

# MAKING A STRAIN

By Dr W.C. Carefoot, England.

If one studies closely each breed of Fowl then almost without exception the true breeders can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and these dedicated few produce the birds which most of the other fanciers exhibit. Almost without exception one can sell a really good breeding trio and within two years the new fancier is having to buy again. The reason for this is quite simple. Very few are able to build a strain for themselves because they lack the dedication and knowledge to do so, usually because of lack of specialisation or wish to win prizes rather than hatch chickens.

My advice to a fancier wanting to build a good strain of Fowls is firstly to select a breed he likes and then stick to it until he has mastered it. Read the Standard and the Scale of Points repeatedly until they are imprinted in his mind and then set out to interpret what the words like "Medium Comb" really mean by going to a Poultry Show. Then when there, try to find out who has the best of that breed, remembering always that the exhibitor with the best may be judging or not showing for some other reasons. Having found out who has the best, ask to visit them and see the birds in their home surroundings to find the conditions which suit that particular breed best, in addition to finding the feeding arrangements.

The next step is to buy the best possible birds you can get as this is the cheapest way in the long run, and usually a genuine breeder will give you a balanced pen if you ask him to do so. Having got the birds then forget about showing them and hatch as many chickens as you can to give you as large a selection as possible.

Any chicken which is obviously lacking in vigour should not be treated but culled instantly, as the tendency to contract various diseases is very strongly hereditary and if you are successful in curing it and later breed from the bird in question, you may have to treat all your chickens in the same way in the future. All birds with obvious faults again ought to be disposed of as soon as possible to give the others room to grow.

When the first year's crop of youngsters is reared the serious work begins. All the youngsters must be studied in detail to find their virtues and faults and the best all round bird selected. If the strain is of cockerel breeders, this will naturally be a cockerel, but if they are pullet breeders it will be a pullet.

Let us assume for a moment that it is a cockerel. Then study him closely and if his main faults and then go through the pullets to find those which excel in these areas, and further select from amongst these the few which have the minimum number of other faults. Let this be your Number One Pen.



*Barred Plymouth Rocks*



*Silver and Golden Campines*



*White Wyandottes*

Then select another cockerel which excels where the first cockerel fails and again select females to suit him in the same way. If the original male was better than the best son, also repeat the process with him and you should have three good pens.

If the best bird is a pullet then select the best few pullets and for each select the male which would make a balanced pair. Probably one male may suit more than one pullet, in which case, run him with them all, preferably in some way so that you can tell which pullet lays which egg. This can be done by trap-nesting or by having the females in separate runs

Once the selection of the pens is made an essential check must be made to make sure that every point required in a perfect bird is in at least one side of the breeding pen, or if that is not possible is at least in one side of one pen. If this is not the case then you can only breed an outstanding bird by introducing fresh blood at another date.

On the assumption that the check is satisfactory, again breed as many as possible, mark the chickens and examine the next generation again as closely as possible. The next objective is general upgrading of the stock without loss of vigour. My method for this is to cull all weaklings and examine the rest to establish the major fault in the strain. If you can eliminate all birds with this fault and still have sufficient birds left to have everything you want, somewhere in the strain. This will be a major step forward. Then go on to the next fault and so on.

Each year I place a minimum standard for each point below which I would not entertain the bird as a breeder. If this is higher than the worst bird in last year's pens for this particular point then we have made an improvement in the strain. It has been my experience that since last years breeders are usually still available, the inclusion of any birds of the current year's breeding automatically reflects an improvement.

If your strain is to be successful over a long period you must include points such as temperament, quality and quantity of eggs, fertility and other desirable points of non-exhibition necessity. There is no reason that a beautiful bird should not be useful too.

During the building of a strain there will come a crises year in which viability is seriously threatened. At this point many fanciers clash out and bring in fresh blood to put back vigour. I believe this is just exactly the last thing they should do. They should cull all the weaklings and breed plenty off the healthiest, and within two years they should have solved the problem by breeding a strain resistant to whatever caused the problem.

If you decide to start making your own strain I wish you every success and the courage to keep going when you cannot find the birds you would like.



Buff Leghorns



White Leghorns



Rhode Island Reds



Black Red Old English Game