

My appreciation of the Self Beige

by Keith Helmke (1994)

I have kept Self Beige covies now for 2½ years, which is relatively short in comparison to our other two contributors. My stock originated from Diane Nunn (a trio) and Joan Radeaglia (a pair) and on these all my current stock are based. Both these ladies have been a great help to me and it is obvious they have a love for the Self Beige, and I can understand why. I hope by reading this some other new fanciers will take up the challenge.

Breeding

The Beige sows are very good mothers, on average litters being 3-4 babies and as yet none of mine have ever left babies or not fed them. The babies grow well and soon learn when it is time for hay etc. They have a very high pitched squeak almost crying for their food. When the babies are born I always look at them as you can normally see how their ear settings will look as an adult. Within a day of being born their ears stick up in the air and don't drop for sometimes 3 months. When choosing the animals for mating I use my best coloured boar with good ears, eye and as much width as possible. The sows can be darker and lighter in colour but never banded or patchy. I find the sows are slightly darker in colour usually anyway. The Beige sows do have the shorter heads but tend to be a bit plain and sometimes lack the glamour of other Selves (i.e. they always look like mothers). I only ever use 1 boar to a maximum of 2 sows at anytime, but this is just personal preference.

The type

Some judges would say lack of it. The boars normally have very big heads with good width between the eyes. They tend to be rather long in the head and flat but still imposing on the table due to their overall size. As mentioned earlier ears can be a problem being set a bit high and sticking out rather than drooping. Their pink eyes are fair sized and in my stock getting better, although Beige do tend to squint a little bit.

Colour & coat

This I consider their greatest asset. No other Self in my opinion has such good colour and undercolour as the Beige (except of course White), their silk coloured hair going deep down to the pink skin. Along with this goes their very fine silky coat. The coat has to be groomed carefully or the cavy looks like a plucked chicken. I tend to show mine with a slightly long coat as the texture always feels nicer to me. The coat is quite long and looks better if bathed a week before the show. New babies are normally darker and gradually lighten as they get older. I do find that some dark babies actually end up a nice colour at about 6 months, so don't throw out slightly dark ones. Generally my Beige are very evenly coloured and I believe this is due to starting with good stock in the first place. With a lot of Selves these days judges are going for darker pigs: in the Beige most prefer a lighter more pleasing colour.

As there are few about you can normally win your breed class and if the club has an A.O.C. challenge (and if they haven't, why not?), you can do well against the others on size, colour and coat qualities. Coming up against Blacks, Creams, etc. can be a problem but fitness and size will sometimes push you higher. The main fault, beside the obvious lack of type, is coat dropping away at the sides. This can be bred out but due to the fine coat it is quite hard to do so. Some judges will actually push the coat down and put you down for skirting even on pigs which have none. The same judges will ignore it on some Golden and Blacks. The other main

fault only affects sows and this is the tendency to go baggy after about 9-10 months. This happens to all my sows regardless of their having been bred from or not. Again some judges will put you down for this even on sows with good shoulders and general fitness. Because of this I try to show my sows as u/5 months and 5-8 months and then breed from them. The boars I leave to grow on and find they nearly always dominate the adult classes. If showing young boars, be careful of the dreaded OD. Last year at one show I was OD'd four times (twice by two judges) and this showing fourteen week old pigs. The argument given to me by one fancier was they weren't accusing me of cheating but the pigs were too well developed for their age. Well not in my shed they're not and not in most Beige breeder's sheds they're not. Some judges who look purely for type will sometimes put up very dark well-typed animals normally bred from Dalmations. Most E.S.C.C. judges will put these down as they normally have very poor undercolour and not the coat qualities of pure Self Beige cavies.

Conclusion

If properly looked after, a cavy with a few equals on colour, coat and condition. When we improve the type on them look out the rest of you. A pleasure to keep in the shed. Why not try them as a second breed? One problem: if you're a Black breeder be prepared to buy some larger travelling boxes.