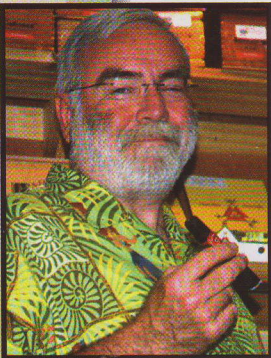


Summer and smoke



Mike Smith

Summer is here and so is this challenging economy. It's more important than ever to keep a good range of prices on your cigar inventory. You'd rather sell down a little than not to sell at all. Most of our customers are finding a way to keep smoking their day-to-day cigars even if they don't buy as many high-end, celebration sticks.

The cigars for this issue include the Camacho *10th Anniversary Corojo*, the *Cusano C18 Paired Maduro* from DomRey and the *Benchmark* (Don Pepin Cuban sandwich) available from Ashton.

The Camacho *10th Anniversary Corojo* is a box-pressed anniversary cigar commemorating the Eiroa family's 10 years of growing the world's only Authentic Corojo seed tobacco. Released in March, these cigars come on the heels of a big success for Camacho with their *Triple Maduro* cigars made entirely of Maduro, a first in a premium line. Like the *Triple*, these cigars are all one type of tobacco, in this case, Corojo (Camacho calls it their "authentic Corojo" to differentiate from others' Corojo). The sizes available are 4 1/2 x 50, a 6 x 60, a torpedo and a dual-tapered 11/18 size. MSRPs range from about \$10.50 to \$12.75. The boxes each contain 21 cigars.

The cigars are gorgeous and tasty, with a medium- to full-body. Though not for the beginner, they are quite smooth for the strength. Lots of different flavors come through and the blend shows us a couple of changes as the cigars are smoked. A spicy taste is always there and helps make the cigar what it is. It's a complex stick that is pleasing to the connoisseur. The construction is great and the ash is tight not wanting to let go. The wrapper is a medium brown and not oily appearing like the Maduros.

The *Cusano 18* was one of the most successful boutique cigars ever offered. The blend has a medium- to full-body with lots of taste from its two Maduros and three wrapper tobaccos. The wrapper is a Connecticut Broadleaf Maduro known for being smooth and creamy.

The binder is a San Vicente Olor. The filler is made up of three tobaccos: a Brazilian Matafina Maduro wrapper tobacco, a 1985 Dominican Oro (18 years old) wrapper tobacco and regular Dominican tobacco. The unusual tobacco mix makes for a tasty cigar that is a little spicy, sweet and with a hint of pepper. It comes in boxes of 18 cigars in sizes of robusto, toro, gordo and Churchill. The MSRPs range from \$4.99 to \$5.90, depending on size. These boxes make good sellers at least partially because there are fewer cigars inside than the normal 20 to 25. That makes the already reasonable prices seem even better.

One of the best surprises to come along in a while is the new *Benchmark* cigars. It's a new brand made in Nicaragua by Jose "Pepin" Garcia for Ashton Cigars. The *Benchmark* cigars have dark-brown Nicaraguan wrappers, two Nicaraguan binders and a tasty selection of Nicaraguan fillers. The actual outer wrapper is a Sumatra seed tobacco. It has a double binder and five different leaves in the filler which is long and short, mixed. A pigtail top completes each cigar. The body is medium to full. The taste is a rich, sweet, earthy variety with a bit of spice in the makeup. The blend is pretty smooth considering its strength.

The stick comes in four sizes and though the price of a bundled cigar, it comes in cedar boxes of 25. The sizes are a robusto, toro, Churchill and cazadore (6 1/2 x 46). Made in Nicaragua, these cigars are just now shipping. The MSRP for these babies is less than \$3, which puts it through the roof of the value house. Don't look for Ashton doing a lot of marketing for these sticks. The low price will not likely permit it. It's a surprise from Ashton, but a pleasant one.

If there are any handmade, premium cigars you'd like me to review, drop me a line and let me know. If you have any suggestions or questions, send an e-mail to mike@cigarista.com. I'd love to hear from you. You can visit my Web site at www.cigarista.com. If you're in the Tampa Bay, Fla., area, be sure to stop in and visit.

Long ashes, dear readers. **TR**

Mike