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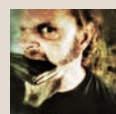
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ATHLON PRESENTS

'SHINE ON!

DROPTINE'S CREATED DELICIOUS MOONSHINE—AND YOU WON'T HAVE TO EVADE THE LAW FOR IT

BY FRED MASTISON



Moonshine. The name alone stirs images of homemade stills hidden deep in the woods, tended to by tough men. These were the liquid artisans that kept adult beverages flowing during Prohibition, and a thirsty public thanked them for it. Small backroom speakeasies, secret clubs and everything in between were full of people who did not need the federal government to protect them from themselves. It was an interesting time in American history, to say the least.

There is a sense of excitement around moonshine. It represents a defiance that is integral to American

culture. What has never really been a selling point of moonshine, however, is its flavor or drinkability. More common was the moonshine that required you to punch your fist through a wall to help it go down. Well, as with many things, time and technique have brought changes to the moonshine world. What started out as a backwoods process has become an art form. A perfect example of that is the emergence of one of the country's best small-batch craft distillers: Droptine Spirits.

BORN OF THE HUNT

Founded by Len and Dave Eder, Droptine is the merging of two great

passions: fine spirits and the outdoors. The Eder brothers have been prominent outdoorsmen and bowhunters for the past 25 years. In fact, Dave was a writer for *Outdoor Life* and the editor of *Bowhunting* magazine. He also founded eders.com and bowhuntingoutlet.com, the largest online retailer of archery and bowhunting equipment in the world.

During their extensive time in the field, the brothers gained a deep respect for droptine deer, a rarely seen whitetail buck with one or more antler tines pointing down instead of up. Respected and admired by outdoorsmen and hunters alike, it's a droptine's imperfections that make it uniquely better

than perfect. Chasing a droptine buck is much like making exceptional moonshine. It requires patience, passion, attention to detail and a lot of luck.

The story of this venture is like many others, with several years of work preceding what we see on shelves today. In fact, the Droptine moonshine saga begins a full three years before the first bottle was capped.

While Len and Dave were working on a deer habitat preservation project, they took a hard look at preferred food sources for this staple of American hunting. While the obvious consumption of corn was noted, they were interested in seeing how often deer sought out apples and persimmons.

For the uninitiated, persimmons are a sweet fruit that, like apples and pears, come into season in the fall. They are usually a shade of orange and resemble a tomato with a sort of brown flower bud in lieu of a stem. More than anything, they are subtly sweet and tasty. If you hunt in a region where persimmons grow, you will see deer pass up other foods to eat them. Knowing this, Dave and Len remarked that apples and persimmons would make an amazing drink. From that half-joking comment, a seed was planted and the idea for a handcrafted, small-batch whiskey was eventually launched.

Keeping with their hunting roots, Len suggested "Droptine Moonshine" as the only name worthy of such a rare and non-typical combination of flavors. While hard work and dedication are core parts of any successful venture, a little luck never hurts. It was one such stroke of luck that a good friend of the Eder brothers made a helpful introduction. He would be instrumental in helping them join forces with a



small distillery that was ripe for such a unique opportunity. This was the launching point for a three-year journey to develop a very special and unique spirit, handcrafted in small batches and worthy of the Droptine name.

As you can tell from the Droptine branding, Dave Eder (shown) and his brother Len are avid hunters and outdoorsmen.

NOT YOUR AVERAGE VODKA

As any TV pitchman would say, "But wait...there's more!" While some people would be happy to launch just one kind of spirit, the overachievers at Droptine have taken their same commitment to quality and turned to vodka as well. Once known as a medicinal agent in medieval times, vodka has quickly become the world's most popular spirit. In fact, over 1.17 billion gallons of vodka are consumed on average each year around the world. It would be a tough market to stand out in, yet that is what Droptine has done. The company has combined exceptional ingredients with a superior process and unrelenting pursuit of "something a little better than perfect" to create a great vodka.

Droptine's vodka is composed of two simple ingredients: pure sweet American corn mash and crisp, cold water from pristine streams. While vodka is historically connected to potatoes, it can be made from any fermented grain such as sorghum, rice, rye or wheat. The sweetest option is corn. The Droptine process is extensive and, in turn, time consuming. The corn mash is distilled no less than six times, until they are left with a concentrated spirit completely free of impurities. At this point, the magic happens. The company uses a patented system to pass this alcohol through specially designed carbon filters three more times until there's nothing left but pure alcohol and an essence of sweetness—a process that won the company a Gold Medal at the 2017 International Spirits Competition.

TASTE TEST

I feel a special connection to Droptine

INSIDE INDIE DISTILLERIES

Craft distilleries, like craft breweries, tend to produce highly creative, unique products. Small-batch whiskeys made from non-traditional grains, vodkas and “moonshines” infused with fresh local fruit, rums made from Kentucky sorghum rather than sugar cane, gins made with all manner of botanical ingredients—the list goes on. These distilleries are often minimally staffed with very little automation, meaning the entire process is hands on.

