



A steel draft coil carries beer through its long, cold journey to your cup.

CONVERTIBLE JOCKEY BOX

Portable cooler taps and dispenses ice-cold beer from both kegs and mini-kegs. By Carlo Longino

Going to a tailgater? Here's a homebrew (in the hacking sense) jockey box that dispenses cold homebrew (in the beer sense). A jockey box is one of those funny coolers with a built-in beer tap on the outside. Inside, it has the requisite plumbing to draw beer from a keg, and a metal coil or cooling plate. Once you fill the cooler with ice and attach a keg, the coil or plate, acting as a heat exchanger, quickly chills the beer to a proper serving temperature — even when the keg itself isn't cold.

It's not hard to find pre-made jockey boxes, but they typically cost \$150 or more and are "hardwired" with a coupler that works with only one type of keg top. This homebrew solution is not only cheaper, but it's also more adaptable, converting easily into a cooler/dispenser for the

5-liter mini-kegs that many European beers come in. In jockey-box mode, the convertible cooler houses the heat-exchanger coil while the keg stays outside. In mini-keg mode, the entire keg goes inside the cooler, and you don't use the coil. Standard compressed-air coupler and plug fittings let you easily swap internal parts to change the cooler's beer operational mode.

To keep costs down, I used brass fittings from a regular hardware store, but many brewers prefer stainless steel for anything that comes into contact with beer. If you want to go this higher-end route, consult your local homebrew shop.

Assembly

1 If you're using brass parts, remove any surface lead by soaking them in a solution of 2 parts vinegar

MATERIALS

From any homebrew store or austinhomebrew.com:

8+ feet of thick-walled beer tubing $\frac{3}{16}$ " inner \times $\frac{7}{16}$ " outer diameter; about 50¢/foot

Barbed ball-lock coupler aka disconnect This fits the 5-gallon ball-lock soda kegs used by home brewers, or you can substitute different hardware to fit standard "D" system commercial kegs. \$5

Picnic faucet \$4

Mini-keg tap hand pump Mini-keg taps are as cheap as \$15; I had a Philtap, which uses CO₂ cartridges and costs about \$60 from williamsbrewing.com

Draft coil I used a 50' coil of $\frac{3}{8}$ " stainless steel, available for \$75 from morebeer.com (item #H680)

From a hardware store:

$\frac{1}{4}$ " \times 2" brass pipe nipples (2) About \$1 each

$\frac{1}{4}$ " \times $\frac{1}{4}$ " barbed hose adapter fittings, hose barb to pipe thread (5) About \$1 each

Hose clamps To fit the $\frac{7}{16}$ " OD beer tubing (10)

$\frac{1}{4}$ " air compressor hose couplers (2) and plugs (3)

I bought two Husky brand coupler and plug sets for about \$5 each

Drill and drill bits

Adjustable wrench

Rubber mallet

White vinegar

Hydrogen peroxide

Hot water From kettle

Keg of beer With CO₂ dispensing system

(or 5-liter mini-keg)

Ice

to 1 part hydrogen peroxide for 15 minutes.

2. Drill 2 holes in the side of the cooler, about 6" apart, below the level of the inside of the lid. Using a $\frac{3}{8}$ " bit, move the drill around to make the holes big enough to snugly accommodate the pipe nipples.

3. Stick the nipples through the 2 holes, using a rubber mallet if necessary. Designate one nipple as the beer-in port for jockey-box mode, and the other as the beer-out. Attach a barbed fitting to the beer-in nipple on the outside and a male compressor plug on the inside. Attach barbed fittings to the beer-out on both sides.

Now it's time for fun with beer tubing. Before each connection, soak the end of the tubing in hot water from your kettle to make it more pliable and easy to get on the barbed fitting. After it's on, secure each connection with a hose clamp.

4. First, make your dispenser by cutting about 18" of tubing, attaching one end to the barbed fitting on the beer-out side, and attaching the other end to the picnic faucet.

5. Next, cut about 4" of the tubing and attach one end to the inside barbed end of the beer-out fitting. Take off one of the compressor couplings, then screw in another barbed fitting and attach it to the other end of the 4" tubing.

6. For the beer-in line, attach a section of tubing (I used about 3') to the beer-in barbed fitting on the outside of the cooler. On the other end of the tubing, attach the coupler for your keg.

7. Cut 2 pieces of beer tubing, about 8" each. Use hose clamps to attach one piece to each end of the draft coil, and insert barbed fittings into the other ends, also securing them with hose clamps. Screw a compressor coupling onto the fitting at one end of the coil (the beer-in) and screw a male compressor plug into the other end (beer-out).

8. The system is now ready to be used in jockey-box mode. Put the coil into the cooler, and hook up the keg and CO₂. Attach the coil's coupling to the plug on the beer-in side, and attach the beer-out coupling to the plug on the other end of the coil.

Fill the cooler with ice, and enjoy your cold draft beer. But remember: You're dealing with pressurized gases and liquids, so exercise due caution.

Mini-Keg Configuration

To convert it into a mini-keg dispenser, remove the picnic faucet from the end of the mini-keg tap. In its place, attach about 6" of beer tubing. Connect a barbed fitting on the other end, screw on a compressor plug, and secure both ends with hose clamps.

Now, all you have to do is uncouple and lift out the coil, tap the mini-keg, put it in the cooler, and plug the coupling into the beer-out port. Cover the keg with ice, and enjoy another cold one.

Resources

Jockey box information: makezine.com/go/jockeybox

Carlo Longino is the publisher of MobileMusicBlog.com and executive editor of TheFeature.com. He can be found in Austin, barbecuing in the dark with a miner's headlamp.