

The extrovert Self Golden

By Evelyne van Vliet (1993)

The Pink-Eyed Golden (PE Golden) is one of the more recent additions to the colour palette of English Self cavies, but they have progressed to be one of the leaders. Would you believe that it is only about ten years ago that they left the AOCs!

For years attempts had been made to produce this colour, but it was not until the 1940s that Dr WF Kerr started an intensive breeding programme which lasted for some years and finally led to the first Golden cavies being born. In 1946 he showed his first Golden and these were greeted with great enthusiasm by other cavy fanciers. This enthusiasm has never faded since that year: PE Golden have always remained a very popular breed over the last 40 years, with a recent surge in popularity, despite the fact that this colour is perhaps one of the most controversial and argued about of all Self colours. Dr. Kerr's Golden are supposed to have been of a light shade and since then the colour has swayed from light to medium to dark and back again. Even today the shade varies from stud to stud, but more about this later.

Character and temperament

The PE Golden has a very outgoing character which more often than not borders on cheekiness. They take a great interest in their surroundings; are inquisitive, lively and alert; and sometimes even up to no good. They are happy and content and therefore a pleasure to keep. They are very good eaters, which reflects in their size and condition. A PE Golden will hold its condition very well, and taking them to shows rarely results in loss of weight. They breed without problems and are good mothers to their litters which average 4 to 5 babies (in my stud anyway), but 6 and 7 babies are no rarity and are usually reared. In addition the size of the babies at birth is above average.

Type qualities

Most PE Golden possess good size, type and shape; they good width of shoulder as well as width of hindquarters, which are well (the well known rounded brick shape). To be critical, though, some could do with better depth of shoulder.

The shape of the head can still be improved to attain the Roman nose feature; there is still some flatness in this department. The width between the eyes is another feature that needs improving generally: too many are still too narrow. To complete the glamorous look, more attention should be paid to a good muzzle.

I can hear you thinking 'what a negative opinion this lady has on the heads of PE Golden'. On the contrary, I am quite happy with them, but with regard to the other colours in their challenge group, PE Golden are still somewhat behind.

On a more positive note, ears are generally of a very high standard; large, well drooped without waves and hems.

Eyes are generally bold and large, although recently I have noticed a smaller, more almond-shape eye appearing in some studs (including my own! But I am happy to say that my 1993 babies are a ready showing a much better eye again!). When this cropped up in my stud last year, I wondered where this had all of a sudden come from. After checking my records, I worked out that these babies had all came boars with smaller eyes. My boars have always had smaller eyes than the sows and it had never affected the offspring, but obviously in 1992 it did. This year have only used sows for breeding with the biggest eyes and each round of matings produced me a

boar with bold, round eyes, I will use these later this year and hopefully improve even more.

Colour

As stated before, the colour of PE Goldens is probably the most controversial of all Self colours (and Saffrons seem to have become a close second rapidly, I wonder why!). When I started keeping PE Goldens, I was told 'you must breed them a lighter shade for the South of the country, a darker shade for the North and a bit of both for the middle of the country'. Needless to say, I was rather confused! Trying to be clever, I looked at lots of Goldens in different parts of the country and started aiming for the shade that seemed to do the most winning.

Other 'advice' included: 'You must breed the lighter ones to the darker ones to come up with the right shade'. NONSENSE!!

To start with the latter idea first! If you breed light to dark continuously, the litters will contain lighter, medium and dark (plus a few other shades) offspring all the time. This way you will never get a uniformly coloured strain. Another fault that would creep in very rapidly would be a fading undercolour.

The best thing to do is to consult the breed standard, and I quote: 'should be a medium colour with no suggestion of yellow (lighter shade!), brassiness or redness (darker shade, which usually turns out a muddy brown once the cavy gets older)'. So we try to achieve a medium topcolour that is even, lustrous and glossy.

