

It's the Fizz that makes the difference!

We always thought there was something special about the bubbles in Champagne – somehow that first glass goes straight to your head in a way that still wine never does.

Now research at the University of Surrey (reported in New Scientist Dec 22nd) has proved that those bubbles really do get you merry more quickly. Fran Ridout and her team in Human Psychopharmacology threw a couple of drinks parties for 12 volunteers, without telling them what they were letting themselves in for. Half these guinea pigs drank fizzy Champagne, while the other group was faced with the same wine that had been “defizzed” with a whisk. The following week the drinks were reversed so everyone had had both.

The next step was to measure blood alcohol levels and, sure enough, these shot up much more quickly in the bubbly drinkers. After just five minutes, they hit 0.54 milligrammes of alcohol per millilitre of blood (mg/ml) compared to just 0.39 in the flat group. After 40 minutes, the fizzy drinkers were just short of the UK's legal limit for driving at 0.7mg/ml, while for those on the flat stuff the level was 0.58mg/ml. Some reaction times suffer badly on the bubbly too – drinkers took an extra fifth of a second to react to peripheral objects than when sober. In comparison, drinkers on flat Champagne only took an extra twentieth of a second – a frightening thought for drivers,

The big mystery is why bubbles make such a difference. Ridout's own theory is that the alcohol must be absorbed more quickly from the digestive system, perhaps because the carbon dioxide bubbles speed the flow of alcohol from the stomach to the intestine.

Any volunteers for more research?

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