

# WSJ Print Edition

*The cans are cute, but they taste like cough syrup and Windex.*

## Fancy Sodas Fall Flat With Me

**By Brenda Cronin**

I am late to the fancy-soda party, and I won't be lingering. The drinks come in winsome bottles or sleek cans and have ridiculous flavors like watermelon-dandelion or rosehip-jacaranda. Drinking one looks like fun. Alas, my limited survey reveals they taste like carbonated cough syrup with a Windex chaser.

Soda was seldom found in the house when I was little, making it a subject of fascination. My parents, raised in Ireland and England, thought children should drink milk or fruit juice. Fizzy, sugary drinks were sweet, festive and a nutritional black hole.

That only made Coca-Cola and 7-Up more tantalizing to my siblings and me. Our physician father finally conceded that tonic water—thanks to drops of quinine—might not be a completely worthless mix of food coloring and empty calories. So ginger ale and tonic water became sick-day staples in our home, a bottle uncapped with a satisfying carbonated hiss if someone had a fever. Worn down by pestering, our parents relented and allowed ginger ale at Sunday dinner. Such austerity only whetted my childhood fondness for concoctions

that now make me wince: grape soda, root beer, orange Fanta, even a hideous insipid confection known as cream soda. During school field trips and friends' birthday parties, I tore into them all.

In college, my worldly roommate, her Exeter sophistication lapping my sheltered convent education, introduced me to the saccharin-infused Pepsi Light. It was a citrusspiked cola in a jaunty blue can. Model Lauren Hutton valiantly flogged Pepsi Light—"One calorie!"—but it didn't last on the market, steamrolled by aspartame, a new sweetener, and the Diet Coke juggernaut.

My roommate also got me into jogging, which dovetailed with my own Diet Coke phase. After a long run, nothing was better than Diet Coke straight from the freezer, the soda feathered with slivers of ice. (I skipped Tab, spooked by the aggressively metallic aftertaste.)

In time my taste for soda dwindled. I didn't lose my sweet tooth, nor did I turn away from carbonation. I still drink plenty of sparkling water, and who doesn't like champagne? I happily sat out the energy-drink craze. These shots of concentrated caffeine are meant to be sipped, not sniffed, but one whiff of a ragingly popular one—bouquet de Dubble Bubble and wet sneakers—was enough to put me off them forever.

I should be reveling in the gourmet-soda parade. If only the flavors didn't sound like products from Bath & Body Works ("Sweet Orange and Agave," "Cotton Candy Clouds") or taste like a mashup of SweeTARTS and Jolly Ranchers.

I gave them another try recently, when suffering through colonoscopy prep. No food all day, my doctor said, but clear liquids were fine. I chose a fancy soda and snapped it open. Vile. Let's just say it made me look forward to a glass of my pre-colonoscopy potion.

De gustibus non disputandum est and all that. But when drinking feels more like penance than a party, I'll do without. Or have a cocktail.

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