Evenness of topcolour is very important and should include the parts of the body where the coat is shorter, i.e. feet and belly. The topcolour should be lustrous - I personally like to see 'a bit of fire' as opposed to a dull colour. Goldens should have a beautiful sheen, almost glossy. Good undercolour that carries well is another important aspect. Fading undercolour will give the topcolour an uneven appearance, especially on the flanks and also elsewhere if groomed hastily.

My personal recipe for breeding good coloured Goldens is as follows:

Always make sure that the stud boar has the correct topcolour that carries down to the skin. The sow needs to have a colour that comes as near to that of the boar as possible and should excel in head-shape ears and eyes. As fate has it, the slightly lighter coloured sows usually have better heads, muzzle and eyes than their medium-coloured colleagues. I have used these lighter sows to a good-coloured boar before now and have come up with good-coloured offspring with improved heads etc. The thing *not* to do then (which I did) is to mate son back to mother to achieve a better head shape, because this litter and the next generations will contain babies that are too light in colour. From now on only mate back to the desired colour. Another thing worth mentioning is that PE Goldens are born much darker in colour and will lighten up as they moult and get older. In my experience there is no desired colour when first born to become the right shade once moulted through completely. Some babies are a dark orange colour, but eventual topcolour will be OK. If, however the undercolour looks more like a washed-out sandy colour, the eventual top-colour will almost certainly be too light.

Pads and ears

The standard tells us that the colour of the pads and ears should be pink-golden and not pale/grey, dark/grey or worse still pale/black! Unfortunately, far too many PE Goldens have ears and pads that are too dark in colour.

Funnily enough the pad - and ear colour seem to be a law unto themselves, because a lighter coloured Golden does not automatically possess the desired pad - and ear colour. I have seen many light coloured Golden with almost black pads and ears. At the moment, I have not quite worked out yet how to achieve the correct pad - and ear colour on my pigs and so far have had to settle for the paler grey version on most of them, although I have now bred a boar with the correct coat colour and pink/golden ears and pads. By mating him to various sows I will hopefully get nearer the desired colour in future generations.

Coat

PE Golden come with a variety of coat qualities. My own stud includes those with short, silky fine coats but also with longer coarser coats. The aim must always be to breed for the short, silky coat as this one is far easier to groom. The coat should be glossy with a good sheen, but most PE Golden are OK in this department.

Presentation

As stated before PE Golden generally have good size and firm condition. It goes without saying that every exhibit has to be presented to the judge in the best possible way. Sometimes a quality cavy is let down badly by its owner and is totally spoilt by lack of presentation; and as a result is not awarded the sought-after red card. Alternatively a lesser quality cavy will look much better when clean and with a well-groomed coat.

To groom a PE Golden for showing is a little and often affair. I usually start grooming mine at least a fortnight before the actual show date. The first week I groom them with the finger-and-thumb method, but also by stroking them with my full hand from behind the ears to the tail, for a few minutes each day. At the beginning of the second week, the coat is reasonably down and the cavy is bathed (which will bring out the remaining guard hairs). Once the cavy is bathed I do not groom it again other than literally lifting the coat with one pair of fingers and picking the last few guard hairs out individually.

PE Golden have a fairly sensitive skin and therefore are inclined to flakiness (or dandruff as I call it). The dandruff seems to be most prominent during the grooming process; so the idea is to groom the coat as far down as possible (which will surface the dandruff) and then bathe the cavy (which will get rid of the dandruff). A very positive aspect of PE Golden is that they hold their coat much better than other Self cavies. Once the coat is down for showing, it will stay like that for almost a month. PE Golden seem very slow in growing guard hairs. Very often I get my Golden groomed and ready for number 1 show and I do not have to touch or bathe them again for number 2 and 3 shows, two and four weeks later.

Summary

PE Golden are a joy to own and look after because of their healthy appetite and outgoing temperament. They are seldom any bother (show or breeding wise) other than for their loud voices constantly screaming for more food. Naturally, though, there are still a few things that can be improved (type - and colour wise) in pursuit of the ideal standard description.

If anyone out there has become interested in this breed, I can only encourage you to have a go at PE Golden; there are many studs with good quality Golden around the country these days to buy foundation stock from.