



# ULTIMATE SPIRITS CHALLENGE

LIKE NO OTHER COMPETITION

## 2015 Ultimate Spirits Challenge

### Great Values

**Ultimate Spirits Challenge 2015** recognizes the following products as **Great Values**: products with a favorable relationship between their price and final score at USC. They are the finest spirits within their respective price points.



#### A note on the icons:

 **Product Image**: to assist you with visual identification, we've included an image for each product evaluated. (Please note that age statements, vintages or label may vary slightly from the specific product evaluated but it represents a helpful portrayal of the brand.) *Click icon to view.*

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### Vodka

Unflavored Vodka All vodkas were judged in category flights of like-with-like. The Chairman's Trophy - Vodka was awarded based on the highest scoring vodka across all the unflavored categories.

Award	Score	
Chairman's Trophy	95	<b>Russian Standard Original Vodka Russia, 40% abv, \$19.99, 750 ml</b>  Shimmering clear appearance. Dry breakfast cereal aroma is classic. Integrated, harmonious in midpalate and aftertaste. Superb balance from start to finish. A world standard. <b>Great Value. Extraordinary, Ultimate Recommendation</b>
Finalist	94	<b>Khortytsa Platinum Vodka Ukraine, 40% abv, \$14.99, 700 ml</b>  Spring water clear. Big, assertive, snack cracker-grain aroma. Toasty on the palate, dry, creamy texture. A winner on all levels. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	94	<b>Spud Vodka Poland, 40% abv, \$19.99, 750 ml</b>  Crystal clear. Bouquet is slightly sweet, earthy, minerally. Offers chewy, rich, dry flavors that last long into the finish. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>

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Finalist	93	<b>Boyd &amp; Blair Potato Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$24.49, 750 ml</b>
		Elegant, integrated, substantial in the aroma. Taste is round, supple, deeply alluring. A classy vodka that is sturdy enough to be enjoyed on the rocks with a twist. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	93	<b>Menage a Trois Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$24.99, 750 ml</b>
		Wispy, herbal, fresh spirit aromas make for pleasing sniffing. On palate, the flavor is rich without being unctuous, dry, vegetal, with loads of black pepper spice. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	93	<b>Prairie Organic Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$24.99, 750 ml</b>
		Clean rainwater appearance. The toasty, slightly sweet breakfast cereal aroma is tantalizing and fresh. In mouth, it's weighty, dry, chewy. An organic beauty. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	93	<b>Starlite Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$17.99, 750 ml</b>
		Earthy, woody, vegetal opening aromas highlight the bouquet. Taste is sweeter than aroma, but is richly textured, chewy. One of the best American craft vodkas around. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
	92	<b>Fuzzy's Ultra Premium Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$24.99, 750 ml</b>
		Clear as rainwater. Clean, grainy, gently dry aroma leads to a long, substantial flavor that's chewy, breakfast cereal-like, enormously pleasing. This vodka is consistently good from year to year. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
	91	<b>Gridiron Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$20.00, 750 ml</b>
		Crystal clear, colorless. Aroma presents an intriguing set of scents that include breakfast cereals and fruits. Taste profile leans towards the ripe fruits, then the finish goes dry like grain. Nice. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>

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90 **Khortytza Ice Vodka Ukraine, 40% abv, \$14.99, 700 ml**

Clean, transparent. Offers zesty, snack cracker, breakfast cereal aromas. Taste profile mirrors the aroma but seems drier, crisper. **Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended**

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89 **LEAF Alaskan Glacial Water Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$17.99, 750 ml**

Clear, pure. Aroma offers appealing scents of minerals, dry earth, quartz, yeast. Taste profile leans more towards elegance than power and that, in the final analysis, is its primary charm. **Great Value. Very Good, Strong Recommendation**

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88 **LEAF Rocky Mountain Mineral Water Vodka United States, 40% abv, \$17.99, 750 ml**

Excellent clarity. Nose features intense graininess, snack cracker zestiness. Flavor profile highlights the deep graininess. Superb finish. **Great Value. Very Good, Strong Recommendation**

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87 **EPIC Classic Vodka France, 40% abv, \$12.99, 750 ml**

Pure as rainwater appearance. Smells of grains, unsalted snack crackers, limestone, minerals. Taste profile features sweetened breakfast cereal, honeywheat toast. Finishes medium long, off-dry. **Great Value. Very Good, Strong Recommendation**

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## Vodka

Flavored Vodka All flavored vodkas were judged in category flights of like-with-like flavors. The Chairman's Trophy - Flavored Vodka was awarded based on the highest scoring flavored vodka across all the flavor categories.

