



HIGH MAINTENANCE

your coffee equipment questions answered

BY

JASON "DOUBLE J" JOHNSON

ALEX LAMBERT

SPRING IS JUST AROUND the corner, and sometimes it's hard to find motivation to stay engaged during these seasonal transitions. Maybe it's time to think about doing a little extra cleaning or start planning your next throwdown to try and draw everyone out of hibernation. That big coffee event that happens every year in the United States—the Specialty Coffee Expo, which is happening April 11–14 in Boston—is coming up. Start looking at those flights!

How do we stay motivated, you ask? We get hyped answering all these questions!

We love using a bottomless portafilter, but what do you do when someone wants an odd number of shots and you want to make sure they still get a balanced flavor?

This is probably more of a training question, but there

triple, like a 22- or 25-gram size) and adjust the water/recipe accordingly that way, as well.

—Alex

Sometimes I go to put my portafilter up into the group-head but it won't fit. Like, it has too much coffee ... but my dose is where I want it. What do I do?

It may be time to switch to a larger basket size. The dose weight of your espresso is just that: a weight. We also have to consider the volume and density of the particles in there. We have found that with some espressos, you can fit a good 20 grams or so in a so-called 17-gram basket. Some beans, blends, or roast levels tend to be less dense, and therefore it takes more coffee volume to make that 20 grams. Most technicians carry a wide range of basket sizes

Back in the day, baristas had to always manually fill the espresso machines. As they used the machine throughout the day, they would have to keep an eye on the sight glass to make sure the machine didn't run out of water.

is definitely a way to get this done! Most manufacturers offer a 14-gram portafilter basket. I would pick up an extra portafilter and keep a 14-gram basket in it. After that, it's really about developing a recipe that you like. I think start with a 1:1 ratio, then try a 1:1.5. I expect the extraction should be stopped a little sooner than you normally would, as well. Also, I suggest you get in touch with your coffee trainer or roaster for advice about this and other training-related questions. They know best on how the espresso should taste and be represented. Good luck!

—Double J

Just to add on to what Double J said, you could go the other way and try a bigger basket (some might call it a

and styles. Double J and I carry everything from as small as 14 grams to as large as 25 grams from several different manufacturers. Hit up your local tech and see if they have anything they can recommend.

—Alex

What does the "manual-fill" button on my machine do? It doesn't seem to do anything when I push it!

There's a strange temptation around the old manual-fill switch. I've seen many "Do not touch!" and "No!" warnings taped onto those mystical buttons when I'm out on service calls. But you're brave, right? Certainly some faded old Post-It isn't going to tell you what to do. So one day, when it's slow around the shop and the playlist isn't holding your

attention, consider tempting fate and doing a little experiment. Hit the button. You'll hear a fast click and a swoosh, and you'll be startled and immediately take your hand away from the machine. All will be calm, but you'll notice you're holding your breath as you wait for a flood of water or sparks and steam to come pouring out of the espresso machine. But—there's nothing, so you simply shrug and carry on to do your lobby sweep.

I thought about ending my response there but realized I never answered your question. The manual-fill button simply adds water to the machine. Nowadays, it's used as a bypass just in case the auto-fill function fails. Back in the day, baristas had to always manually fill the espresso machines. As they used the machine throughout the day, they would have to keep an eye on the sight glass to make sure the machine didn't run out of water. There are some concerns about the button getting pushed too much or held down for too long. Doing that can cause the boiler to overflow or the dreaded low-steam pressure issue to arise. Worst-case scenario would be water leaking out of the pressure-relief valve and vacuum breaker. That's why so many machines have the warnings posted to them. If you're tired of the Post-Its, you can always ask your technician to deactivate the button.

—Double J

Backflushing: with or without screens?

With! The screen is there to keep solids (including powdered detergents) from entering the group and clogging or contaminating it. You definitely want to keep them in place if you are planning on putting anything in the basket or blind (coffee, detergent powder, etc.). Double J and I (and likely quite a few other technicians around the world) have cleaned our fair share of solidified espresso-machine-cleaning detergents out of brew valves or internal group tubes. After backflushing, you can drop the screens, and the gunk that was on there will be much easier to get off as well!

—Alex

Got a question about coffee equipment?

We'd love to help! Just email your thoughts and queries to highmaintenance@baristamagazine.com.

SWEETBIRD[®]
BRISTOL ENGLAND

Sugar-free
not taste free

Free from artificial colours
Free from high fructose corn syrup
Free from GMOs
Vegan approved since 2006

Vegan

Part of the
Beyond the Bean
brand family

f t i /hellosweetbird

CAFFEINE CRAWL

START OF 2019

NW Arkansas // January 5
San Diego // January 25 - 27
Houston // February 22 - 23
Oklahoma City // March 22 - 23
Kansas City // April 26 - 28

THANKS TO
SAN DIEGO AND HOUSTON
PLATINUM LEVEL
SPONSOR

InterAmerican Coffee
Specialty Green Coffee Importers