



Crafting excellence: Alfa Laval centrifuge's impact on flavor and efficiency at Fat Head's Brewery Middleburg Heights, Ohio



In a recent conversation, Matt Cole and Chris Allmont of Fat Head's Brewery shared some insights from their craft beer adventure – full of surprises and transformations, with an Alfa Laval centrifuge as an unexpected star player. Curious to know how Fat Head's Brewery secured their gold medals at the World Beer Cup and the Great American Beer Festival? Well, the Alfa Laval Brew 350 played an important role. Let's dive into the details of their journey and find out what made it all click!

Fat Head's origins and early success

Fat Head's South Side Saloon in Pittsburgh was founded in 1992 by Glenn and Michelle Benigni. In 2009, they teamed up with Brewmaster Matt Cole to establish their first Brewpub, in Cleveland's North

Olmsted suburb. The Head Hunter IPA quickly gained recognition, clinching medals in 2010 and 2011 at the prestigious Great American Beer Festival. This success propelled Fat Head's into the craft beer spotlight.

Facing a growing demand, the brewery acquired a historic brew house in 2012, launching a production brewery in Middleburg Heights. By 2018, they had outgrown the space, leading to the construction of a larger facility, and increasing their production to around 45,000 barrels.

Quality and hoppiness: A legacy

At the core of Fat Heads' success lies its fanatical devotion to well-balanced, hop-forward flavors and an unwavering commitment to preserving the most

delicate flavors and aromas. The flagship Head Hunter IPA, renowned for its aggressive hop profile, quickly earned accolades at prestigious festivals. Despite initial challenges, the brewery committed to keeping its beers unfiltered and un-centrifuged, causing occasional production delays and high losses.

A centrifuge gamble: Alfa Laval’s transformative power

An unexpected twist came with the adoption of Alfa Laval’s bottom-fed centrifuge technology. Negative past experiences with centrifuges from other suppliers caused some hesitation in embracing the technology again, but an on-site trial proved that Alfa Laval’s bottom-fed technology was different.

“We’re a very hop-forward brewery,” says Brewmaster Matt Cole. “And heavy hopping can sometimes result in abrasive or bitter flavors that aren’t very pleasant. With the Brew 350, we found a refining process that lets us remove just enough plant material to get the flavor, aroma, and mouthfeel that we want. So, for us, going with a bottom-fed centrifuge wasn’t just about efficiency; it was very much about flavor.”

However, the Brew 350 did indeed enable a more efficient brewing process as well. A 15–25% reduction in production time for Head Hunter IPA showcases the transformative power of Alfa Laval technology.

Process improvements: Alfa Laval’s advantage

“Before the Brew 350, we only used finings to clarify our beer,” Matt explains. “That caused a lot of delays in production and packaging. At times, we’d see a 30% loss of our Imperial IPA. We weren’t very efficient, and it was frustrating.”

“Moving into the new production facility, we didn’t want to change what was already working. But we recognised that centrifuge technology had evolved and was necessary for the shelf stability we wanted,” Matt continues.

“Adding the separator was pleasantly surprising,” says Matt. “We were more inconsistent than we thought, and our shelf stability improved dramatically once we installed the Brew 350.” The improved shelf life is a result of no dissolved oxygen pickup during centrifugation, as well as lower yeast



counts and better flavor and aroma retention. “Now, we occasionally include a 90-day-old Head Hunter on our tasting panel, and it’ll be right up there with stuff that’s been packaged just days before.”

“In my mind, one of our proudest achievements in winning GABF and World Beer Cup this year was that those sample cans were pulled right off the packaging line,” says Chris Allmont, Head of Operations. “The whole team really appreciated that.”

Besides better shelf life and flavor and aroma retention, Fat Heads also realized other process and yield improvements. Reduced dumping from the fermentation vessel (FV) and streamlining the pre-finings stage led to cost savings and increased yield efficiencies. Labour savings enabled the team to focus on quality and developing new recipes. The flexibility brought by the Brew 350 led to more consistent process times, putting an end to unpredictable workflows and stressful catch-ups.

Gold standard recognition: World Beer Cup and Great American Beer Festival

Fat Head’s Brewery proudly highlights its gold medals in the highly competitive IPA category at prestigious competitions like the World Beer Cup and the Great American Beer Fest, all achieved with the assistance of Alfa Laval technology.

“The judges at that level are really good at picking up very miniscule amounts of dissolved oxygen (TPO – total packaged oxygen),” says Matt. “Some of our samples have had dissolved oxygen (TPO) in the single digits or low teens after packaging.”

Head Hunter, a classic American-style IPA, was the star of the show. With its commitment to quality and flavor,

How to contact Alfa Laval

Up-to-date Alfa Laval contact details for all countries are always available on our website at www.alfalaval.com

now supported by the Alfa Laval Brew 350, Fat Head's Brewery continues to stand out in a sea of competitors.

Alfa Laval's quiet revolution

In addition to flavor and efficiency, the Brew 350 was quickly appreciated for its low impact on working conditions at the brewery: "Something that pleasantly surprised us was how quiet this centrifuge is," Chris concludes. "I've been exposed to other suppliers' machines, and when we fired up the Brew 350, I asked "Is it running?" – I couldn't believe how silently it worked."

With the Brew 350, we found a refining process that lets us remove just enough plant material to get the flavor, aroma, and mouthfeel that we want.

Matt Cole



Brew 350

- Up to 300 hl/h
- Bottom-fed fully-hermetic design for no oxygen pickup
- Hybrid design for clarification or polishing duties
- Lower power consumption
- Lower temperature pickup
- Lower noise