Craft spirits are the new craft beer. Despite having larger hurdles to clear (spirits take longer to distill, age and perfect, and are much costlier to produce) than craft beer, the craft spirits industry is experiencing growth that parallels the craft beer explosion of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Though there were barely 70 small distilleries in the United States in 2003, there were more than 600 in 2014 and, according to the American Craft Spirits Association (ACSA), nearly 1,500 by late 2016. —*Jereme Zimmerman*



THOMAS KIRCHEN PHOTOS (3)

Spirits, and especially its moonshine. Much of my family lived in a certain region of the United States and may or may not have taken part in the booming moonshine business. More specifically, the transport of said product to eager customers. I am also a connoisseur of well-made spirits, and Droptine does not disappoint.

The company's moonshine has a

unique but subtle flavor. While I would have never thought of mixing apples and persimmons myself, I am glad they did. The result is a sweet but not overpowering flavor. Unlike some current trends of simply flavoring whiskey to mask its harshness, Droptine moonshine is a smooth and well-made formula. Even without the flavor, the moonshine would be a smooth drink.

While I prefer to drink my whiskies neat, I am certain there is a cocktail out there worthy of this elixir.

The vodka is equally as good. In fact, it has a sweetness that I am not accustomed to experiencing in unflavored vodka. The thorough distillation process is obvious when you take your first taste. There is no bitterness or harsh bite. As with whiskey, I prefer good

vodka in a simple format: ice cold and usually neat. That said, Droptine vodka would be an exceptional base for a cocktail as well. Without any harshness or aftertaste, this vodka would allow the drink to be flavorful and enjoyable. If you are a vodka fan, you will certainly appreciate what Droptine has accomplished here.

A BOLD ENDEAVOR

Droptine is also noteworthy for one other ideal that I admire: boldness. It takes a lot to enter a business world that is very different from the one in which you have spent the previous 25 years. Few people have the drive to make such a jump, and fewer have the patience to survive the long, drawn-out process that is needed to see success. In the end, it takes passion and the willingness to sacrifice to meet your goals.

Len and Dave Eder have done just that, and we are all now reaping the rewards of their efforts. When I asked Dave about what was next for Droptine, his answer was a clear commitment to not resting on their laurels. "We are currently aging a bourbon and will be launching that in early 2018, and we are also working with a highly regarded winery and its winemaker to release a wine that will perfectly complement wild game like venison. That will come later in 2018 as well."

As you can see, the future looks bright for Droptine. The world of moonshine and small-batch spirits in general has grown over the last 10 years. Even some of the world's largest spirit-makers are repackaging in order to take advantage of this trend. It takes dedication and passion to create something special in this market, and Droptine has done just that. ●





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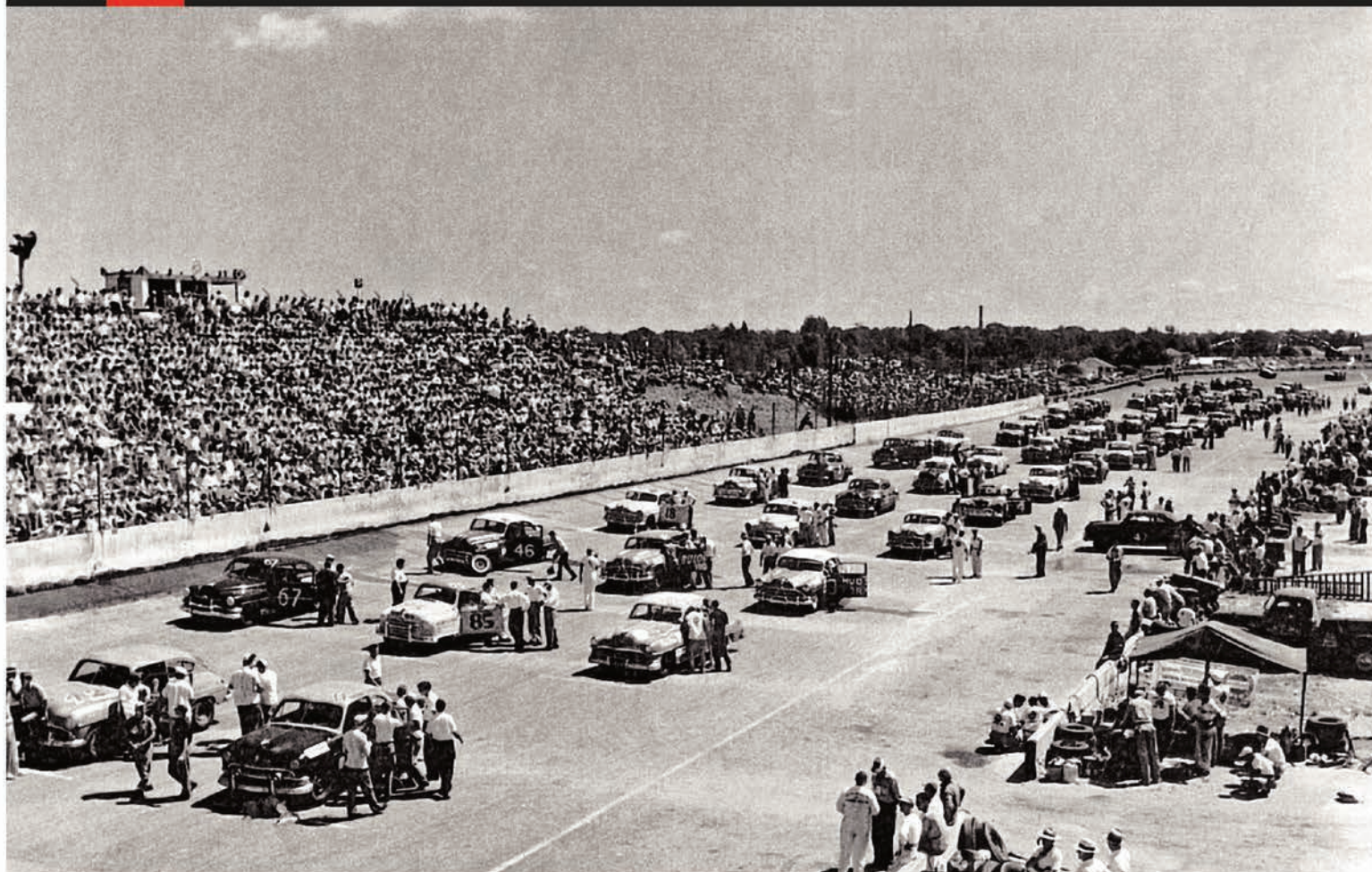


