

Wheeler's Black Label "Ice Cream" (Vegan)

Hannah Kaminsky, My Sweet Vegan ~ Magic in your mouth. That's the way Wheeler's Black Label describes itself, with no hint at modesty or shyness, proclaiming superiority in a fiercely competitive field. A bold move from this newborn company, facing up against the big boys like Häagen-Dazs and Baskin Robbins without so much as flinching. This apparent lack of tact would normally be an instant turn-off in my book, but this time, I'm behind them 100%. None of this boasting could outshine such an incredible creation that absolutely deserves this praise, and then some. Not only does their ice cream come in more incredible flavors than you could even dream up and taste like nothing else on the market, but it's completely vegan. Sure, I do have a certain soft spot for frozen desserts, but mark my words: This stuff puts everything else out there to shame.

Craving a taste since word first reached my ears about this "magical" frozen treat, I could hardly contain my excitement when the carton of four chocolate variations arrived at the door. Having waited for so long, I threw myself upon the box and got right to work, snapping pictures fast as the temptation to tear into each bowlful proved overwhelming. I must apologize in advance for the sloppy photos that resulted.

First up was Mexican Chocolate, an unassuming shade of medium brown that concealed what intense flavors it contained. Smelling of sugar and cocoa with a few floral notes and a fragrant vanilla perfume, only a taste would tell what a fox in sheep's clothing it truly was. Melting smoothly across my tongue like no other vegan ice cream has before, snatches of sweet cinnamon burst like fireworks before engulfing the whole palate. Super smooth, velvety, and rich, I swear my eyes must have rolled back into my head on the first taste. An incredibly well-balanced concoction, the spice actually is the star here, while the chocolate flavor provides an elegant backdrop to support it. Sad to say, the entire container was gone before I had finished writing down notes, and I could have easily polished off two or three more right then and there had I been given half a chance.

Moving next to Chocolate Coconut, I could already tell that good things were in store just by the tropical scent that dazzled my nose while photographing this stuff. Casually sneaking a taste while I had my back turned, my mom declared "Wow, that is coconut!" and a moment later when I tried it for myself, I must have echoed her words exactly. So very coconut, it's crazy! Like an exotic vacation in the tropics, smothered with decadent, creamy chocolate, who needs paradise when you can have ice cream? Pieces of shredded coconut emerged in every spoonful, adding to the astonishing flavor, but as a fair-weather coconut lover, this was a bit much for me. Coming off as perhaps gritty when it looks like it should be smooth, it was still very good overall; But not exactly my cup of tea.

My enthusiasm for this next flavor is simply through the roof, and I couldn't possibly wait to declare this one as my favorite of the batch, the clear winner even in a race of champions: Chocolate Black Russian. Now, I had only heard of a white russian previous to this experience, but a little bit of research proved that a black russian was pretty much the same thing, only without cream. Pretty clever, Wheeler! Having had little experience with alcohol, I wouldn't be able to tell you how close this comes to the original drink, but to me, this ice cream base is the best coffee ice cream I have tasted since going vegan. Seriously, my first thought was "Woah, this seriously tastes like Häagen-Dazs!" I still can't quite wrap my mind around it, the flavor is just so insane. Add in some huge slabs of bittersweet chocolate that snap cleanly between the teeth, and I swear my heart could have stopped while eating this and I wouldn't have noticed. It is that good. If heaven were an ice cream, this must be what it tastes like.

Finally, all that remained of my incredible treasure was Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip. Sporting those same lovely chocolate chunks as the Black Russian, it was certainly a treat just to look at. Smelling of nothing but roasted peanuts, it promised a serious peanut-punch despite its pale pallor. Rich as a spoonful of pure, frosty peanut butter with chocolate sprinkled in, this stuff is maddeningly addictive. For those who are already harboring peanut butter obsessions, this just might be like crack-cocaine, so I must warn against trying it. Especially since that would leave more for me.

This stuff was so convincing that I was almost worried that it might not be vegan after all, but the proof was in digestion: Days later and still no ill effects, I'm thrilled and overwhelmed at how delicious this new dairy-free option is. Although it's still a bit hard to come by, slowly but surely Wheeler's is breaking into various restaurant menus and hopefully on to the open market; I just wish it would hurry up, as my main complaint is that they didn't send me enough!

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