

Case 7

“Loopy Juice”

Scotland’s per capita alcohol consumption is the eighth highest in the world. Health and social problems related to alcohol abuse and subsequent loss of productivity cost Scotland \$3.6 billion annually.

Buckfast Tonic Wine™ (also called “Wreck the Hoose Juice”, “Loopy Juice”, “Commotion Lotion”, and other pet names) is 15 percent alcohol by volume, and each 750 ml bottle contains as much caffeine as three liters of Coca Cola™. The combination of alcohol, sugar, and caffeine can make people simultaneously uninhibited, hyper, anxious, and combative. Buckfast drinkers often get blindingly inebriated, but are simultaneously so charged by the caffeine, that they are unable to sleep and so keep on drinking. Its syrupy sweet taste and low price make it a favorite “starter” beverage for novice drinkers.

Loopy Juice accounts for less than 1% of Scotland’s alcohol market, but has a disproportionate impact crime. In the Strathclyde region of Scotland (population 2,300,000), Buckfast is mentioned in crime reports on average of almost four times a day: a total of 5,638 reports between 2006 and 2009 (the bottle was used as a weapon in 114 of them). A survey of offenders at the Polmont Young Offenders Institution, Scotland’s largest juvenile detention center, revealed that over 40% of the juvenile offenders who drank before committing their crime drank Buckfast. The Caffeine Awareness Association named Buckfast Tonic Wine the “Worst Caffeinated Product” of 2010; however, when Scotland’s Minister of Justice asked liquor stores to limit sales of Buckfast, a backlash by aficionados caused sales to soar.

Buckfast has been produced since the 1880’s at Buckfast Abbey, an 11th century monastery in the Devon countryside, by an English order of Benedictine monks. In the 1920s Buckfast’s formula was enhanced with caffeine to reach a larger market (prompting suggestions that the name be reversed to “Fastbuck”), and was often prescribed by physicians for depressed coalminers. Daily sales of Buckfast in Scotland now total more than £50,000.

According to The New York Times (3 February 2010), the Right Reverend Bob Gillies, Episcopalian Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, charged that the monks who make and profit from Buckfast had betrayed the teachings of St. Benedict by knowingly causing personal and social damage through their product. The monks denied responsibility for the misuse of their “medicated wine”. A spokesperson for J. Chandler & Company (the distributor of Buckfast) responded, “It’s always wise to remember that Jesus turned water into wine”.

According to Britain’s The Independent (1 September 2008), despite the link between Buckfast and crime and the havoc Buckfast causes society, the monks plan to increase production of Buckfast in response to growing demand. The article quoted J. Chandler & Company spokesman Jim Wilson: “The responsibility to behave properly and drink within reason lies with the drinker, not the drink. People who wish to drink simply to get drunk will do this whether they select Buckfast or any other drink.”