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GETTY IMAGES

FROM BOOZE TO NASCAR

During the Prohibition, bootleggers needed a way to distribute their wares without running into the law, so many decided they would simply outrun them. They souped-up their cars, squeezing as many ponies as they could out of them. Beyond just horsepower, these mechanics tuned their cars' suspensions for better handling. These modified rigs burned up the winding mountain roads, easily

outpacing local deputies. With a knowledge of the roads that can only come from a lifetime of running them on the darkest nights, it was a rare day when one fell victim to the police.

The government removed the ban on alcohol in 1933, putting an end to the failed experiment that was Prohibition. This largely ended the moonshine trade, though many had developed a taste for it by then. To keep up with this demand, an enterprising few kept the fire stoked under their stills. Though booze was now legal, these distillers did not feel the urge to pay taxes on their products. So, the hot rods kept running

moonshine, this time trying to stay ahead of the agents of the BAFTE and IRS.

A side effect of this thirst for grain spirits was a need for speed. Many that had taken part in the illicit trade had become enamored with the adrenaline rush that came along with throwing a highly modified car around twisting roads at a high rate of speed. By the end of the 1940s, drivers were pitting their cars against one another, wagering on the outcome and racing for pride. As time went on, the popularity of these matches increased, drawing larger crowds with each passing race. Wilkes

County, North Carolina, became the unofficial home of these contests of speed.

Eventually, stock car racing found a home in Daytona Beach. Already revered as a place to set land-speed records, this beachfront location was home to a 4.1-mile course that would host countless races. One of these displaced firewater drivers, William "Big Bill" France, held a meeting with other drivers and mechanics to create a standardized series of rules. This was the birth of NASCAR. Some versions of the legend say those rules were written out on a bar napkin, a fitting homage to the sport's roots. —Joe Albanese

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SOME LIKE IT HOT

You might be saying that this page of *Ballistic* is just an excuse to run this super-sexy photo. Well, winter is coming—why not do a little daydreaming about next summer? That said, we'd like to share a couple of *Ballistic*-approved drink recipes with you. Of course, great vodkas and moonshines like those from Droptine are definitely awesome served straight up, but for those of you who like to kick things up to quench your thirst in summer, try these two uniquely perfect mixed drink recipes. —Nino Bosaz



DROPTINE OLD FASHIONED

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 sugar cube
- 3 Angostura bitters
- 1 liter club soda
- 2 ounces Droptine Persimmon & Apple Moonshine

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place the sugar cube (or 1/2 teaspoon loose sugar) in an old-fashioned glass
2. Wet it down with 2 or 3 dashes of Angostura bitters and a short splash of water or club soda
3. Crush the sugar with a wooden muddler, a chopstick, a strong spoon, whatever
4. Rotate the glass so that the sugar grains and bitters give it a lining
5. Add a large ice cube
6. Pour in the Droptine Persimmon & Apple Moonshine
7. Serve with a stirring rod

LOADED BLOODY MARY

INGREDIENTS:

- A couple shakes of celery salt
- 1 lemon wedge
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 8 dashes of your favorite hot sauce
- 3 green olives
- 3 cocktail onions
- 1 dill pickle spear
- 1 celery stick
- 1 teaspoon horseradish
- 2 ounces spicy V8 juice
- 2 ounces Clamato juice
- 2 ounces Droptine Premium Vodka

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place all of the ingredients (less the pickle and celery stick) into a mason jar along with 5 ice cubes.
2. Put the lid on and shake vigorously
3. Drop in the pickle and celery stick and you're good to go