

SOME THOUGHTS ON BLACK ROSECOMBS

By Ian Selby

It has been very interesting talking to fanciers and judges about their interpretation and values on the Black Rosecomb Bantams and likewise I have read many books on the subject from the best authors of today as well as yesteryear.

I think it is very easy for an author to describe his ideal Black Rosecomb Bantam and what he or she should look for. Again this is echoed by many judges, to what they look for when a class of this breed is placed in front of them.

Most authorities do not give the reasons for their opinions and in some books we, as readers, are told what to look for, then the matter is closed.

But what happens when we cannot obtain a certain characteristic because it does not exist in our birds, or if we do, we know we will lose out in other more important areas.

I will outline a few important points to help the Black Rosecomb Bantam breeder to hold some of those points.

Some of these points may be of interest to breeders of black legged black breeds and the reason why some characteristics, although we may think they are wrong, should be held and others we thought were important, should be dropped.

Like all breeds the most important points to a bird is its type. Black Rosecomb bantams have traditionally been small and, this in recent years, has been one of its downfalls, for the simple reason that it is now highly inbred. We as Rosecomb breeders need to get them a little bigger, not because they are too small but because the bigger ones have more vigour, have better feather and are more dominant. This however "does not mean" as big as possible. The reader should "keep in mind, moderation" and "don't get carried away with extremities".

A Black Rosecomb bantam makes its type from the flow of feather. We all have long backed bantams and it is relatively easy to find a cockerel or pullet that stands up like a Fantail pigeon. Lewis Wright in his "Book of Poultry" described the breast as: "broad and prominent, carried somewhat Fantail fashion". Once we have the bantams a little bigger and one or two start "standing-up" you will find the appearance of the long back will go. The art for the judge is not to throw these long back birds "out" but look for helpers to the fancier by looking for the stance or 'station' that comes hand in hand with feather.

It is so easy for one to discard an important bantam that is useful in one area and even it up with a bad fault. If these types of birds are in your pens don't be too quick to cull them out as they are important breeders and you will find they become better show birds, especially the females, in their second and third years.

The next point for examination is the eye. I have a friend who, when he reads this, will have a chuckle to himself. My explanation of eye colour is due to him for which I am indebted. It took nearly 10 years of discussion with him to find out he was right. A black Rosecomb bantam's eyes should be "Hazel". But what happens when they are not. What does a judge do in a class of 10 birds when 5 are Red or Orange and the other 5 are black. Remember we are judging the eye only in this instance.

I published some years ago an article on Black Rosecomb bantams by Bruce Trewin, an Australian fancier who perhaps won with more breeds than anyone. He was a respected fancier and had a track record like no other at Royal Shows in that country. In his article he stated: "A Rosecomb's eye should NEVER be black".

It didn't take my friend very long to point this out to me and of course my reaction was that the statement was "rubbish". I went about breeding black-eyed Rosecombs to black-eyed Rosecombs and I got them black, so black you couldn't see the pupil. I also got black feathers and beautiful black legs like you wouldn't believe.



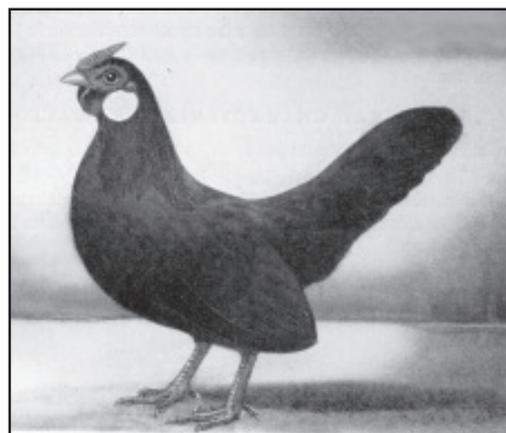
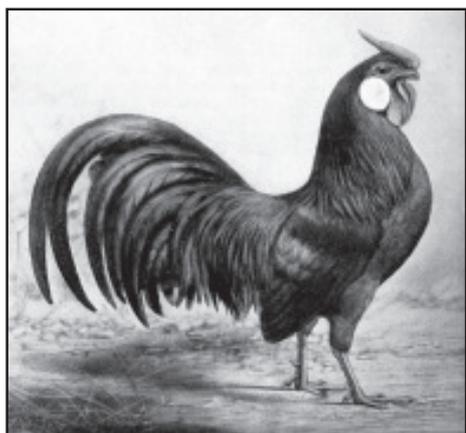
But I also got gypsy-face and although the females I benched had good type, fit and better in every way, our better judges always put them down for gypsy-face. I did not have any complaints about the decisions and I had learned my lesson the hard way. Bruce Trewin, my friend and those judges were correct, a Rosecomb should NEVER have a black eye.

Now back to our 10 birds in front of the judge. Five with dark eyes must be passed as they will probably have gypsy face. We can now judge the lighter eyes even though we are looking for hazel eyes. As for the breeder, it should be obvious although you do not have hazel eyes it is better to go to the red or orange eyed bantams and keep away from the dark eyed birds. You will then end up with nice red faced pullets and at least one of the bad faults has gone; no more gypsy face.

It is interesting to note that our standard for Black Minorcas states: "Eyes; dark, black preferred" and of those Minorcas that I have judged all the females that do not have gypsy faces are the ones that are inclined to be hazel eyed and not black. It would be very interesting to see how Minorca breeders flocks are on this point.

