

## Our research

We asked leading supermarkets and high-street wine shops to nominate their own-label Champagnes for around £22 and favourite sparkling wines under £15. We then added the UK's three top-selling big-name Champagnes, plus two highly acclaimed English sparkling wines (Nyetimber and Ridgeview), bringing the total to 16 in each category.

Six professional tasters rated the wines for quality and enjoyment, awarding each one a mark out of 20. The bottles were covered in opaque bags so they couldn't see which was which. They also didn't know individual prices, or whether they were tasting Champagne or sparkling wine. We then averaged the scores, rounding up or down to the nearest whole number.

# Let's get fizz

An own-brand Best Buy Champagne for £15 – now, that's bound to put a sparkle in your Christmas

**S**ix of the top ten Champagnes from this tasting are supermarket own labels. The result won't come as a surprise to those of you who can remember the uproar we caused, back in 2002, when our panel of professional tasters rated a £13 own-brand Champagne from Tesco an out-and-out winner, beating big-name brands that cost far more. But it does reinforce the message that, where Champagne is concerned, own labels are no Charlies.

We also have an exceptional value award this time. Somerfield's Prince William Premier Cru Champagne was just pipped by our overall winner, a Champagne

from Sainsbury's – but at £15 we think it deserves our accolade.

### Biggest name beaten

Two of the three big-name brands in this tasting did well. With 16 points out of 20, Lanson Black Label came fourth overall and is a Best Buy. Veuve Clicquot came in at a respectable joint fifth position, on 15 points. However, the Brut Imperial from Moët & Chandon – the UK's top-selling big-name brand – came 20th overall. With a score of 13 points, it was beaten by all but two of the 16 Champagnes in our tasting, as well as by some (much cheaper) sparkling wines.

**Moët & Chandon – the UK's top-selling big-name brand – came 20th out of 32**

### CHAMPAGNE

## 16/20 Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Champagne Premier Cru Vintage 2000

£22.99; on offer at £17.99 till 12 Dec



**WHICH? BEST BUY**

We tasted the difference, even with the bottle hidden. This wine's 'elegance and class' and 'biscuity complexity' drew appreciative marks from all our panellists and made the Sainsbury's not just our top-scoring Champagne but our overall winner. **DID YOU KNOW?** Premier cru wines are just one step below the tip-top grand cru wines.

Available Exclusive to Sainsbury's

### CHAMPAGNE

## 16/20 Somerfield Prince William Premier Cru Champagne

£14.99, Somerfield



**WHICH? BEST BUY**

'Lovely, fresh, mineral', 'toasty maturity, crisp, quite light and elegant,' enthused our tasters. The Somerfield was barely beaten by the Sainsbury's and is a bargain at £15. **WATCH OUT FOR** Some thought it a bit sweet but felt overall it was balanced and would be OK even for those who prefer their Champagne dry.

Available Exclusive to Somerfield

### CHAMPAGNE

## 16/20 Pierre Gimonnet & Fils Premier Cru 'Gastronome'

£19.99, Oddbins



**WHICH? BEST BUY**

This blanc de blancs Champagne, made exclusively from Chardonnay grapes, came third overall. Almost all tasters praised it for being complex and biscuity and for its good acidity, but one found it too sherry-like. **WORTH KNOWING** It's produced by a private family from its own vines.

Available Exclusive to Oddbins

### CHAMPAGNE

## 16/20 Lanson Black Label

£21.78; £17.78 6 Dec till 3 Jan, Tesco



**WHICH? BEST BUY**

In fourth place, the best of our three big-name Champagnes was liked for its 'freshness' combined with 'nice richness'. Our tasters picked out lemony, floral characters and flavours reminiscent of ripe pears and apples. The Lanson is widely stocked and prices vary, so it's worth shopping around for the best deal. **DID YOU KNOW?** Take-home sales of Lanson from July 2005 to July 2006 topped £20 million.

Available Widely stocked. We give price paid at outlet shown

### Champagne wins the day...

The 32 wines in this tasting produced a high set of marks, with none scoring less than 10 out of 20. But on balance our 16 sparkling wines did less well than the Champagnes – thus echoing another finding from our 2002 report. As a group, the Champagnes generally stood out as being finer, richer and more interestingly flavoured than the sparkling wines, which were mostly thought of as 'fresh, clean and fruity, but lacking in complexity'. Our top sparkler, from Marks & Spencer, came joint 11th overall but still earned 14 points.

