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Whiskey priced above $50 gains 4% in U.S. sales

Overall whiskey sales fell 5%, with bottles above $50 generating nearly 20% of dollar sales on well under 10% of volume

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High-priced whiskey brands are still gaining ground in the United States even as the broader category keeps shrinking. On Thursday, November 19, Shanken News Daily reported that brands priced at $50 or more a bottle rose 4% in NielsenIQ-tracked channels in the year through October 3, while total whiskey sales fell 5%.

The report, which cited Impact Databank, NielsenIQ and Circana, said the wider U.S. whiskey market is headed for a fourth straight annual volume decline. But the upper end of the category has continued to outperform despite tariffs and a weak consumer backdrop.

That matters beyond whiskey alone because it points to where beverage companies may still find growth in a soft market. Premium products are accounting for a larger share of revenue than their case volumes suggest, a dynamic that could shape pricing, package size and portfolio choices across spirits and other alcohol categories.

Impact Databank said whiskies priced at $50 and above make up well under 10% of total U.S. whiskey volume but nearly 20% of total dollar sales. In other words, a relatively small slice of the market is carrying a much larger share of spending.

In the U.S., the high-end segment is made up largely of bourbons selling for $50 and above and Scotch whisky, especially single malts. Shanken said Edrington's The Macallan leads all high-end whiskies in the country by dollar sales and is still posting growth for its core 12-year-old expression.

Pernod Ricard's The Glenlivet remains the top single malt Scotch by volume, according to the report. The brand has been adding new releases, including a Provence edition in its 12-year-old cask-finished series that sells for $55 for a 750-ml bottle.

At the upper end of Irish whiskey, Pernod Ricard's Redbreast single pot still label is also gaining volume, the report said.

Sazerac, the largest spirits marketer by volume, remains one of the strongest players in premium American whiskey. Shanken said several of its bourbons priced above $50 are recording strong double-digit growth, including W.L. Weller, Blanton's and Colonel E.H. Taylor.

Sazerac has also launched Eagle Rare 30, described as the oldest age-stated release so far from Buffalo Trace Distillery. The company is now releasing the 2026 Buffalo Trace Antique Collection, with several special bottlings priced at $155.

A separate brand ranking cited by Shanken showed that the leading whiskies priced above $50 for a 750-ml bottle grew 14.3% in retail volume in Circana-tracked channels in the 52 weeks ended November 1. The list covered 10 major labels that together accounted for 2.03 million 9-liter cases in U.S. volume terms in 2025.

Within that group, Colonel E.H. Taylor posted 85.1% retail volume growth, W.L. Weller rose 78.1%, Blanton’s gained 32.7% and Eagle Rare increased 18.9%. The Macallan and Johnnie Walker Blue each grew 2.0%, while Redbreast rose 1.4%. The Glenlivet fell 3.1%, Angel’s Envy declined 8.4% and Woodford Reserve Double Oaked slipped 0.2%.

Large suppliers are still putting new products into the segment. Brown-Forman expanded its Woodford Reserve Double Oaked line in October with a rye version bottled at 45.2% alcohol by volume and priced at $55. The new release joins Double Double Oaked Bourbon in the brand’s higher-end lineup.

Bacardi-owned Angel’s Envy has also added a new expression to its Distillery Series, a Kentucky straight bourbon finished in stout and Amburana barrels. The bottle sells for $55 in a 375-ml format.

One of the clearest shifts in the market is the rise of smaller premium packages. Shanken said wines and spirits in reduced sizes are growing as consumers deal with inflation and lower disposable incomes. In whiskey, that has created room for premium labels sold in smaller bottles, letting shoppers spend less upfront while still buying into well-known brands.

That trend could have wider implications for the beverage business if companies decide to defend premium price points through smaller formats rather than discounting full-size bottles. It also gives producers another way to target gift buyers and consumers looking for luxury purchases for entertaining or special occasions.

Diageo is one company pursuing that strategy. Shanken pointed to Johnnie Walker Blue in a 200-ml bottle priced at $85, a format aimed at consumers who want a premium product in a smaller purchase.