

Cochins International Winter Show Summary
Prepared by Bob Anderson, judge
For Gail Carlson, Show Superintendent
February 17, 2014

Thank you Gail Carlson for organizing the Winter 2014 Online Cochin Show, and thank you to the exhibitors for asking me to assess your birds. One of the strengths of the internet is that it removes the limitations of time and space that would otherwise not allow us to share the experience of showing and learning together. Judging an online show based upon photos can be challenging – taking longer than it would to judge a bird in person because information is limited, size / fleshing is difficult to determine and the view of the bird is dependent upon the skills of the photographer. The extra time, however, also allows the judge to carefully study the birds and provide more detailed comments than would otherwise be provided at a physical show.

The exhibitors should be very proud of the birds entered in this show! There was a record number of entries (51) and the birds were of exceptional composition and in very good condition – clearly most had been washed and prepared for the show.

It is common for exhibitors to prefer certain judges and to refuse to show under others. As a breeder and exhibitor I understand this – the effort that goes into creating a bird that fits your vision, growing it out and then conditioning it for show is undermined when a judge who is not familiar with the breed places birds incorrectly. Some exhibitors will show different styles of birds under different judges – anticipating their preferences. In a perfect world there would not be such differences among judges and their interpretation of the Standard of Perfection. While I do not consider myself infallible by any stretch, I do have a very clear view of what I consider to be a good Cochin based upon input from my mentor, Gary Wilson, as well as my own experience raising almost all recognized varieties of Cochin over the past 35 years. In that vein, my philosophy is that the judging criteria should be on the table – no secrets.

The Cochin is not an amorphous blob – it has very distinctive lines which are created by key physical characteristics:

- **Length of leg & stance** – I mention these together because one is of no value without the other. It is common to see Cochins, Bantams in particular, which are short of leg and horizontal stance. I refer to this as breeders breeding according to the paintings in the Standard of Perfection – not the written description. The Cochin is not a short-legged breed. The appearance of fullness and closeness to the ground is a combination of factors that includes a medium leg, forward stance and fullness of feather.
- **Wings** – I harp on this without apology. A Cochin cannot be a Cochin without a proper wing – short and tucked up to the horizontal (or slightly higher) – with the resulting line across the body emphasizing the hock feather, mass of cushion (females) and length of saddle (males). Granted, the dwarfing gene in bantam also produces heads and wings that are larger in proportion to the body than large fowl, but...that alone does not change the standard and does not offer a free-pass for Bantam breeders to continue producing inferior birds.
- **Mass of feather & feather width** – A Cochin is not a Cochin without mass of feather and feather width. Mass of feather is created by a number of factors, including density of feathering on the skin and amount of downy under-feathering. The mass of feather helps to emphasize the cushion and width of feather creates a smooth & glossy finish. A bird without both is not competitive.
- **Broad head / stout beak** – Call it the final touch. The comb, beak and length of earlobe relative to wattles are all relatively unimportant if you're looking at the objective 100 point scale. So a bird has an extra point on the comb, or a fishtail blade or a rough texture to the comb instead of smooth? Who cares? The judges, public and customers care – and here's why – no matter what the bird's body, feather and condition, the first and last thing people see is the head.

It is easy to get lost in the color descriptions for each variety – the perfect color, the disqualifications and the defects. As a judge, I simplify all of these into rules of thumb that apply to ALL color varieties, including those that are not recognized:

- **Even pattern** – Call it Mottled or Barred, Mille Fleur or Partridge, Golden Laced or Silver Laced - this rule applies. It also applies to Blue and Self Blue, among others. If you have a patterned bird, the pattern must be evenly distributed across the bird. From the breast to the hackle, through the cushion and over the wing.
- **Rich, even base color** – Golden Laced must be Gold. Not red or yellow. The shade of Gold should match from hackle to saddle and over the wings. Mille Fleur should not be a washed out shade of straw. Blue should be a consistent shade of cool Blue without mealiness, black streaking or shafting and Buff should shine like a coin from hackle to tail.
- **Distinct demarcations** – Mille Fleur is not Mille Fleur without the black chevron “V” and the white “teardrop”. Barred is not barred if it includes gray and brown. Mottling is not mottling if the white “teardrop” blends into the base color, and Partridge cannot be Partridge if the female’s penciling loses its clarity over the cushion.
- **No “autumn tones” in cool colored birds** – Cool colors are Black, White and Blue – and any pattern made up of Black, White and/or Blue; this would include Barred and Silver Laced. The best Whites will often show Black and the Best Blacks will often show White, for reasons I won’t get into here. In any case, my eye, as a judge and breeder, focuses on ensuring that any cool-colored bird does not show warm tones (e.g., copper, straw, mousy brown or red) which indicate that the pattern is not completely covering the underlying gold genetics.

Working with a new color – I will speak to some of these specifically. The Splash are very nice, overall. They have historically been considered a necessary evil associated with Blue, but are, in actuality a force unto themselves. Blue Mottled are also of very nice quality, with both the Blue and Mottled varieties benefiting from the Blacks. After the Splash, Blue Mottled should be the next variety to be recognized, in my opinion. The Mille Fleur pattern is absolutely stunning when done correctly – particularly in the D’Uccle. It is a pattern that is difficult to replicate in a softer-feathered bird such as the Cochin. Nonetheless, a color description is in place for the Mille Fleur and, as of today, the quality of this variety varies widely – with some showing promise and others completely lacking breed & variety characteristics. I encourage anyone interested in Mille Fleurs to purchase birds from a top breeder rather than trying to re-create this color variety from scratch. Calicos have not gained popular acceptance or respect, because they are currently considered a poorly colored Mille Fleur –lacking any written description. If you are working with a new variety, and if it is important, then the color should be documented and generally agreed upon. It should follow the color rules listed above, and there should be a plan to have the variety recognized by the APA and or ABA via Cochins International. Barring these criteria, the new varieties are, for practical purposes, irrelevant.

A final thought – I raise Large Fowl Cochins. They are an Asiatic, ground-nesting breed with heavy bone structure and short wings. They are a foundation breed – not a hybrid, but one of the “original” breeds used in the creation of many of the American and English breeds, tracing their history back hundreds of years in Southeast Asia. As a side note, Langshans and Javas (classified by the APA as an American breed) are also Asiatic breeds related to the Cochin – probably all deriving from the same base genetics in SE Asia. We can debate the origin of the Cochin Bantam and its treatment as a different breed (e.g., Pekin) in the UK, but according to the APA Standard of Perfection it is a diminutive version of the Cochin large fowl. So, when I hear from Bantam breeders that Cochin Bantams exempt from requirements for an “Asiatic head” or short wing I cringe. On page 305 of the APA Standard of Perfection (2010) it states: “Shape descriptions for all varieties generally the same as for large Cochins.”

My hope with this overview as well as my judge’s comments is that they will bring clarity. Some of my comments may be controversial and I do not shy away from controversy when it names the elephant in the room and encourages discussion. As such, I encourage any and all of our members to post your comments and questions to the CI Facebook page where the entire group can participate and learn from the discussion. Bob