

## The Dutch cavy

By Allan Trigg (2009)

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To anyone interested in starting with Dutch, I would recommend that, initially, they purchase stock from one source, a reputable breeder and start with a trio or, better still, two pairs (the extra boar will allow you to develop two different lines). Don't expect to buy show stock but look for good basic breeding stock that will provide the foundation for your own stud.

However, before you can start buying stock, you have to decide which colour (or colours) you are going to keep. The choice is quite extensive these days as ten colours are now fully standardised:-

RED	Once the most popular colour and often the best marked but challenged by Blacks recently. Colour itself varies from poor (drab, light or brindled) to good (a rich, reddish chestnut colour).
BLACK	The strong contrast of Black/White appeals to many people. Often crossed with Chocolates, that can be a problem if you want to keep Blacks and end up breeding Chocolates.
CHOCOLATE	Perhaps not as strong numerically as in some past years but capable of producing exhibits good enough to compete (and win) with the best. A dark Bourneville colour is required.
CREAM	Controversial when it comes to colour. Some are too dark (Buff) but if one strives for an ideal as pale as the Self counterpart, then the demarcation of markings can become rather indistinct.
LILAC	The only pink eyed colour of Dutch and only in the hands of a few studs. The colour is lighter than the present day Self ideal and some exhibits carry a brownish cast that needs to be eliminated. A colour that appeals to those wanting a challenge.
SILVER AGOUTI	An attractive colour that is in demand and gaining in popularity. Some nicely marked exhibits have been bred recently. If the colour becomes too light, an outcross to a Black is the normal remedy.
GOLDEN AGOUTI	After a time when the colour was scarcely seen, there are now plenty of breeders and some good examples are often on view at shows. In addition to buying ready made stock, this colour can be produced by a Red/ Black cross. Particularly with the latter, one needs to watch for red hairs and patches.
CINNAMON AGOUTI	Although, in the past, this colour has taken top honours at DCC shows, the colour has need for more supporters as few are shown these days. Originally produced by crossing a Black Dutch boar (carrying Chocolate) with two Silver Agouti Dutch sows.
CREAM AGOUTI	A fairly recent addition to the colour range and one that was produced by crossing a Cinnamon Agouti boar with a Cream sow. More interest is needed in this colour.

**CHOCOLATE AGOUTI** The latest addition to the colour range having been recognised as a standardised colour from January 2009. Initially created from a Chocolate/Cinnamon Agouti cross and in few hands at the moment.

Of course, it is the markings that make a Dutch and, although the general requirements seem fairly straightforward, there are some finer points which need clarification. Consequently, one should consider the standard and the correct interpretation:-

**BLAZE & CHEEKS:** The standard states "Cheek markings to be round and not take in the smellers but to be as near as possible without touching". This means that the cheeks should follow the jaw line, creating a pleasing, rounded effect. For smellers read nose and whisker bed. Also, it should be noted that it is a fault for the cheek markings to run under the jaw and catch/touch the mouth. This should be faulted as should dark pigment in the nostrils which is undesirable.

The blaze should be wedge shaped, broadest at the base and tapering to a point between the ears. The only aspect that may lead to any controversy is the point between the ears which can run to a fine line to separate the cheeks. This is OK as long as it is only a very narrow line (to quote a rabbit book) as any width will deviate from the desired tapering effect. You will find that, on some exhibits, there is a solid bar of colour behind the top of blaze. This should be attributed to the neck and treated as a failing of such.

**CLEAN NECK:** This is the area directly behind the ears which should be free from any coloured marking. Drags from the cheeks to the neck can occur and are an obvious fault. However, it should be explained that, from the point of the blaze, it is quite normal for a slight extension of the cheek marking to curve around each ear in the form of a small band of coloured hairs. Provided these are contained close to the ears and the general curve of the cheeks, there is no need to consider this a failing.

