

The fascination of breeding the Pink Eyed Self Golden

An Introduction for Beginners

By Bernard Wiles (1993)

The Pink Eyed Self Golden was first bred in 1947 by Dr. Kerr, a scientist with an interest in genetics and small livestock. Details of how the new breed was originally produced are not available. However it is thought that Beige and Red were used predominantly to produce the colour with limited use of Self White or Cream blood, which would account for the type characteristics found in Self Golden.

The Pink Eyed Golden is now a true breeding variety, having progressed steadily to become, in the late seventies, leaders of the 'Any Other Colour' category. Consistent success in this classification resulted in the English Self CC agreeing at it's AGM on 21 January 1984 to include the PE Golden in Self Challenge Classes with Black/PE White/Cream. A very appropriate decision in my view, (this opinion is probably based on the fact that I made the proposal at the ESCC AGM). Since that time the PE Self Golden has competed successfully in the Self Cavy Premiere Division.

This success story culminated at Bradford Championship in 1991 when Noreen Handley's Adult Sow became the first Self Golden to be awarded BIS at this prestigious event, now accepted by the majority of fanciers as the major event in the Cavy calendar. A thoroughly well merited award and I was delighted for the Hadleys, however I must admit to a little personal disappointment as this was a target I had set myself some years earlier.

General Observations

The PE Golden has a good disposition and a somewhat extrovert personality, not as nervous or easily startled as some other varieties. They are good feeders, keep their condition well and are more easily prepared for shows than Blacks/Whites/Creams. They are also prolific breeders, producing large healthy litters and are willing and able to raise all their offspring, if allowed to do so. The main disadvantage with Golden is that they have a relatively short show life as youngsters, usually being born a chocolate colour and not clearing to their normal colour until three months old or more and often if shown much after four months some strains risk the 'dreaded OD stigma'. This is more than offset as an adult however, when they can often be shown successfully when 12/15 months old until, in some cases, 4 years of age.

Establishing a Successful Strain

The basic principles, in common with all other breeds are:

- 1/ Locate a well established breeder with a proven track record, and purchase the best stock he/she is prepared to sell.
- 2/ Pair the best to the best, remembering that not only the best characteristics of the parents are reproduced in the offspring; the less desirable features also reappear.
- 3/ Provide well ventilated, clean and dry accommodation.
- 4/ Feed the best hay, corn, greenfood and root crops.
- 5/ Keep breeding records, they are useful when things go according to plan but are absolutely invaluable when problems occur.

Colour

There has always been controversy as to what is the correct colour of the Self Golden. The breed is produced in all shades of gold. The more successful breeders keeping a range of shades from light through to dark, irrespective of their personal preference. Continual breeding of light to light will produce a strain of unacceptably light pigs and similarly with the darker variety. My personal preference is for the medium colour and increasingly I believe the majority of breeders and judges prefer this shade.

When judging colour, the shade should not be the priority, I consider it to be more important that the top colour is even and glossy and is carried down to the skin and there is no sign of a flaky appearance, also that the face, feet and belly are of a similar colour.

Type

Goldens have yet to acquire the head qualities of the better Blacks Whites and Creams, although I understand from the Production Manager of the 'CAVIES' magazine that he judged one from the Handley stable recently and I quote, "apart from the colour you would have thought it was a Black".

As with other selfs, Goldens should have a 'short' head giving a curved profile rising in a gentle arc to meet well developed shoulders dipping into a short stocky body with good width between the eyes and a broad muzzle. Many Goldens meet these criteria but generally not to the same extent as Blacks Whites and Creams. They are however capable of making very good size, but probably as a result some tend to 'flop' on the show table, and therefore not present themselves as well as the better Blacks.

Eyes

The bold eye, so sought after in show stock, is lacking in some strains of the Golden but certainly not in all. However the bold eyes possessed by some strains are set to deeply in the skull, giving a rather 'sunken' impression which distracts from the overall balance and glamour of the animal.

Fatty eye is certainly not a problem in Pink Eyed Goldens. I have never bred or seen a Golden with fatty eye although I understand they do exist.

Ears

Many Goldens currently possess large well drooped ears free of thick leading edges or hems. This was not the case fifteen years ago when I first became fascinated by and started to breed the Pink Eyed Self Golden. In those days hemmed ears were very common in the breed and my original stock certainly had this hereditary characteristic. Eventually by carefully developing a sophisticated selective breeding programme (i.e. not using any stock with the fault) I managed to eradicate the problem. My records show that I have not bred a single pig with hemmed ears for over seven years (and contrary to general belief I have bred quite a few in that time).

Showing

Goldens are relatively easy to prepare, usually requiring a bath about five days before the show and the 'little and often' grooming technique should be used to avoid creating a flaky appearance to the coat, especially if the Cavy possesses a lighter than ideal under colour. As with other selfs Goldens do possess coloured hairs the most noticeable of which are the white ones, usually in the top of the head, which should be carefully removed.

Conclusion

I can strongly recommend the Pink Eyed Golden to any dedicated Cavy fancier, as there is still so much to be achieved in improving the breed.

The ultimate challenge for the Pink Eyed Self Golden breeder is to improve their strain to the extent that it will compete with and beat the Self Black at the major events on a regular basis.