

Beige are not for the faint-hearted

by Diane Nunn (1994)

Beige as I always say, is not a breed for the faint-hearted or those that thrive on winning shows. If you want a challenge, however, then try Beige.

There are some good Beige around these days with good colour, type and size; and I see no reason why they should not do well on the show scene.

Beige are the pink eyed dilute of chocolate. They are big, bold cavies with a gentle nature and a large appetite and settle very well to a life of showing.

Colour

We are told that the colour should be that of beige cloth, but with so many shades of beige cloth this is not a fair description. I would describe it as a medium beige with a hint of pink. They excel in undercolour, the lovely pinky beige going right down to the skin. Pads and ears should be pink with no shading.

The babies are born much darker than their parents and lighten throughout their young lives. You can, however, get several different shades in one litter. To get a fair idea of the adult colour look at baby's belly a few days after birth.

If the offspring are very dark when born do not expect them to be the correct colour as adults they will not, they will always be too dark. The youngster should however, be several shades darker than the adult: you will then attain the right colour later on. You will find that with experience you will get an eye for the correct colour.

Look also for a level colour, although as baby grows on this can appear to change as sometimes, as the colour comes through, the pig can look extremely patchy.

Faults to look out for are barring, shading, gold, dark and light patches and eye circles.

Keep light and dark pigs in the breeding pen as well as the odd one with gold patches. These are invaluable, as you will find over the years of breeding that your stud will lighten in colour. So keep the colour right by breeding back to the darker pigs. As previously mentioned undercolour is not a problem.

Remember that if you breed too dark will you not get a hint of pink - you will get a definite hint of gold or red.

Breeding

The boar is the most important half of the pair. Choose one that has good type, good width between ears and eyes and also good colour. The sows should also be as near to the standard as possible.

Gradually improve the type by line breeding selectively. Type has always been a problem but over the years the dedicated breeders have worked hard to improve type and can now show some very good examples. Remember that Beige are large boned animals and so if you lose size by trying to introduce type then you must line breed back to the larger boned boars to try and again increase size.

Never breed with a pig under five months of age. I make sure that my sows have grown on well before putting with a boar. A small sow mated to a large boar can have real difficulties when producing the young. The babies are quite often born dead due to the length of time it takes to bring them into the world and you can also lose your sow due to the damage that can be done internally. I have seen this happen and it is heartbreaking.

Showing

Boars are usually the show animals as sows are inclined to become very baggy after a litter. I have also found that quite often a good show sow as a youngster fails to make a good adult.

Beige are very long in coat and grooming must be done with great care so as not to end up with a patchy colour or a coat that looks very uneven or broken. Bath at least a week before a show to allow the coat to settle.

My show boars are always kept on their own so that they can grow on and have all the advantages of good feeding. If kept with a sow they lose weight rapidly. Show sows can be run in pairs as long as they get on well together. There is nothing worse on a show pig than chewed ears. Beige are a difficult breed to start with as you need more than a few pairs or trios to produce a good ratio of winning stock. I have known many people that have tried showing Beige only to lose interest after not winning at shows. I must admit that I did not win a rosette until I had been showing Beige for about two years. Hopefully, when you show your Beige the hall will have good lighting, as the Beige coat tends to pick up the shadows of the hall and even worse is a tent, which can make the pig look very barred.

All I can say now is that if you decide to have a go at breeding and showing Beige then good luck. Remember that no breeder will allow their best pigs out of the shed, so accept what they have to offer, which is usually good breeding stock, and breed your own winners.

We all love competition, that is what the hobby is about and no-one should mind losing to a better pig.

So good luck!!!