



By David Bernstein

Smirnoff, Guinness, Captain Morgan, Jack Daniel's, Red Dog, Two Dog, Old Dog, New Dog, Budweiser or Southern Comfort, Coors Light, or even (heaven forbid) Knickerbocker... all beverages that a college student may be inclined to sample (in moderation, of course). But where can one purchase such things in the Main South area? And what if you're not exactly legal?

That's what I set out to learn one fine summer evening. Dressed in an Operation Ivy T-shirt, Spiderman baseball hat and trying hard to look under age (not difficult for me!), I hit three local liquor stores to do a little comparing. I began the sojourn at McDonalds (on Main Street). Granted, you can't buy anything with a proof* there, but they had a deal on McNuggets, and the soda is free with a Clark ID. Almost directly across the street from McDonalds is a medium sized establishment called Webster Square Package Store Discount (1014 Main St. -look for the large Busch sign) . This was a well-lit, good- sized store with a decent selection of both hard liquor and beer. The selection of cold 6-packs is definitely it's strong point, while the selection of cases is rather limited. 6-pack beer prices were a little above average for the area; Budweiser for \$5.25, Sam Adams for \$6.45, Guinness for (gasp) \$8.25. The hard liquor section offers the usual standards, albeit at a relatively high price. A 750 ml bottle of Absolut regular vodka was \$14.40.

After casing the joint, I decided it was time to pick up a bottle of vodka (not Absolut) and see if my face would pass the test. It didn't. Not only did I have to show my N.J. driver's license,

PACKAGE STORES (Booze Cruise)

but the cashier wasn't happy until he had seen my Clark ID and my expired N.J. driver's license. Three ID's is some pretty strict carding! I would give this store a thumbs up for it's cold beer selection, non-shady appearance, and late hours (open until 11 p.m.), but I would recommend bringing a senior if you're not legal.

My second stop was Bay State Liquor (877 Main St), which is close to the heart of Main South. This store was in a decidedly less friendly area than the last, but seemed safe enough inside. The shop was small and well-lit but did not contain a wide variety of firewater. It seems to cater mostly to the 6-pack and 40 crowd, stocking a lot of Bud Light and Old English. The lower-grade beers were competitively priced, with a 6-pack of Budweiser going for \$5.25. The rich-kid beers were significantly more expensive; Cider Jack was \$6.80 and Sam Adams was an over-priced \$7.10. There was also a stack of Molson and Budweiser cases, but they didn't seem to be selling well. Although Bay State stocks hard liquor, it is definitely not this store's selling point. All the bottles are kept safely behind the counter and out of the reach of inquisitive hands. When asked what brands of vermouth they carried, the cashier said, with a straight face, that he had never heard of vermouth. The surprisingly adequate selection of standards (vodka, rum, tequila) and reasonable prices (750 ml of Absolut was \$13.80) balanced the cashier's lack of hooch knowledge. I put my face to the test a second time and bought a bottle of rum. Feeling older than I look, I quickly walked out of the store.

This is a liquor store that I would recommend skipping. The poor selec-

tion and bad area make this a good option only for those of you who have no "babysitter" and wouldn't mind risking an occasional knife in the gut.

The last stop on the trip was the supermarket-sized State Liquor Exchange at 370 Park Ave. This fine establishment has, by far, the largest selection in the immediate area. State carries a wide variety of beers, both in 6-packs and cases. Some of the more exotic 6-packs are only sold warm, while the staples can always be bought cold. 6-pack prices are the lowest around; Budweiser selling for \$4.85, Cider Jack and Sam Adams for \$5.69 each. Cases of beer are available both warm and cold and feature old favorites, dirt cheap schlock, and the occasional oddball brew. Hard liquor and wine take up a good 3/4 of the store, and the selection is very good. Almost any variety of hard liquor can be found, although the brand selection isn't overwhelming. For most intoxications, two options are offered; the medium-priced local brand, and State Liquor's Brand (a.k.a. rubbing alcohol). For the average college student, the Home Brew should be more than enough. Most of the hard stuff is competitively priced, but they try to catch you on some brands (the 750 ml bottle of Absolut was \$16.29).

After finding my much sought-after vermouth (in the vermouth isle, no less), I put my face to the third and final test. I was carded, but the cashier seemed to be doing it out of routine and only glanced at my driver's license. I would recommend State Liquor for its selection, prices, and relatively safe parking lot, but make sure you're of age— they usually have a cop by the exit. •

*Author's note: Apparently the illustrious editors couldn't figure out what I was talking about here. "Proof" is the measurement of alcohol content in a drink (whiskey is about 80 proof, beer 10-20 proof, etc.). If you were able to figure this out for yourself, why not send Zack Ordynans a nasty message on the VAX.

Editor's retort: Dave Bernstein is a lousy bowler with a stupid haircut. Why not shave his head the next time you see him?