**SADDLE:** Dutch are often considered half and half animals (front white, rear coloured) with the saddle being the dividing line. This should be as straight and as clear cut as possible. In the past, there has been some confusion as to what should be the ideal position for a saddle. The close relationship between the Rabbit and Cavy Fancy has led to this situation as the Dutch rabbit standard requires that the saddle should be as high as possible without touching the exhibit's armpits.

The same reasoning has, at times, been applied to Dutch cavies, particularly by fanciers with roots in both Fancies. In this regard, it must be said that a high saddle is much more preferable than a low slipping one. However, a balanced, equally divided appearance is now confirmed as the ideal. This was decided at the Dutch Cavy Club's AGM in 1993 and ratified by the British Cavy Council in 1994.

**UNDERCUT:** This is the underbelly part of the saddle line and should, likewise, be straight and cleanly cut. Dips and V markings often occur to spoil the evenness of the line. Another failing which can affect both saddle and undercut alike is a skewed cut to the markings i.e. the line slants diagonally.

**FEET STOPS:** - The stops (white markings on the hind feet) should ideally finish halfway between the hock and the toe ends. These should not run underneath on the foot pads but be as cleanly cut as possible.

It is most important that a show exhibit carries a pair of stops and not just one or none. Otherwise, the exhibit is deemed incomplete in show markings and must be disqualified. Another failing that demands disqualification is where a stop is so long that the white marking runs above the hock. If, however, the foot carries coloured

hairs below the hock but light pigment on the pads runs under to the hock, this is simply a faulty stop which should be penalised but not disqualified.

Occasionally, one will encounter a Dutch which possesses stops of good or acceptable length yet carries white hairs above the hock (i.e. separate from the stop itself). This failing should be considered to be a flesh mark and be penalised accordingly.

As regards the shortness of stops, this is probably the most contentious issue associated with Dutch. Relevant to this problem is the colour of toenails and this feature has been the subject of much comment and controversy in the past. At the Club's AGM in 2002, it was decided that toenails must be white/horned coloured and that the existence of coloured (i.e. dark) toenails on an exhibit is a fault that demands disqualification. This change to the standard was put before the British Cavy Council in January 2003 and has been ratified.

**EARS:** The uninitiated may wonder why ears are so relevant to Dutch. The reason is twofold. Firstly, the soundness (colour) of the ears very important and then there is ear carriage which is, of course, a very desirable and pleasing feature but less important.

One must try to ensure that flesh marks (white pigment) on ears are kept to the minimum within the stud since it is a serious fault; once thought bad enough to justify disqualification. This ruling was rescinded long ago and a more tolerant attitude now prevails but it is still a bad failing which needs keeping under control. Also, something which was made clear to me when I first started keeping Dutch was that the soundness of the ear relates to the outside of the ear only. Penalising flesh marks within the ear would be too severe.

Any physical damage to the ear edges needs to be penalised according to the severity of the failing. Hemmed ears are another fault but are seldom seen in Dutch and, in relation to the breed, are of minor importance. Nowadays, points for Ears are allocated in two sections of the Breed Standard, Soundness within the Markings points for BLAZE, CHEEKS, NECK & EARS and carriage and shape within the points given for HEAD, EYE AND EARS.

**COLOUR:** On the question of colour, the aim should be for a bright attractive colour, sound and free from foreign coloured hairs. The only exceptions on brightness may be with Cream and Cream Agouti where too "hot" an effect can lead to the top colour being deemed buff in shade.

As with other marked breeds, show points are also allocated for BODY SHAPE and for a fuller description and the complete Breed Standard, follow the link to the Dutch Cavy Club page.

If you decide to try Dutch, do so for the right reasons. It often amazes me that some people keep a breed simply because they think they can win with it. I can remember a well known fancier confiding in me that he really preferred Black Dutch but had Chocolate Dutch because he was doing so well with them. Show days are only one, at most, two days a week and you have your stock at home for every day of the year. Winning is nice but isn't everything. Enjoying your stock and keeping what you really like is more important.

Finally, if you breed something useful, don't be afraid to show it. With your support, the club and the breed can prosper.