

Charpentier charts ambitions

FRESH FROM his triumphs in this year's IWSC competition, Denis Charpentier and his eponymous range of Cognacs continue their relentless march eastwards.

Winning gold and silver medals for his XO and Napoleon Cognacs as well as bronze for his Robert Loston brandy, Charpentier has also taken on a Taiwanese marketing general manager, Michael Chien, to lend weight and expertise to the operation.

"It's a real priority for us to build the brand around the world," said Charpentier. "You can generally find us in most duty free shops already in Asia but we equally need to build on our domestic distribution."

This year the company is looking to sell somewhere in the region of 25,000 and 30,000 cases, roughly split 50/50 between brandy and Cognac, and next year, with the markets of Korea, China and Hong Kong coming on stream, business will be even better.

"It's also interesting to note that our Robert Loston brandy has done well and we expect to shift around 8,000 cases by the end of the year. We certainly have no limit on stock - it's

rather a question of price which drives the market."

The Denis Charpentier VSOP is particularly well known, with the 10 year old picking up gold at the IWSC awards in London last month. By the end of 1995, the company expects to have exported 8,000 to 10,000 cases of the brand.

Charpentier is also about to carve out a new segment with the launch of a Cognac exclusively reserved for the Far East and pitched between the VSOP and Napoleon qualities. "It's quite a logical step for us," said Charpentier, "and is in line with our expansion plans to reach 50,000 cases of both Cognac and brandy by next year."



Cognac Denis Charpentier shows its quality from Cognac through to presentation

There is certainly no denying the quality or the increasing popularity of Denis Charpentier Cognac. Evidence for this can be gleaned from the key markets of China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan where in both duty free and domestic sales, his brands are selling well.

"We approach our marketing strategy from a totally consumer-oriented way," said Chien. "We are on the ground and keep in regular contact for example with our 800 wholesalers in China."

One of the key planks of the company's growth strategy in the promised land of China, is that it ventures into the hinterland beyond the eastern seaboard cities of Beijing and Shanghai, as well as some of the smaller towns.

"I take the cases of my Cognac myself," said Charpentier, "and visit the big consumers personally, as well as the wholesalers and retailers, including large department stores. We also have people based in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan and in China."

Charpentier only uses Grande Champagne in his Cognacs and the older varieties of eaux-de-vies and of course his packaging, and presentation underlines this quality. Indeed the VSOP, won this year's Drinks International Design Trophy for the most impressive spirits presentation, in the IWS Competition.

"Our packaging is elegant and reflects the more personal touch we apply to our Cognac. We tend to do the opposite thing in this company to that which people expect - for example one eventual goal is to import our Cognac into Hong Kong from China."

While certainly not claiming to match the likes of Hennessy, Charpentier anticipates that next year, its Cognac will rank fifth in the Cognac league, and that from a relatively new and small company, is no mean feat indeed.



Capitalising on its Tour Monde USP

Kelt exclusive

CURRENTLY NUMBER eight in terms of sales in Taiwan, Cognac Kelt would appear to be going from strength to strength across the globe and the Far East particular.

Indeed it would seem that the USP of Tour du Monde, whereby the Cognac is shipped around the world before it is bottled, is working well for brand. Furthermore with the recent announcement of its listing in all DFS stores - Cognac Kelt is on a roll.

"We are definitely looking at duty free as an engine for growth," Olev Kelt told Drinks International. "Our ambitions certainly include getting into Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, although whether we move into Hong Kong remains to be seen."

Sony Trader is the company's Far East importer, and with the exception of the Japanese market, which has proved a particularly difficult hunting ground for Kelt thanks to paralleling activities, the future for Cognac Kelt in the Far East would seem to be set fair.



Choice made its debut in China in July

China is 'it' for Hennessy

Hennessy produced some 26 million bottles of Cognac in 1994 with 95% of production finding its way out of the Charentais town and onto the world stage in more than 120 countries.

The Far East, particularly Japan, has long been a priority and the company is in a good position for development, notably in China.

"By far our best market is that of Greater China, that is China itself, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan.

"Japan is still important to us as our second largest market with the US following closely behind," said Hennessy's Jean-Michel Delavaud.

Aided and abetted by in-depth company research into

the Cognac market in the Far East, in terms of drinking habits and Cognac quality, it is Hennessy XO which is fronting activities, and China is the prime focus.

"The Chinese drink Cognac at the table as if it were wine," said Delavaud, "and it is considered quite masculine and virile, while whisky is perhaps viewed as a more feminine drink."