Johnnie Walker

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Johnnie Walker is a brand of Scotch whisky produced in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland. It is the most widely distributed brand of Scotch whisky in the world, sold in almost every country and with yearly sales of over 120 million bottles.[1]

Contents

- 1 History of Johnnie Walker
- 2 Blends
  - 2.1 Standard blends
  - 2.2 Special/limited bottlings
- 3 Marketing
- 4 Sponsorships
- 5 In Popular Culture
- 6 References
- 7 External links

History of Johnnie Walker

Originally known as Walker's Kilmarnock Whisky, the brand is a legacy left by John 'Johnnie' Walker after he started to sell whisky in his grocer’s shop in Ayrshire, Scotland. The brand became popular, but after Walker's death in 1857 it was his son Alexander Walker and grandson Alexander Walker II who were largely responsible for establishing the whisky as a popular brand. Under John Walker, whisky sales represented eight percent of the firm’s income; by the time Alexander was ready to pass on the company to his own sons, that figure had increased to between 90 and 95 percent.[2]

Prior to 1860 it was illegal to sell blended (malt and grain mixed together) whisky.[3] During that time John Walker sold a number of whiskys — notably his own Walker's Kilmarnock. In 1865 John’s son Alexander produced their first blend, Walker’s Old Highland.

Alexander Walker first introduced the iconic square bottle in 1870. The other identifying characteristic of the bottle is the label, which is applied at an angle of 24 degrees.

From 1906–1909 John’s grandsons George and Alexander II expanded the line and introduced the colour names. In 1908, when James Stevenson was the Managing Director, there was a re-branding of sorts. The whisky was renamed from Walker's Kilmarnock Whiskies to Johnnie Walker Whisky. In addition, the slogan, "Born 1820 – Still going Strong!" was created, along with the Striding Man, a figure used in their advertisements for around fifty years.

They dropped Johnnie Walker White during World War I. In 1932, Alexander II added Johnnie Walker Swing to
the line.

Johnnie Walker continues to be blended in Kilmarnock, with a large plant just north of the town's railway station. The historic bonded warehouses and company offices (now local authority) can still be seen in Strand Street and John Finnie Street.

**Blends**

For most of its history Johnnie Walker was only offered a small number of blends. In recent years there has been a growing number of special and or limited bottlings.

**Standard blends**

- *Red & Cola* – a premix of Red Label and cola, sold in cans and beer-bottle like bottles. This product has also been marketed under the names "Premix" and "One".

- *Red Label* — a blend of around 35 grain and malt whiskies. It is intended for making mixed drinks.\(^4\) 80 proof. 40% ABV.

- *Black Label* — a blend of as many as 40 whiskies, each aged at least 12 years. According to William Manchester, this was the favorite Scotch of Winston Churchill.\(^5\) 80 proof. 40% ABV.

- Johnnie Walker Swing — named for the distinctive bottle, in which an irregular bottom allows it to rock back and forth. It was Alexander II’s last blend: it features a high proportion of Speyside malts, complemented by malts from the northern Highlands and Islay, and is "almost as sweet as a bourbon."\(^6\)

- *Green Label* — a vatted malt whisky that consists of a blend of about 15 individual single malts, the signature malts being Talisker, Cragganmore, Linkwood, and Caol Ila – Aged 15 years. 86 proof. 43% ABV. Previously sold under the name 'Pure Malt'.

- *Gold Label* — a rare blend of over 15 single malts, including the very rare Clynelish malt. It was derived from Alexander II's blending notes for a whisky to commemorate Johnnie Walker's centenary. His original efforts were thwarted by a shortage of these malts following World War I. Gold Label is commonly bottled at 15 or 18 years. 80 proof. 40% ABV.

- *Blue Label* — Johnnie Walker's premium blend. Every bottle is serial numbered and sold in a silk-lined box, accompanied by a certificate of authenticity. There is no age declaration for Blue Label. 86 proof.

**Johnnie Walker blends, by years of production, and from least expensive to most expensive.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>young</strong></td>
<td>Old Highland</td>
<td>Johnnie Walker White Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Premix / One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none given (blended)</td>
<td>Special Old Highland</td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Red Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (blended)</td>
<td>&gt;Walker’s Old Highland</td>
<td>&gt;Extra Special Old Highland</td>
<td>&gt;Johnnie Walker Black Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none given[6] (blended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Swing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (vatted)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Green Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/18 (blended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Gold Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none given (blended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnnie Walker Blue Label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special/limited bottlings

- *Millennium Edition* – a collectors edition of 12 year old *Black Label* was released in limited amounts in the year 2000.

- *Deco* – a very limited number of 350 ml bottles were produced in beautiful Art Deco-designed bottles, hence the name of this blend.

- *Premier* – a blend aimed specifically at the Japanese market.

- *Swing Superior* – a limited edition variety based on the *Swing* blend, marked by its distinctive golden label. 86.8 proof.

- *1939 Swing* $1500

- *Celebrity*

- *Johnnie Walker 1820*

- *Liquer Whisky* $1200

- *21 year old* – a rare aged variation of Gold Label.

