

Distilling with the Still Spirits Turbo 500

How did I start distilling with the Still Spirits Turbo 500? That is a great question. In this post I'm going to tell you the good and bad points about distilling with the Turbo 500.

But how did I get there? I always had an interest starting as a kid. Watching shows like Dukes of Hazzard. As I grew up as a teen ager I experimented making beer (Yes Mom, that wasn't a school science experiment). The last few years watching shows like Moonshiners struck my interest again to move up from brewing again. After reading [The Home Distillers Notebook](#) by Jeff King, I was hooked. I knew that I wanted to make the jump from brewing beer to distilling liquor.

But I needed a still. The book taught you how to build a tea pot still, so I went out and bought a cheap stainless steel teapot and some copper tubing. I tried to build this thing and failed miserably. I know I am not mechanically inclined. That is my brothers area of expertise. So I thought to myself, what do I do now. I searched on line, joined forums, I got overwhelmed. I didn't know anyone who knew how to distill (so I thought at the time, but that is another story).

There are a lot of small stills on-line. But which one is the right one? Everyone had an opinion.

It was at a family get together (this tends to be a theme in my posts for a reason. We are not hillbillies, honest), a

family member told me that there was a still at a local wine and beer u-brew store, and I should go check it out. I couldn't get out of my family supper fast enough, but it was the weekend and I couldn't go to the store anyway. But talk about my anxiety.

The weekdays came around and I found some time to head down to the u-brew store and sure enough, there was a still. The first one I have ever seen in person. I was so excited. It was the Still Spirits Turbo 500. I had seen it on-line and had watched some videos of it before. So I was familiar with what I was looking at.

So I went ahead and bought the Turbo 500 with the column condenser. This is when I started distilling with the Still Spirits Turbo 500. I started with the recommended sugar wash with their turbo yeast and their instructions of adding the charcoal during the fermentation process. At the end of the fermentation process, a clearing agent is added to separate the charcoal from the mash. It was a very different process than brewing beer.

The distillation process only called for the first 50ml to be separated out as the forshots. the rest was usable liquor. This is a lot different when you use grains, which really through me off when I made the jump to grains. The cuts where an entirely different process and I did a terrible job for a long time.

Anyway. I distilled my first sugar wash and had my first liquor. It was 20% ABV, and it smelled like nail polish remover. The taste was not pleasant, and very hot going down. After some reading, I learned about filtering the liquor with a breta filter. This was even aired on the show Myth Busters at the same time about making cheap vodka taste like expensive vodka. What timing. I filtered the liquor through my dedicated filter around 3 times, and it made a huge improvement. It cleared up the aroma and made it a lot smoother.

The next jump I made was getting away from the Turbo yeast, and went to Champaign yeasts then on to actual vodka yeasts. The liquor percentage came out much lower, around 11 – 14% but there was a huge improvement in flavour and smoothness.

So the Still Spirits Turbo 500 with the column can be used to make a decent vodka when you make changes to your process. The column is able to produce a distillate at 94% constantly through the entire run.

The problems with the Still Spirits Turbo 500 are that it is set at a constant temperature, and the thermometer is set at the outgoing water temperature. You are not able to raise or lower the temperature of the boiler to keep your mash at specific temperatures to help you with your cuts. In addition, the temperature readings is on the outgoing water temperature, not the temperature of the vapour inside the condenser.

If you are distilling a grain mash, this makes it very difficult to make your cuts using the temperature, and you are relying on your taste only. Because the condenser distills everything at 94%, you can't even use the liquor percentage for the cuts.

A misleading advertisement on the box is that it states it is also a crab cooker. Most likely for legal reasons, but I assumed I would be able to boil water to help me with beer making. The boiler never brought the water to a boil unfortunately.

If you want to make the move to grains, this is why they have the Still Spirits Alembic Assembly. It is designed to distill at a lower percentage to allow more flavour to come through the distillation process. The thermometer is sitting on top of the dome taking the temperature of the vapour at the top of the dome, which is more accurate than the column. You can still slow down the distillation by controlling the amount of cold water goes through the condenser. Again the only problem is you still can not control the temperature of the kettle. But it does do a better job than the column. If you want to make vodka, you can always triple distill your liquor to achieve the neutral flavour.

The Still Spirits T500, using the column, does perform exactly as advertised though. It is meant for a sugar wash and to use its line of flavour extracts to achieve different liquor flavours. For a beginner distiller, this is a great product, but you will outgrow the still once you want to move to grain mashes.