

## **AROUND THE SHOW HALL**

By Tom Roebuck (May, 2018)

As I travel around for my judging assignments, I try to take the time to look through the Cochin classes, even when I don't get tasked with the Featherleg or Asiatic classes. Gail asked me to provide some of my observations. Generally, I have found the classes to be inconsistent. There are usually a handful of top-notch birds, but then the remainder of the class has issues that in my opinion can be fixed fairly easily with tough culling and very selective breeding. So, what am I seeing in particular? Focusing on the bantams for this article...

Heads: I am seeing some narrow heads, long beaks, and sloppy combs, with the comb issues being more prevalent in the males, but that is mainly because the males have larger combs by design. Select birds with shorter beaks for your breeding program. More space from the top of the head to the top of the eye will result in an inherently better head as it is the polar opposite of the crow head issue. Also, look for shorter heads front to back. What I mean by that is look for shortness from the back of the head behind the eye to the back of the beak. That, combined with a shorter beak will result in a much better head. Width of skull is also important but not so much that you lose sight of the bird attached to the head. The first three words in the Standard under the description for the head are: Short, broad, and deep. And on a show prep note, trim the beaks on your birds. It takes a couple seconds and makes the birds look so much better. As far as the combs go. We are looking for a medium comb. While 5 points are the ideal as far as structure, extra or less points on the comb aren't as big a deal from an exhibition perspective as things like twists in the blade or a blade that falls to one side, or a single comb that just isn't straight. Pay attention to the combs on your females in the breeding pen. Females with comb issues are going to pass that on to their offspring.

Leg color: See some awful leg color, especially in the white bantams. Leg and beak color in whites is yellow. Not white, not willow or blue. I give due consideration for a female in production but white males with white legs? I have also seen some blacks with willow legs and some with white legs. Yellow to swarthy yellow needs to have some yellow in there somewhere.

Lack of symmetry: One of the more prevalent issues in my opinion. Simply, I am seeing many Cochins that lack balance. Mostly this is from front to back. Maybe not enough back end to balance out the front or they stand too tall, dropping the tails way below the head, or they have no backs whatsoever. Neck/hackle transitioning right into cushion/saddle is not the structure of a properly proportioned Cochin.

Feather quality: narrow feathers which allow for the fluff to show through, and lots of females with stringy cushion and tail feathers. How do we fix this flaw? Select away from it when picking your breeders.

Overdone Cochins. What does that mean? Mainly I see this with the larger Cochin bantams. Granted we don't weigh the birds in the show, but the bigger birds tend to have fairly sloppy structure, undefined transition from neck to back to cushion, poorly tucked wings, and lack the lines that a good Cochin needs to showcase.

I know it sounds like I am slamming the Cochins. I am not. Merely pointing out some deficiencies that seem (to me) to be trending in the show halls in varieties that we shouldn't be seeing them in. I am also seeing some fantastic representation in many of the other varieties. Brown Red, Birchen, Lemon Blue, Columbian, Buff Columbian, Barred. I will also give a nod to some very nice Silver Blues that I've seen in person and in photos from shows I haven't attended. Keep in mind that they are not yet recognized so are not supposed to be selected for anything higher than Best or Reserve of Variety. I am not saying they aren't deserving of a higher award, but as the rules are written our judges shouldn't be putting them as class champions or reserves. It is a very eye-catching color, and I am hopeful that we have a qualifying meet for the Silver Blues in our future!

That's all for now. I will see you around the show halls!