



Master Whisky Blender for the Edrington Group (Famous Grouse brand), John Ramsay – who is due to retire – was in South Africa recently to launch the newest addition to the ‘famous’ brand – The Black Grouse.

# whisky

## doyen in SA to launch brand

By Andrew Smith

John Ramsay

**T**he Black Grouse subtly marries the smoothness of The Famous Grouse with the aromatic peatiness of an Islay Malt to create a blended whisky designed to attract blended Scotch drinkers, who are looking for a dram with a more challenging taste.

“The South African whisky market has experienced a noticeable shift towards premium whisky,” states Ramsay. “Similarly, we are seeing a global trends moving towards more premium whiskies and flavours and we feel The Black Grouse delivers this on all levels. It will give whisky drinkers the opportunity to sample a stronger, peated whisky from a trusted premium brand.”

### The man behind it

Ramsay’s career started by accident. “In secondary school I was extremely interested in chemistry,” he begins, “and set about ensuring I received the correct qualifications to enter this arena. However, at university I got into the ‘party crowd’ and from being a top student in my fourth year became a struggling one in my fifth. It was at that time I did a self-assessment and decided to look for a job where I could also study chemistry on a part-time basis.”

He entered the whisky industry in 1966 working in the laboratory at Strathclyde Distillery. In 1971 he took up appointment as Chief Chemist with Wm. Lawson Distillers and a decade later was promoted to the role of ‘Blender/

Chemist’. In 1990 he joined Highland Distilleries as production controller before moving to Edrington in 1991 and assuming the position of Master Blender. Ramsay is also a member of The Incorporation of Coopers of The Trades House of Glasgow and a Keeper of the Quaich.

The Black Grouse has already won prestigious international medals and accolades, testament to the skill of the Master Blender in being able to continually deliver premium blends of the highest quality. Most recently, it was awarded a Gold medal in the Scotch whisky category at the 2008 International Spirits Challenge.

The Black Grouse packaging suggests the promise of a rich, peaty, rewarding flavour. The Black Grouse bird – the inspiration behind this newest blend of whisky – is a distant relative of Scotland’s national game bird, the Red Grouse, which originally inspired The Famous Grouse. □



John Ramsay (r) at work in the laboratory