

Review: Black Horse, Beamish, County Durham



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LAST time I went to the Black Horse pub, I stuck my neck out and described what I had as “the best Sunday lunch in the North East”.

So bowled-over was I by what was on offer, I just couldn’t hold back and, to be fair, stand by that statement today.

However, since then, the pub has had a major refurbishment, so it only seemed right to give it another blast.

But instead of heading along for Sunday dinner, we opted for a Saturday evening.

At some so-called traditional country pubs, you can end up being served microwaved meals.

But home cooking is guaranteed at the Black Horse, where the vegetables are even grown on-site.

The pub itself was always quaint and homely, if a little cramped, but the refurbishment project has seen a large extension added.

That said we thought it best to book and our instincts were right, with only two time slots remaining.

The menu is made-up of a series of classic dishes and I plumped for prawn cocktail to start, while my dining partner went for black pudding.

I was delighted with a hearty mound of plump Norwegian prawns in home-made tomato and brandy flavoured mayonnaise, accompanied by crisp lettuce leaves.

And after a brief charm-offensive, I also managed to grab a sample of the black pudding, which came with caramelised apple and a tangy chutney.

We were already feeling a bit full but couldn't wait for the mains to arrive.

I had gone for the steak and ale pie, which was neatly presented on a large plate, with a quinelle of mash alongside, which had leeks running through it.

A jug of homemade gravy was also brought to the table, as was a selection of vegetables, which included a pot of dauphinoise potatoes and the Black Horse's famous roasted parsnips.

The circular pie was made with delicious pastry, which was the perfect thickness and not too dense. Inside were large chunks of steak, beautifully succulent and surrounded by just the right amount of gravy.

The vegetables – all home-grown – were perfectly cooked, while the gravy was full of flavour.

My better half was in a much more summery mood and had gone for the ploughman's, which we had predicted would be more of a lighter bite, so ordered some chips to go on the side.

But boy were we wrong.

The gargantuan rectangular plate was packed full of delights, including a mound of parma ham, several slices of salami, three separate cheeses (applewood smoked, brie and stilton), strawberries, celery and grapes.

A coleslaw, made with cabbage and carrots from the gardens, along with a homemade chutney accompanied the dish.

Trying to dust the lot of this, as well as the chips, was too tough, even for the two of us, so we were delighted the kind waiter was more than happy to wrap the remainder up, which kept me in lunches for the next three days.

There didn't seem to be any way a desert could be slid in but after glancing at the menu, we decided the sensible option would be to share one and we opted for a trio of ice creams – white chocolate chip, Belgian chocolate and caramel – all beautiful, served with a dollop of Chantilly cream.

We concluded that the Black Horse's refit had very definitely been worth it, creating space for more people to enjoy its delights.

I challenge anyone to find a better pub meal anywhere in the North East.

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