### ...but one splits the panel

Though not Best Buys, three high-scoring Champagnes were liked by all the tasters. Radcliffe's de Brissar (£19.99 a bottle; £13.33 three for the price of two, Thresh-

ers) and Veuve Clicquot (£26.94 at Tesco and widely stocked) both scored 15 and tied in fifth place. Last time's winner Tesco Premier Cru (£14.79) also scored 15 and came seventh overall.

Waitrose Vintage 1999 Champagne (£21.99) split the panel: described as 'classy and quite elegant', it was liked by three tasters, while the other three marked it down, summing it up as 'angular and disjointed'. It scored 14 and came tenth.

### Price not linked to quality

There seemed to be no link between price and quality for both Champagnes and sparkling wines: some quite cheap wines made it into the top half of the ranking, while some very expensive wines came near the bottom. Log on to [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) for the full results and more information.



### MIXED BLESSING

**For Buck's Fizz the quality of the orange juice is all important**

delicately flavoured, and when mixed, the taste gets lost. On the plus side, that means you don't have to spend a lot on the wine itself – so try Castell Llord Cava Brut, Spain (Netto £3.29). It wasn't a Best Buy but tasters found it young, refreshing and crisp.

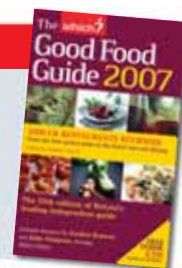
For Buck's Fizz, mix half-and-half with orange juice; splash in Crème de Cassis (blackcurrant liqueur) for a Kir Royale; for Champagne Cocktail, add a sugar lump and a dash of brandy.

Champagne and sparkling wine are often used for party drinks and cocktails. But both tend to be quite

### MEMBER BENEFIT

#### £2.50 off food guide

Wine and dine in confidence with *The Which? Good Food Guide 2007*. We're offering it for £14.49 (£2.50 off RRP), p&p free, until 31 December 2006. Email [mailorder@lbsltd.co.uk](mailto:mailorder@lbsltd.co.uk) or call 01903 828 557. Quote code GFGW1206 and ISBN 978-1-84490-027-5.



### SPARKLING WINE

#### 14/20 M&S Bluff Hill Sparkling, New Zealand

£7.99, Marks & Spencer

Our top sparkling wine came 11th overall and struck

tasters as being 'good, interesting fizz' and having 'real character'. One admired it for its 'tangy freshness', while another found it 'creamy and toasty'.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Bluff Hill is half Chardonnay/half Pinot Noir, which, along with Pinot Meunier, are the grape varieties traditionally used for Champagne.**

Available Exclusive to Marks & Spencer



### SPARKLING WINE

#### 14/20 Marqués de Monistrol Vintage Cava 2001, Spain

£7.99; £3.99 till 31 Dec, Co-op

**WHICH? BEST BUY** **EXCEPTIONAL VALUE**

Both this and the Somerfield sparkling wine (right) got the same score. Described as 'lemony, crisp, fresh', it was loved by some for its 'bright, green apple' tang. But two tasters disliked the slight earthy flavour, typical of much cava from the Barcelona region. A real snip at the offer price.

**WE LIKE** Co-op's offer lasts long enough to get some in for New Year celebrations.

Available Widely stocked. Offer and price apply to Co-op



### SPARKLING WINE

#### 14/20 Somerfield Vintage Cava Brut 2000, Spain

£6.99

Virtually all the tasters admired

this wine for being clean, fresh and pleasantly fruity, and commented on its lemony, floral character, although one felt it lacked balance. It tied in 14th place with the Marqués, making it a double winner for Somerfield.

**WORTH KNOWING** It was 'a bit too earthy' and 'rather leaden' for a couple of the tasters.

Available Exclusive to Somerfield



## To cap it all...

### A beer cap on a bottle of fizz? Surely not?

Most Champagne and sparkling-wine companies use beer-type crown caps as a temporary seal during the production process – it's only at the end that the typical cork goes in. But we were surprised to see the beer cap used on the finished product of one of our samples, Green Point, a sparkling wine from Australia. The makers use it to avoid cork taint, which, according to some estimates, can spoil one in 20 bottles of wine.



**Green Point uses a beer-type cap, to avoid the risk of cork taint**