

Heady numbers as Caorunn gin sales continue to rise

Remnants of winter clung to the mountain tops as the train cruised north from Edinburgh towards Aviemore, the pockets of white snow contrasting sharply against the clear blue sky.

The River Spey also sparkled in the spring sunshine as we entered the atmospheric station in the heart of the town. Onwards via taxi to our ultimate destination, remote Caorunn distillery, makers of small batch Scottish gin.

They claim to be the first ever gin handcrafted in a Scottish malt whisky distillery and since 2009 Caorunn Gin has been created in small batches at Balmenach Distillery near Cromdale (PH26 3PF).

It is one of the first distilleries in Scotland to be licensed for Scotch whisky and gin is a newish kid on their block.

Caorunn (pronounced ka-roon) is from the Gaelic word Rowan Berry and the humble berry is one of the five unique Celtic botanicals at the heart of the product.

The company use Scotland's natural pantry to the full, hand-foraging the berry along with other Celtic botanicals, coul blush apples, because they can withstand the late frost and are the most northerly grown apple in the UK, heather, dandelion and bog myrtle (hated by the dreaded midge, by the way), a fragrant plant with infuses a soft, sweet resinous aroma into the gin, all of which can be found within ten minutes of the distillery.

They are paired with six traditional gin botanicals including coriander seed, juniper berries, angelica root and cassia bark, to create the product which is on sale nationwide and internationally.

Adding to the history of the product is the fact that Caorunn is the only gin in the world to be distilled in a working chopper berry chamber and the company say this unique process allows them to extract maximum flavour.

Kevin MacPherson, distillery manager, said gin has really taken off as a drink and Caorunn is, he claimed one of the forerunners of the premium gin.

He added: "We took an idea to produce a premium gin and it fitted in. It is true to say that this is the first every gin handcrafted in a Scottish malt whisky distillery.

"We were the first. All the staff who work at the distillery had a hand in making the gin but, with the help of the blender, we tried different things until we got the taste that we wanted.

"All the Celtic botanicals we use are within a five minute walk of the distillery and everything is in abundance here. We have got a classic gin, we have orange, we have raspberry and we have an exclusive.

"The classic is always the go-to gin and the orange and raspberry are very popular."

That said, MacPherson added that gin is for everybody to enjoy as it is an easy drink, the flavours balancing well with a tonic, but you can have it with what you want. The main thing is that you enjoy the gin the way you want it."

He emphasised that the company still make whisky and gin is a separate entity and whisky is on a boom at the moment in the world. There are new markets and they include India.

PICTURE: Kevin MacPherson with a bottle of the company's classic gin. Picture **Nigel Duncan**