- *Quest* – a very special blend, rarer than Blue Label. (~$500)

- *Honour* – one of the most rare and most expensive blends of Johnnie Walker Scotch whisky.


- *Old Harmony* – a rare blend marketed at the Japanese market. Very expensive. (~$850)
- **15 year old Kilmarnock 400 Whisky** – an extremely rare Gold Label blend bottled to mark the 400th anniversary of the granting of burgh status to Kilmarnock. Released in 1992 in very limited amounts. (~$850)

- **150 years Anniversary 1820–1970** – the second most expensive of Johnnie Walker whiskies. (~$2,000)

- **Blue Label 200th Anniversary** – 2005 saw Johnnie Walker's extremely limited bottling of its ultimate blend. A special release of cask strength Blue Label, in a special square Baccarat crystal decanter. It is the most expensive Johnnie Walker product, selling recently for over $3,599 a bottle.

- **Blue Label King George V Edition** - 2007 To recreate the Johnnie Walker blending style from King George V era. Oak casks dating back to the last century were used to age the whisky, sourced from distilleries operating during the reign of King George V. Special packaging in crystal decanter accompanied by an individually numbered certificate of authenticity. (~$550)

- **Johnnie Walker Blue Label Mini Blended Scotch Whisky** - a very rare item that includes a hand blown nosing glass and sealed tasting notes and booklet on blue label whisky, $250

### Marketing

Every type of Johnnie Walker scotch has a different color as previously noted. The purpose is to denote the different type of scotch and to position them to be used for different occasions. For example, Johnnie Walker Blue Label is rare and expensive, and so it intended to be used for special occasions.

A key feature of every bottle of Johnnie Walker scotch is the Striding Man logo. It was created by an illustrator named Tom Browne to be a likeness of John Walker in traditional attire. In the logo, the man is walking forward, which Diageo says symbolizes forward thinking and the pursuit for excellence. Diageo has created "The Striding Man Society" which is a members club for Johnnie Walker drinkers. The club can be joined by going here (http://us.johnniewalker.com). [7]

Another key aspect of its marketing is the slanting label. This was an advertising tool developed by Alexander Walker who thought it would help his bottles stand out on the shelf. [8]

### Sponsorships

Johnnie Walker sponsors

- the Johnnie Walker Classic, an Asia-Pacific golf tournament
- the Johnnie Walker Championship at Gleneagles, a golf tournament in Scotland
- the McLaren-Mercedes F1 team.
- the Ashes, a cricket series between Australia and England

### In Popular Culture

A number of singers and songwriters have referenced Johnnie Walker in their works, including George Thorogood, Brand New, Leonard Cohen, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Sticky Fingaz, NOFX, Rory Gallagher, Inspectah Deck, George Jones, Amanda Marshall, Jimmy Buffett, Elliott Smith, Trent Willmon, Clutch, The Band, Covenant, Marius Müller-Westernhagen, King Tee and ZZ Top.
Johnnie Walker whisky appears in fiction often, and Blue label is often used as an example of high-end scotch. Notable examples—in which the whisky was an unusually notable part of the story—include:

- In Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore* a character appears named Johnnie Walker, his attire based on the red jacket, boots, cane, bow-tie and hat worn by the character in the product's logo. Johnnie Walker is extremely popular in Japan.
- Léon Gontran Damas, French poet of the Negritude literary movement, titled one of his poetry collections "Black-Label", after one of his poems describing his spleen and mild alcoholism.
- Nationally-famous 1950s Bollywood actor Johnny Walker took his pseudonym from the whisky company. He did so because of his debut in the film industry as a drunkard.
- In the episode *Bartlet for America* of *The West Wing*, the recovering alcoholic character Leo McGarry is revealed in flashback to have suffered a relapse three years earlier when he was offered a glass of Blue Label by a group of political donors he was trying to court. Throughout the episode, Blue Label is praised by the character for its high quality.
- In the television series *Scrubs* the Janitor steals some of Dr. Cox’s drink at a bar when he runs off. He mutters 'Black Label'.

### References

General references:

- *Scotch Whisky: A Liquid History* by Charles MacLean. ©2003 Charles MacLean & Cassell Illustrated. ISBN 1-84403-078-4

Specific references:

2. ^ http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA_Features/CA_Feature_Basic_Template/0,2344,737,00.html
4. ^ Mixing use per http://us.johnniewalker.com
6. ^ a b One Sweet Swing | Travel + Leisure Golf (http://www.travelandleisure.com/tlgolf/articles/golf-one-sweet-swing)

### External links

- Official website (http://www.johnniewalker.com/)
- Details (http://www.scotlandwhisky.com/distilleries/speyside/Cardhu) on how to visit Cardhu distillery, spiritual home to Johnnie Walker
- Dr. Whisky (http://drwhisky.blogspot.com/search/label/johnnie%20walker/) on Johnnie Walker


Categories: Diageo brands | Scottish blended whisky | 1865 introductions
Hidden categories: All articles with unsourced statements | Articles with unsourced statements since August 2007