Moderation, the real landing point: the boom of mid-strength

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The UK beverage market is experiencing a rapid shift towards "mid-strength" alcohol, driven by a growing consumer desire for moderation. Data from Ocado reveals massive sales increases for intermediate-strength wines, beers, and spirits. Young adults lead this trend, seeking balance, midweek socialization, and sensory enjoyment without the negative effects of standard alcohol consumption.

There is a word that recurs persistently in consumption reports: moderation. Rather than abstinence or excess, it is a seemingly trivial concept that is redesigning, in a surprisingly rapid way, the alcoholic beverages market in the United Kingdom. **Data published by Ocado, one of the country's**

leading online supermarkets, capture a trend that would have been difficult to imagine until a few years ago: intermediate alcohol beverages are becoming an independent and rapidly growing consumption category.

These include wines between 6% and 9% alcohol, beers between 2% and 3%, and spirits between 15% and 20%. **Over the last two years, sales in this segment have increased by 71%, while searches on the Ocado website have grown by over 400%.** This is an unmistakable signal that something is changing.

Mid-strength wine leads the change

Within this general growth, “mid-strength” wine is paving the way in the UK. **Year-over-year sales mark a 151% increase, a figure that prompted Ocado to expand its offering in this segment by over 200% in just one year.** The platform now boasts the widest range of intermediate-strength beverages among all British supermarkets, while low-alcohol beer keeps pace with a 21-22% monthly growth.

These are no isolated numbers. **Overall sales of mid-strength drinks are growing by 41% month over month, and Ocado has responded by tripling its offering in this segment over the last year.** This is the concrete response to a demand that continues to increase.

The portrait of a new consumer

To truly understand this phenomenon, we must look at who is driving it. Ocado commissioned research alongside the analytics firm Clariti, conducted on a representative sample of 2,180 British adults in March 2026. The results are eloquent. **Nearly four out of ten adults (39%) state they choose intermediate-strength beverages more often compared to a year ago.**

However, it is among young people that the data becomes truly

significant: in the 18-34 age bracket, the percentage rises to 54%. **The majority of respondents (58%) claim to actively seek to moderate their alcohol consumption compared to the past.** Three profiles dominate this new market.

The first is the “Modest Modernist,” a young consumer who identifies as neither a heavy drinker nor a strict teetotaler, viewing moderation as a lifestyle choice rather than a sacrifice. **The second is the “Midweek Socialiser”: half of consumers, and 65% of younger ones, prefer reduced-strength beverages during the week, driven by remote working and midweek socializing.**

The third profile is the “Health-conscious” consumer: 71% of buyers, and 76% of the 25-34 age group, claim to pay more attention to the balance between alcohol consumption and lifestyle. **Furthermore, 48% choose mid-strength options specifically to reduce the risk of hangovers.**

They want to reduce, rather than quit

It is within this context that brands like Quarter Proof and 6Percent are born and thrive, representing a new generation of producers focusing on alcohol reduction without sacrificing the sensory experience. **Fabian Clark, co-founder of Quarter Proof, states clearly that people are trying to reduce their intake, which is exactly where mid-strength beverages come into play.**

The data proves him right: since arriving on Ocado, sales of Quarter Proof spirits have grown by 129%. Gabriella Lamb, co-founder of 6Percent, launched on Ocado in March 2026, perfectly captures the point: **“Intermediate-strength wine gives people more choice if they want to drink a little less, without giving up the pleasure of a good glass of wine.”**She also adds a relevant fact for the sector: many consumers are interested in these products, but still struggle to find them, meaning distribution remains a significant obstacle.

From no/low to mid-strength: the evolution of a trend

It is worth placing this phenomenon within a broader trajectory. Recently, the no/low alcohol beverage market has garnered significant media interest. **However, the numbers suggest that the true landing point for consumers is an intermediate dimension: enough alcohol to maintain the social and sensory experience, but low enough not to interfere with productivity, well-being, and health.**

Shauna Clark Fitzpatrick, buying manager for the No & Low Alcohol and Ready to Drink category at Ocado Retail, describes this shift with words that summarize the spirit of the phenomenon well. **“We are witnessing a clear change in how people relate to alcohol: it involves finding a balance that suits their lifestyle, especially for midweek occasions and evenings at home.”**

What this means for the market

For producers, the message is clear: the frontier of innovation has shifted. Offering non-alcoholic alternatives or relying entirely on standard strengths is no longer enough. **The mid-strength segment concentrates the emerging demand and requires research and development investments focused on flavor profile fidelity.**

The consumer who chooses a 6% wine or a 15% spirit wants to rediscover the pleasure of the original product, rather than settle for a substitute. For retailers, the key leverage is visibility: moving these products from specialized niches to main shelves, making them easily accessible, and building a recognizable category. **This is exactly the direction Ocado is taking, having made a decisive bet on this specific segment.**

The true cultural shift, however, lies elsewhere: moderating means making a conscious choice rather than giving something

up. **For a generation that wants to enjoy a Wednesday evening aperitif without paying for it on Thursday morning, the answer is a good wine with a 6% alcohol content.**

Key points

1. **Mid-strength sales surged by 71% in two years**, highlighting a strong demand for intermediate alcohol beverages.
2. **Younger consumers drive the market**, with 54% of the 18-34 demographic choosing lower-alcohol options for lifestyle balance.
3. **Product availability remains an obstacle**, pushing retailers like Ocado to expand their mid-strength selectionsignificantly.
4. **The focus for producers must be on flavor profile fidelity** to ensure a premium and authentic sensory experience.