Award	Score	
Chairman's Trophy	94	<b>Van Gogh Dutch Caramel Flavored Vodka Netherlands, 35% abv, \$27.00, 750 ml</b>  The immediate impact of the bittersweet Dutch caramel influence is what makes this a pinnacle achievement in astute flavoring. A benchmark flavored vodka. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>

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Finalist	92	<b>Zu Bison Grass Flavored Vodka Poland, 40% abv, \$24.99, 750 ml</b>
<p>Faint, greenish/silver color. Nose is grassy, vegetal, earthy, mossy, clean as a whistle. Taste echoes the bouquet, adding a delicate note of sap. Seriously tasty and classic. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b></p>		

## Gin

Chairman's Trophy and Finalist status are determined by the judging chairmen, using a scoring curve based upon the number of entries and overall categorical scoring.

Award	Score	
Chairman's Trophy	97	<b>Cold River Gin United States, 47% abv, \$26.99, 750 ml</b>
<p>Wonderfully fragrant and complex with bright scents of juniper taking the lead with supported by orange, cardamon, coriander, and fresh herbs. Lush and silky on the palate being decadent while ideally balanced. A new American classic. <b>Great Value. Extraordinary, Ultimate Recommendation</b></p>		
Finalist	96	<b>Beefeater London Dry Gin United Kingdom, 47% abv, \$19.00, 750 ml</b>
<p>A true classic and a staple in any respectable bar. The nose is generous and complex while ever-evolving in the glass. Vibrant and focused on the palate with a silky texture. The quintessential London Dry Gin. <b>Great Value. Extraordinary, Ultimate Recommendation</b></p>		
Finalist	96	<b>Citadelle Gin France, 44% abv, \$25.00, 750 ml</b>
<p>Wisps of juniper with subtle blanched nuts, brown spice, fennel, and leafy herbs fill the generous nose. Superbly balanced and complex on the palate with clean citrus notes that carry to the finish. <b>Great Value. Extraordinary, Ultimate Recommendation</b></p>		
Finalist	96	<b>Tanqueray London Dry Gin United Kingdom, 47.3% abv, \$19.99, 750 ml</b>
<p>Balance and sophistication are the descriptors that leap to mind. Juniper, lemon and orange zest, dry and fresh pine needles, and an underlying mineral note. A benchmark. <b>Great Value. Extraordinary, Ultimate Recommendation</b></p>		

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92 **Bombay Sapphire East London Dry Gin England, 42% abv, \$22.99, 750 ml**

Clear, pure appearance. First nosings pick up more of coriander and angelica than any other botanicals. Taste profile introduces the juniper and citrus aspects. Sophisticated, stone dry, with plenty of textural grip. **Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended**

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88 **Greenall's The Original London Dry Gin United Kingdom, 40% abv, \$15.99, 750 ml**

Subtlety is the coin of the realm here with soft fruit and floral notes in the lead with hints of cardamon and vanilla bean. The palate is more expressive with bitter lemon and black pepper rising on the finish. **Great Value. Very Good, Strong Recommendation**

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## Vermouth

All vermouths were judged in category flights of like-with-like (e.g., flights of sweet vermouths, flights of dry vermouths, etc.). The Chairman's Trophy - Vermouth was awarded based on the highest scoring product across all the vermouth categories.

Award	Score	
Chairman's Trophy	94	<b>Noilly Prat Rouge Vermouth France, 16% abv, \$12.99, 750 ml</b>  Pretty medium brown/chestnut color. Aroma is a banquet of dried and fresh herbs, roots, leaves, wine. Flavor profile offers richness, seductive bittersweet highlights. Long, succulent finish. Superb. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	93	<b>Cinzano 1757 Sweet Vermouth Italy, 16% abv, \$29.99, 1 L</b>  Cola-like appearance. Nose is zesty, herbal, citrusy, delicate, mossy, woody. Taste profile highlights the intensity of the herbs, vegetation, dry leaves, parsley, coriander, fennel, sage. Lovely and easily one of the better rossos from Italy. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>
Finalist	93	<b>Noilly Prat Extra Dry Vermouth France, 18% abv, \$12.99, 750 ml</b>  Pale oyster color. Aroma is juicy, herbal, crisp, fresh. Exotic flavors include saltine cracker, stone, white wine grapes, citrus peel. <b>Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended</b>

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Finalist

91

**Martini Rosso Sweet Vermouth Italy, 15% abv, \$7.99, 750 ml**

Light cola brown color. High notes of woody botanicals, fennel, black pepper, tubers. Flavors include beet, berries, dried rose petal, dried citrus peel. **Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended**

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Finalist

91

**Noilly Prat Ambre Sweet Vermouth France, 16% abv, \$18.99, 750 ml**

Complex, earthy, foresty aromas abound in this exotic bouquet that's sweet/sour in nature. Taste is supple, sweet, nutty, almost sherried. **Great Value. Excellent, Highly Recommended**

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**Martini Extra Dry Vermouth Italy, 18% abv, \$7.99, 750 ml**

Faint tarnished silver color. Soft aroma of dried flowers, kiwi, mango. Taste profile is off-dry, fruity, ripe, nuanced. **Great Value. Very Good, Strong Recommendation**