

Stoli Group to release Kentucky Owl bourbon into travel retail



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Stoli Group is set to release its super-premium US bourbon brand, Kentucky Owl (‘The Wise Man’s Bourbon’), into the global travel retail market this year.

Stoli Group’s parent company, SPI Group, bought Kentucky Owl in 2017 from its owner, Dixon Dedman, and he has been retained by SPI Group as Master Blender of the brand.

Kentucky Owl was founded in 1879 by Dixon’s great-great-grandfather, C.M. Dedman. Prohibition in the US led to the bourbon’s mysterious disappearance more than 100 years ago. Dixon Dedman began working on the brand’s second iteration in 2008 and released his first batch in 2014.

Every batch of Kentucky Owl is described as one-of-a-kind with a blend of high-quality, different aged bourbons. The process involves re-charring, re-barrelling, tasting and experimenting with the various bourbons.

Stoli Group is the exclusive distributor, marketer and seller of the bourbons and now rye whiskies, of which Dedman has produced two.

Stoli released the first batch of Kentucky Owl produced under SPI Group’s ownership – 11yo Rye Whiskey – in September 2017. The 55.3%abv product was sold in 27 markets, retailing at US\$130. A number of other batches followed during 2018.

The first release of Kentucky Owl attracted a top rating of 95 points by Whiskey Advocate, the respected US whiskey industry magazine.

The publication's journalist Fred Minnick, who is also San Francisco World Spirits Competition judge, said: "Just beautiful, long rounded notes of caramel, cinnamon roll, butterscotch, brisket burnt ends, nutmeg... if it sounds complex, it's because it is and the finish just doesn't quit, giving you a lingering taste of every note."

Commenting on Kentucky Owl's entry into travel retail, Stoli Group Global Duty Free and Travel Retail Director Jean-Philippe Aucher said: "Kentucky Owl is without doubt one of our most exciting releases into global travel retail. It is produced in relatively small batches, using Dixon Dedman's ground-breaking methods, and therefore we will be carefully selecting operators who understand and prioritize craft bourbons and ryes."

He added: "Kentucky Owl will have a highly visible presence at upcoming travel retail industry shows, and we look forward to entering discussions with duty free operators who fit this bill."

The American bourbon and whiskey category represents US\$3 billion in annual sales and achieved a +6% CAGR from 2010-2016.

The strongest growth in the category is in super-premium small-batch bourbon, which achieved +20% CAGR over the same period.