An interesting point from W.H.Silks book 'Bantams and Miniature Fowl' when he writes on Rosecombs that "Legs and Feet: Black, Toe-nails: White." Another point in that is not Standardised but worth noting - White Toe-nails in black legged birds. I found it very hard to get all toe-nails white as it is only a minor point.

Next comes the tail of a Rosecomb. Let's deal with the female first. For years we used the British Standard plate for a Rosecomb female and this is so far out that if we were to continue with it we would simply have another breed. In 1959 the N.I. Assn (NZ) via secretary John Nesfield and councillors E.J.R. McLaren and S. McLaren produced a revised standard which included the American Poultry Assn plates of Black Rosecomb bantams. Since 1959 we have always, in the North Island (NZ) at least, used these plates as our ideals.



The Rosecomb Plates from the American Bantam Association used in the 1959 North Island P.P.&C.B. Associations Bantam Standards and is currently used today.

The female Rosecomb Plate from the British Poultry Standards 1960.

The British plate showed the female with a whipped tail. The American plate shows the female with a fan-tail. Now the problem we have is that some fanciers and judges go for the whipped tail and others go for the well expanded type. At no point in the standard does it mention either. The predicament for both judge and fancier is which one benefits the breed if the correct one is absent. I would like to think that the over-expanded or fan-tailed one is more acceptable because it will help fill the tail of the male counterpart. This reasoning is far better than a judge telling us that it does not say this in the standard. Unfortunately it is one of those points that will always be argued but for the breeder a fan-tail is a must and it will always help shorten-up the back and help that flow of feather from head to tail that makes a good Black Rosecomb bantam.

This leads us to the tail of the male. The emphasis is on the cockerel as it is accepted that the cock does not produce the feather the cockerel does but this does not mean there are not exceptions to the rule.

The Black Rosecomb cockerels' tail makes the bird, for without its tail and type it is not a Rosecomb bantam. But how do we as breeders enable ourselves to produce finished tails for the show bench. Breed early in the season is a good start so that the bird has at least 10 months to develop.

However I found the best ones come from narrow breasted Rosecombs. This of course goes against all standard predictions but as I have said some things should be overlooked to gain in other areas and the

breast might be one of them. Once again "this does not mean" as narrow as possible and "moderation' rather than the extreme must be followed.

My reason for this is as follows. If we take a look at Heavy Breeds they are all wide in breast and lack large sickles. Look at Light Breeds; they are not as wide in the breast but have large sickle feathers. Take Old English Game and bantams in particular, those with wide breasts, lack tails; and those with tails lack width of breast. Now translate that to a Black Rosecomb bantam cockerel and those with narrow breasts have good tails. Those like game bantams with wide breasts just lack the tail and especially the furnishings.

You also get long backs but as I have already mentioned by selection get those Fantail-type chests up and the Rosecomb bantam type starts to emerge. Going back to the quote from Lewis Wright which says "Breast broad and prominent etc.", we must also understand that in those days those wise men were also starting to make standards and improvements. Now over 150 years on we can take the best of what they suggest. When a Black Rosecomb bantam cockerel is in the back of an exhibition pen showing himself off the words used by Lewis Wright being "prominent and Fantail fashion" are quite apt, we can't really see how broad the breast is.

Probably the most important part of a Black Rosecomb bantam to the inexperienced judge is its head. In particular the comb and the lobes. To me they are no less important than type and tail, infact I have had the luxury of "just showing the better combed ones" which is a little arrogant I must admit. Too many judges place too much importance in the comb and its workings. I have been down that road and it nearly ruined my Rosecomb line, simply because of the lack of workings on the back of the comb. This happened back in 1985 and it took me 10 years to gain the lost ground indicated by a group of judges determined at that time to pass all birds that did not show signs of workings at the back of the comb. Since then I have been able to see photos from overseas and visit Australia and I have come to the conclusion that Rosecombs all over the world are the same. There are more Roses in the front of the comb than there are at the back. Fortunately there are more important things to worry about but once again the statement must be taken as "moderate" and not to its extreme because in this case I do not agree that they should be like cleanly cut piece of steak and as flat as a pancake. There should be some Roses there and if you have a well filled front then that should be okay.

The other part of the head that is placed in importance is of course the lobes. Both must be identical. Round lobes are of course what we are looking for but quite often we get them heart-shaped. Unfortunately selection is the only way out of this one. The problem is the small piece of skin between the bottom part of the lobe and the throat near the wattles. It is like the skin has given way and caused the lobe to drop. You can only fix this by selection or introduction of a sound lobed bird. If I was to introduce such a bird it would have to be about a 3 or 4 year old hen so that (a) it was sound in lobes and (b) the lobes survived the test of time.

One other point worth noting when dealing with lobes and not only in Rosecombs, but with black breeds. Another quote from Lewis Wright "The ones with dirty dark blue lobes which appear to develop slowly are the ones that will mature with perfect white earlobes". All is not what it seems at first glance.

This statement from Lewis Wright I found quite true and shows the value of observation.

Not only Rosecomb breeders, but fanciers of all breeds, should have, when selecting their youngsters, a copy of the standard plate in front of them. It is all very well thinking you know what you are looking for, but you do need a gentle reminder once and a while. This includes the so called experienced ones. I have bred almost every breed and colour of bantam and many breeds of fowls and ducks, but none have been so hard to achieve close to perfection as a Black Rosecomb bantam. I have been one of those who has underestimated the level of perfection that we have obtained in New Zealand in the past 50 years.



Here is a White Rosecomb Cock from W.H.Silks book 'Bantams and Miniature Fowl' showing the required "Cobby" type and a short back.