

Beige - the Self that loves to eat

By Joan Radeglia (1994)

Self Beige were first bred by Mr. Charlie Reynolds in 1927. They appeared in litters of Self Chocolates. Genetically, Beige are pink-eyed Chocolates; but it is not known how the pink-eye first got into Selves, whether as a mutation of the gene for eye colour within a strain of Chocolates or whether it was derived from some other ancestor. Lilacs were produced at around the same time, though these were much lighter than today's exhibits; and were possibly just a very pale shade of Beige. Since then the pink-eye has been transferred from Beige to produce the Self Golden and from these to produce the latest Self, the Saffron.

In the 1930's a Miss Hart in the South used to show Beige, which I remember from my early days in the fancy as being very large with nice colour and type. In the 1940's and 1950's the partnership of Harold Waterhouse and Mrs Yates was the leading force in Beige. My first Beige came from Harold about 25 years ago, when he let me have a trio for a £3 donation to the Southern Cavy Club, a very generous price even then. At the same time I believe Harold provided stock for Peter Parkinson and Eric Entwistle set up Peggy Crosse, and these two had leading studs of the colour in the 1970's. I later crossed in a sow from Diane Nunn and several pigs from Peggy Crosse; and it was Peggy's stock which gave the size which is still in my stud today.

I had actually had some Beige long before taking them up as my major breed; for in the early days of Self Golden Baden Powell had a typey strain of Beige of a dark shade of colour not seen today; and Dr. Kerr told me to put some of these into my Self Golden. This cross put in some of the type which the Golden have to this day. It is possible to improve the type of A.O.C. Selves by crossing to another colour; but when you do this you should only use another Self not another breed entirely, such as Dais or Satins.

Judging Self Beige

The first thing I look at when judging the Beige is Colour. Lay the pig on the flat of your hand and you should see an even colour from the tip of the nose to its rear. The colour must be right - there are 30 points for this and only 25 for all points of shape including head, shoulders and body type; but too many Judges put type above colour.

Levelness is the most important feature of colour: there should be no bars or patches. The top colour should be a medium shade, ideally with a pinkish tinge. The undercolour on pure-bred Beige should not be a problem, but you have to look at when judging today as the very nicely typed Beige sometimes produced from Dals fail undercolour badly.

Ears and Eyes are much better today than they used to be but there is still room for improvement. There is a picture in an old Fur & Feather of a Beige I used to win with 20 years ago: the judges didn't seem to notice, but the ears were dreadful. The problem with ears is that they are of a different, more rubbery texture to other Selves and they don't tend to droop very well. If you can get to the new-born babies and straighten the ears when they are still wet, it can make a real difference later! Sometimes, too, as with other Self breeds, if you get one with a broad head thus can seem to push the ears outwards. Eyes frequently need to be bolder. Here, though, if they get too big they sometimes also tend to go fatty or are inclined to be runny.

The Coats of Beige can be difficult, again seeming to be of a different texture to other Selves; and there is no clear distinction between guard hairs and undercoat, so grooming them short is not easy and you cannot get the same short coats as with Blacks, Whites, Creams or Golden. Sometimes you even get a woolly-coated one, but you must not attempt to breed from these.

Beige usually have good Size and Substance, especially with boars. These should develop good depth and width of shoulders and a solid 'straight up & down (bricklike) feel to the body. Sows are a little smaller; and as adults often seem to go baggy even if they have never had a litter. This is an old-fashioned' characteristic in a Self - in the old days judges didn't use to mind if the adults were baggy - most of them were like that; and Beige sows still are to this day. Because boars have the more solid type and good size, they are usually your adult show pigs in the Self Beige.

Head Type is not so easy to get in Beige. This is partially because there is no easy outcross for Beige to other colours, as their closest relatives are Chocolates and Lilacs not Whites, Blacks or Creams. Another factor though is that some colours emphasise head type better than others - the Lilacs with light colour around the eyes can look typeier than more even-coloured ones; whilst the colour of Self Blacks certainly emphasises their muzzles. Probably the biggest problem however, is that when there is a problem with ears it makes the head look much less attractive. Beige have good width of head; so my belief is that we need to work on ears and eyes and the head type will then be good enough to see the Beige compete for higher honours.

Breeding Self Beige

A general principle in breeding Beige is to depend upon the boar for colour and the sow for type. The boar must be of the right colour, level and good under; and should be as large as possible. Sows can be of different shades but you would want them to have a reasonable type; and usually they would have better ears than the boars. I find that my Beige breeding sows all look very similar - the boars all have some features which single them out, but not the sows.

I use plenty of boars in the breeding pen - I seem to breed a lot, but the boar is also the show pig and when preparing them for a show I keep them on their own; and even given a good gap between shows I only let my show boars have one sow with them. Any more and they lose condition, so perhaps the boars are not as strong as they look! I first mate sows at 6 months. After they have produced litters I let them run with their daughters for a couple of months, until they are fit again, before putting them back to the boar.

Raising, Feeding and Showing Self Beige

Usually most litters of Beige look alike, appearing quite reasonable at birth, but most do not then make show pigs. Sometimes you get babies that are clearly bad ones; but even more occasionally you get an odd good one that stands out. When this happens, make a note to keep it whatever it looks like later: Beige always seem to go through a stage when they go long and narrow. If they were outstanding at birth I put them in a bottom pen, make sure to feed them well, and wait until they come back to fulfil the promise they showed as a baby. Then they go in a top pen.

I find it difficult to show Beige as u/5s. They grow so well that most boars would be O/D at more than 12 weeks and sows too big at 16 weeks. I do show the occasional sow at this age if they are particularly good. Intermediates too are frequently too

large to be shown - I could have shown one at Doncaster, weighing over 40 oz and a genuine 5/8m; but it obviously would not have stayed on the table.

Perhaps the main reason for the size of Beige is that they are placid, friendly calm animals who live to eat. Peter Parkinson used to say they had more intelligence than other cavies; but if so I think that their intelligence is in their stomachs. I find that if you box Beige to take them to a show and put a piece of carrot in the travelling-box, they will eat this up whilst travelling to the show. I do not know of any other breeds which eat whilst on a car journey. At shows too they settle in well and will eat up when left overnight at two-day events.

Feeding Beige to achieve show condition is then, apart from the problem of bagginess in sows, straight-forward. Another good factor is that there is no need to worry about white hairs - they are not at all easy to see. They are therefore in this respect a good breed for an older fancier with less acute eyesight! They are less easy, though, to get right in coat; boars can be greasy so that they need to be thoroughly bathed before a show; and lots of grooming is needed to get a reasonable length of coat. When you do this well, though, you should be able to show a big, solid pig of appealing colour well able to compete for Best AOC awards; although the pig itself is more likely to go to shows dreaming of carrots rather than glory.