

A run down on the Red

By Rupert Hadley (1993)

Before anyone starts off with Self Reds they should ask themselves why it is that they want to keep this particular breed? If you are hoping to regularly achieve duplicate wins, Best Selfs etc., then this is probably not the breed for you. If you are interested, however, in the beauty of the Red, its rich colour and the prospect of a challenge, then why not give it a go?

Unfortunately numerically Reds are not the most abundant breed, and acquiring suitable stock is not all that easy. You may have to place your name on a waiting-list since most breeders of Reds tend to keep small select studs. An ideal start should perhaps be a trio or preferably two of breeding stock from which hopefully you can start your own line and breed some future exhibition stock

Red boars should be as rich in colour as possible but please note that, if they are really good, they are not going to be made available as sale stock; good reds are bred not bought. Sows should be ideally as nice in type as possible but don't necessarily disregard some of the plainer ones since they may be excellent breeders. What is important is that if the breeder is getting something out of the line then there should be the potential for you to do likewise.

Colour

This should be a rich, dark mahogany colour. Ideally the colour should be even and carried well down the hair shaft to the skin. Generally Reds tend to be of fairly even colour and it is rare to find a patchy, uneven example.

One common failing which I believe is seen less nowadays is flakiness to the flanks/rump whereby much lighter undercolour is seen prominently showing through the top. This can be made much worse by uneven grooming.

One of the problems with Reds is that their colour will tend to alter during their stage of development. Once the babies are born and have dried off, an idea of their true final hue can be determined. Colour will then tend to darken and may go almost a chocolate shade for a few months. Ideally they should be very dark at this stage. Ones to discard are the light ones exhibiting pale belly colour and/or feet (which are often a useful guide as to their future colour).

By the age of 4 months or so, but this can vary slightly with different strains, the colour should come through fairly well and the baby coat should have moulted out. Don't rush young Reds, showing them too often too early, since you don't want to stunt their growth. It is an adult which you should be aiming to win with, since wins in adult breed classes carry the most prestige, and form by far the majority of the ESCC point's classes.

Whilst it is true that young Reds are a little more nervous than some other breeds, a lot can be achieved by patient and regular handling. Reds of 5/8 and Adult ages I find as placid as any other breed.

Young reds can be born with a 'grizzle' of white hairs interspersed with the red making them look a little like a brindle. These invariably moult out by 3 months or so and I regard it as nothing to worry about. Those covies with some white present as a small patch often make up as good-coloured pigs which have traditionally been used as good breeding stock. So don't necessarily discard all these pigs especially the sows since, although they obviously cannot be shown, they may make good breeding stock.

Type

Ideally the type of a good Self Black, for example, should be obtained, capable of challenging for Best Self at the major shows - Doncaster etc. Fairy story over, I don't know if anybody else has seen such an example of the breed combined with excellent colour because I haven't. What must be obtained is the nearest to the ideal that is possible.

Although the Red is one of the oldest breeds of Self, unfortunately the type is still a long way from the very best typey Self breeds. Occasionally good ones appear but the average standard still needs plenty of work.

I am very pleased to see size has greatly improved recently with some big exhibits around compared to the very small ones which used to be shown. Body type also has improved but the main problem is to acquire good head profile with rich colour. Often the best-coloured pigs have plain, long faces and the typier pigs of course are the ones slightly lacking in colour. Trying to achieve the correct balance is no easy matter.

Coat

Usually Reds exhibit very good coat texture and have a naturally fairly silky coat. Grooming like any other Self (or any breed come to that) is important, to give a good 'finish' to the pig. Removal of the coarser guard hairs to leave an even coat-length is required, without creating a flaky appearance. Boars can be more difficult to groom but the secret must be to groom little and often to get the desired effect.

Eye and ear

Reds tend often naturally to possess good bold eyes so these shouldn't be a problem. Ears on the other hand can be a problem.

I think it is essential to try and fix good ear carriage into your strain, since without good ears the Red will never get anywhere when in competition with other A.O.C.'s in the Challenges.

Outcrossing

Since I have not used other colours in an attempt to try and improve Reds I cannot comment on the usefulness or otherwise of such an attempt.

If anyone is contemplating attempting the Self Red, possessing a few spare pens and is game for a challenge, then I suggest go straight ahead. However the Red is not a breed to dabble in briefly only to give up despondent in a few months when immediate show success is not forthcoming. It is important that the fancier accepts that 'patience is a great virtue' especially with Reds!

One other point in their favour is that Red sows make excellent mothers tending to have loads of milk and to look after their young with great devotion.