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A Trio of Top Cigars

In this issue, the three cigars covered are the Los Blancos NINE, the Hoyo de Monterrey Reposado en Cedros and the Punch Rare Corojo 10th Anniversary, both from General Cigar.

The Blanco Cigar Company was based in Chicago, but David Blanco tells me the moving trucks are on their way to Tampa as I'm writing this. One of the Plasencia factories, based in Esteli, Nicaragua, produces their cigars.

The NINE cigar is their best achievement to date. The smoke is full-bodied, full of tobacco and rolled tight. The draw is a good one and produces lots of smoke with plenty

of pleasing taste. It is made with Oscuro Corojo wrapper grown in Nicaragua. The binder is also Nicaraguan as is the filler made with three different ligero leaves. The cigar is dark and oily with a bit of earthiness and spice. The name comes from having tried eight blends before this big success.

All of the sizes, except the Lancero, come in a box of 20 and include a Double Corona, 7"x52, a Torpedo, 6 1/2"x52, a Toro, 6"x52, a Lancero, 7"x38 and a Robusto at 5"x52. MSRPs range from about \$7 to \$8.50. The Lanceros are packed 30 to a box.

General Cigar makes both of the other two cigars reviewed. The company has a huge range of products. They are the largest manufacturer and marketer of premium, imported, hand-made or hand-rolled cigars in the U.S.

In March of 2010, General Cigar's then-parent company Swedish

Match signed an agreement with the Plasencia Group. This joint venture provided General Cigar with access to the Plasencia's tobacco growing, processing and cigar making operations in both Nicaragua and Honduras. In October 2010, General Cigar merged with Scandinavian Tobacco Group (STG) to form a worldwide company focused on cigars.

First of the two cigars is the Hoyo de Monterrey Reposado en Cedros, meaning "rested in cedar." It's an immersion method of aging a cigar while it lies in cedar for three to six months to pick up the distinctive flavor. This unique process, along with a multi-national blend of long filler tobaccos, a spicy Connecticut broadleaf binder, and an Ecuador Sumatra wrapper yields a complex, rich, medium-bodied smoke. They actually trademarked the process as "Inmersión." The filler is a blend of Honduran, Nicaraguan, and piloto cubano from the Dominican Republic.

Three sizes of the cigar are in production: the Liso, 7"x49, the Marco, 6.25"x54 and the Sueno, 5.25"x54. Reasonably priced, \$5 to \$6 buys the Sueno, with the larger sizes a little higher. They come in an interesting "chest" of 24. Enjoying a cedar taste is necessary, as you might have guessed.

The 10th anniversary Punch Rare Corojo is our second General Cigar offering. The Rare Corojo is offered for only a short time each year. The 10th anniversary version came out in late March. This version differs by featuring a proprietary Connecticut Corojo wrapper. The normal version of the Rare Corojo wrapper is Sumatran.

It's a box-pressed smoke with a reddish colored wrapper. The look is good with the exception of the cap, but that disappears quickly. The flavor is good with a little spice kept on the mild to medium side. There is some sweetness and a little pepper among the many different but subtle tastes. The cigar is firm, draws well and produces a fair amount of smoke. The burn is a bit uneven at times but nothing too bad. If you like a subtle flavoring that varies throughout, this cigar certainly qualifies.

It sells for a suggest retail price of \$6.50 and has a limited supply. They come in a cool, red wooden box and an interesting band. The size is listed as 5"x50 but they measure at closer to 5 1/2". The binder is a Connecticut Broadleaf and the filler is a blend of Dominican, Honduran and Nicaraguan tobaccos. The Rare Corojos have always been popular, maybe a little due to their scarcity, so grab them when you see them as they don't stay around for long. **TR**

