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10-16 March 2002

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SUNDAY EXPRESS

AT HOME ★ wine cellar

MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL

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Tried and tasted

Antony Worrall Thompson whips up some interest in ready-made custard



BIRD'S £1.25 for 500g, 5% cream
I expected this to remind me of my childhood, but if custard really was like this, then my tastebuds have definitely changed. It contains no eggs, which is not a good sign, and has a starchy, floury taste that's not terribly pleasant.
Total: **5/10**



SAINSBURY'S 99p for 500g, 42% whipping cream
You can have too much of a good thing – in this instance, cream. Using so much of it produces a good pouring consistency but very little custard taste. It's too rich and sweet, too.
Total: **5/10**



SAFEWAY £1.09 for 500ml, 15% cream
This one looks the business but contains no eggs, so the flavour doesn't live up to expectations. But it's pleasantly thick and smooth with a slightly burned, caramelly taste that stops it being too sweet.
Total: **6/10**



M&S £1.09 for 500g, 22% cream
This has a creamy taste, isn't over-sweet and has a pleasant pale colour, making it look home-made. It could do with being a little richer (still no eggs!) and I would like to have seen some vanilla among the ingredients.
Total: **7/10**



TESCO FINEST 99p for 350g, 26% cream
At last someone is using eggs. This contains yolks, so it's quite rich, but there's too much cream for the custard flavour to come through. I like the use of vanilla, although they've gone a bit overboard with it and the flavour is rather overpowering.
Total: **8/10**

THE WINNER



WAITROSE 99p for 500g, 10% cream
This has hints of vanilla and quite a genuine home-made taste, if a little on the sweet side. This is how you remember custard tasting when you were a kid – though you were lucky if it was ever this good.
Total: **9/10**

CONCLUSION Maybe you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, but some companies seem to think you can make custard. I don't agree. Proper custard is made with egg yolks and it doesn't contain cream, just milk. Using cream, as all these do, just makes the custard too rich, so you can't have much of it. Having said that, these are easy to prepare (they can all be microwaved) and much better than custard powder.

WT GRAPHICS / MARK KENGE



Voddy heat

Russia's winter warmer is the hottest tittle in town, says Kitty Johnson

Traditionally guzzled by frost-bitten Russians and Poles to keep out the cold, vodka has become an international favourite and is now the drink to be seen sipping in fashionable bars. Historically it was often flavoured to make it more palatable, and it remains a brilliant mixer. You can combine it with all manner of fruity partners to keep up with the current cocktail craze (or to colour-co-ordinate with sofa covers and bar stools) but some vodkas are so good they deserve serious consideration in their own right.

● **Waitrose Canadian vodka**
£9.99, Waitrose

Made with rye grain from northern Canada, this one has nose-tingling purity with a touch of aniseed and spice. On the palate there is a hint of sweetness. If you're feeling especially brave, try drinking this on the rocks. Or take the more cautious route and mix it with your favourite fruit juice for a delicious cocktail.

● **Blavod**
£11.95, Asda

This "black" vodka in fact looks green when it is diluted in water. Distilled in Britain, it is given its dark colour by the addition of black catechu, an oriental herb that contains colour tannins but has no flavour. Blavod is smoky and sinister and looks fabulous in a cocktail. Try mixing it with cranberry juice for a "Black and Cran" – but whatever you do, don't forget the ice.



● **Utkins UK 5 vodka**
£10.99, Sainsbury's

This vodka is made from organically grown grain and some very pure water. It has a distinctive earthiness to it and a very dry, slightly nutty flavour. Because it's made without the use of artificial chemicals, herbicides or seed treatments, your conscience can still feel clear after a glass or two, even if your head doesn't.

● **Absolut Mandrin**
£14.99, Oodbins

This is grain vodka from southern Sweden, where there is an age-old tradition of flavoured spirits. Absolut do blackcurrant and lemon flavours, as well as this mouthwatering orange version. It's lively, zingy, and I love it.



● **Seriously... Pinky**
£20, Harvey Nichols

The Swedish Seriously range was the brainchild of a group of winetasters who wanted to take the "bite" out of vodka but still leave in all the alcohol (in this case, 40 per cent). And the bite has certainly been taken out of the prettily perfumed Pinky, which is made with added natural botanicals. Basically, it smells like a trip round a candy store sniffing Jelly Tots, Refreshers, Opal Fruits and bubble gum, and I felt like a kid again.

