

The PE Self White - balance is the key

By Margaret Tenner (1994)

Whether it is something to wear, flowers, fur or feather, my first choice of colour is usually white. 'But white is not a colour' it has been said to me. Regardless my favourite colour or non-colour is white. I have kept white mice, rats, pigeons, duck and cats, so it follows that I would love the white cavy.

Self Whites are a breed for the fancier who enjoys show preparation and has time to attend to keeping a high standard of cleanliness in the cavy shed. The pens, especially where stock to be shown or housed, need to be kept dry and clean. Any wet bedding, hay and uneaten greens should be replaced with fresh items on a daily basis. This is to avoid pigs lying on anything which might cause staining. For this reason greens are best fed in small amounts more often, whenever possible.

PE White to PEWhite breeds only PE Whites. Therefore, there is no skill required to breed the colour, only to keep it white when you've bred it. The only thing I can say about breeding for colour is that a fine silky coat appears whiter than a coarse or woolly coat. This has something to do with light reflection.

With only the type to concentrate on in the breeding pen the new White fancier may think it is going to be easy to breed a good one. This is not so. Careful planning is necessary to build a stud, which incorporates all the essential good points, and carefully considered programming is required to maintain these good points and at the same time eliminate faults which sometimes creep in and are unnoticed at first.

It may take at least a couple of years to establish a stud and get to know it, learn to judge potential in very young cavies and to know how each one will develop. Also to recognise faults at a very early stage. It is important to think well ahead and remember that babies bred in the Spring will not make mature show adults till Summer the year.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of keeping the balance between all of the characteristics which make up the ideal cavy. At the beginning of the main breeding season I assess the show pigs and prospective show stock for the forthcoming season, making a careful note of any points which I wish to improve on. I then make sure that the features to be worked on are carried by as many of the cavies in the breeding programme for that season as will allow me to make an improvement without exaggerating it and upsetting the balance. While working on a particular point other features may begin to deteriorate. Hence the need for careful monitoring & continual assessment.

To be successful long term, a fairly large stud needs to be kept. Pigs carrying all of the main features i.e. size; good ears; good eyes; fine silk coat; strong shoulder; width of muzzle, between eyes, shoulder & down the body; not forgetting profile, glamour & substance, should be to hand. This will enable the fancier to correct faults within the stud before they become in-bred. Stud boars should carry as many good qualities as possible & certainly no bad faults, such as thick coats, hemmed ears, narrow heads, poor shoulders or very long bodies.

Some features once established can be maintained with care within the stud. Large bold eyes are one of the points which I have never had to work on. Almost all babies born seem to carry a similar type & size of eye with very few exceptions. Fine coats can also be easily maintained so long as no pig carrying a heavy or long coat ever enters the breeding pen. Should any long-coated offspring appear, then both parents should be disposed of, together with all other offspring. Carefully study your records and make a note to watch for the problem occurring again in

any near relatives. It is better to be ruthless by clearing out a section of stock at the first sign of a problem before it escalates and half the stud is affected.

In my stud I find the most difficult two features to get on to the same pig are a really broad head and long ears. It seems the cavy with a really wide head and muzzle has to make do with a shorter ear and the pig with superb ears has the longer head. Therefore, these two points need to be continually balanced or badly exaggerated heads could result in either direction.

Care should be taken when selecting youngsters to run on for future breeding. The new fancier often keeps the pretty babies and gets rid of all the plain, usually larger, ones. If this is done continually size will be lost. Although many of these pretty ones can win as u/5s and even 5/8s they often only make 2lbs or less as adults. 3lbs is the weight usually aimed for in an adult White. So some of the better boned, lager babies should be retained for breeding, a few of which will make up into showable adults. During the growing process they go well out of proportion, growing in length first, then broadening out and typing up later. It may be 15 months or even longer before a White is ready for adult competition. Well after this they should continue to improve in type and gain weight. Many reach their best at almost 2 years.

Young Whites which look like well-proportioned mini adults while growing are usually the ones which, when mature, only look like weighty intermediate. Even so, many of these carry quite a glamorous type and odd may slot into the breeding programme, in pens where plainness prevails.

Some lessons can only be learned from experience, but knowledge gained this way will help you to get to know your own stock and how they behave in the breeding pen. Get your copy of the Standard out occasionally and read it again. You may find you are deviating down a track by following your own preferences, and breeding plans need making to bring things back towards the standard of perfection laid down by the ESCC.

When some pleasing cavies have been bred and you decide to take them to a show to see how well they measure up in competition, good preparation is essential. Nothing looks worse than a badly prepared White on the judging table. Grooming needs to be done about a week before the show; which gives the cavy time to regain condition. When to bath and which shampoos to use seem to be matters of personal preference. New exhibitors may like to do test runs on pigs not to be shown to find how long the coat takes to settle down after bathing and try out different shampoos. A further light groom may be necessary on the day before the show, together with a check over for cleanliness. Particularly the underside of the cavy, the feet and around the mouth may need to be touched up. This can be done with a spray containing water and a drop of shampoo, then brush if needs be with a soft brush and dry.

As I have said previously, keeping the balance is essential and that applies to every aspect of breeding and exhibiting if one is to be consistently successful. Keep enough cavies to carry all good points so that any faults can be corrected within the stud. Stand back and assess your stud as a whole frequently. Whether your cavy wins or not can also be a matter of balance between your skill as a breeder and your presentation ability.

I hope this article on the Pink-Eyed White will encourage a few fanciers to take up the breeding of this lovely variety of cavy and help to retain its popularity.

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