

# CHICKEN RUN

HAMBURGH  
and FRIESIAN FOWL  
at GERRIT MARKVOORT'S

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I'd never had the chance to meet Gerrit Markvoort, even though as a top breeder of Hamburgs for many years he visits most large and national shows – we've just never managed to be in the same place at the same time. So I was really looking forward to visiting Gerrit and admiring his famous Hamburg and Friesian fowls. It was certainly a golden day – due to the sunshine, the hearty welcome and the chickens being even more beautiful than I had expected.

Below: Friesian Hen in yellow white pencilled.

**Above: Gerrit with one of his silver spangled Hamburg cockerels.**

## **Gerrit Markvoort**

Gerrit has been a chicken lover as long as he can remember – and his memory goes back a long way! His first 'chicken memory' dates from his early youth, when he was staying at his grandparents' house: a hen that had been missing for a few weeks suddenly came strutting out of the rye-field with nine tiny chicks. It must have had quite an impact on little Gerrit, as he could evoke the picture while mentioning it to us. Chickens were always around, but they were only backyard poultry. It wasn't until 1977 before he started





with 'the real thing'. He had joined a local club and was looking for some pedigree setting eggs. Poultry judge Winus van Dommelen provided him with 30 eggs of yellow white pencilled Friesians – free, on the condition that Gerrit had to exhibit some of the Friesians the following year, and that at least one of them should be awarded 'Outstanding'. Gerrit gladly took the challenge and the next year he did show a winning Friesian pullet that won Second Best in Show. This winning bird was of no use in the breeding pen though, as she later grew spurs. Two years later in 1979 another of his Friesians won the 'Grand Prix of the Netherlands'.



In 1981, he visited the European Show in Amsterdam together with his son Wilfred, and there they admired a pen of black Hamburgs. For Wilfred it was love at first sight. So in the spring, Gerrit arranged some setting eggs for the boy from the top Dutch breeder, Roel den Besten. They were fun years – father and son both breeding chickens – Wilfred also becoming champion of the Hamburg Club in 1985. However, when he was 16, his interest in chickens waned, as it often does.

**Left: The black Hamburg cock.**

The black Hamburgs stayed at Gerrit's but no serious selection or breeding was done, even though Gerrit was rather fond of the breed – it was just he didn't find the black colour particularly appealing. In 1992 he started with silver spangled Hamburgs – a variety much more to his liking. Today he is at the top with those as well.

In the past two years he has added gold pencilled Hamburgs (in the hen-feathered variety) to his pens. He bought a cock and a hen from two different fanciers and at first, it seemed to be a bad match; the offspring were quite poor, even including one with lemon pencilling. However, better selection has already resulted in very good birds this year.

### **A bit of history**

It seems strange that in the Netherlands, the Hamburg are called Hollands Hoen (despite the fact that it has never been proved that the spangled and black varieties are of 'Dutch' origin) and are named among the Dutch breeds. However, deep down we know that this type of fowl was already known in England long before. Back then, in England they were known by many different names, including Black Pheasants,



Spangled Pheasants, Golden Spangled Pheasants, Mooney Pheasants, Silver Mooney Pheasants, and so on. By mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when poultry exhibitions began, the inconvenience of all these different names of this obviously related group of fowl, became evident. Finally it was decided that these chickens should have the name **Hamburgh**, due to the fact that at least the pencilled ones were imported through the port of **Hamburgh** (Germany). When Darwin described the 'Spangled **Hamburgh**' he stated that it was an English breed.

**Right: Gold pencilled **Hamburgh** hen.**



He also mentioned the 'Pencilled **Hamburgh**' and that those were of Dutch origin. The fact is, that in the whole coastal area from southern France to northern Germany, such pencilled chickens were found, all looking very much alike in their markings. In Holland, pencilled chickens were also known, and, in the old days were called 'Pel', until – as in England –poultry exhibitions became popular and it was clear that 'Pel' (pencilling) was a marking and not a breed. This was reinforced by the wide range of differences in the pencilled birds; for instance, some had a rose comb and others had a single. From 1900 the group of Pel chickens were split; those with single combs were named Fries Hoen (Friesians) and those with rose combs became Hollands Hoen (**Hamburgh**). From that time on, the spangled and blacks have also been exhibited.

### **The **Hamburghs****

These are very elegant chickens with soft flowing feathering and an abundant tail, somewhat low carried wings, blue legs, white earlobes, large fiery red eyes and a distinctive rosecomb. In the Netherlands they come in Black, Blue, White,



Cuckoo and also the beautiful Gold Spangled and Silver Spangled. Furthermore there are the traditional colours Gold Pencilled and Silver Pencilled, while also Lemon Pencilled, Gold-Blue Pencilled and Yellow-White pencilled are recognised.

**Left: The pencilling consists of fine 'stripes' across the golden or silver ground colour and is different from the pencilling in Friesian.**

The **Hamburgh** also comes in hen-feathered, where the cocks don't have the normal masculine feathering in the hackles and tail (unlike Sebrights and

some Game strains, the hen feathered trait in **Hamburghs** is intermediate between henny and normal). Moreover the cocks have the same markings as the hens. They otherwise retain a masculine appearance though, in their build and head.



In Gold and Silver Spangleds each feather ends in a black tip. **(see photo)**

Ideally, the black spangles are in the form of a globule, the ratio between ground colour and spangle as such, that an all over spangling is seen with enough golden or silver ground colour visible. Often several parts of the body – shoulders and back – look too black, but trimming a feather here and there to bring out more ground colour for exhibition, is permitted.

It is remarkable that the Gold Spangleds have a black tail and the Silver Spangleds have a silver tail with a black spangle. For some ten years now, breeders in the Netherlands have tried to breed a golden tail with black spangles, but with varying success. As yet the standard says: a black tail. All together the spangled colour variety is difficult to breed in perfection, but is splendid to see.



### **The Friesians**

The Friesian is a lightly built chicken with an upright stance and the abundant tail is carried rather high. They have a single comb, white earlobes, dark orange eyes and slate blue legs (except for the cuckoo variety, which has white legs). Amongst large fowls they are lightweights; the cocks weigh about 1.5 kilos and the hens even less.



In the old days the Friesian were praised for good laying qualities and also known as Dutch Everyday Layers. Today the number of eggs produced is still quite high and, compared to the body weight, their eggs are fairly large.

Friesians are recognised in 12 colour varieties, the pencilled being the oldest and most characteristic.

#### **Left: Feathers of a silver pencilled Friesian.**

This marking is not striped as in the Hamburg but with what we call 'pel' marks, resembling wheat grains. In this colour variety there is very much dissimilarity in marking between cocks and hens, because the pencilling – which is characteristic of the hens – is almost absent in the males. The cock has the same ground colour as the hens, while the colour of the tail always has the same colour as the pencilling of the matching hens. The hens are pencilled all

over, except in head, neck and upper breast. The ground colour can be gold, silver, lemon or red-brown with black pencilling, or yellow with white pencilling. Friesians are also recognised in Black, Blue, White, Cuckoo, Sand/Yellow, Black Mottled and Red Mottled.

### **Gerrit on his animals**

The hen feathered Hamburg are a new challenge for Gerrit, who retired recently and can spend more time with his birds and other animals, such as the koi carp in the pond, cattle, the Gelders coach horse and his dog.





**Left: The Gelders Horse.  
Below right: The coach.**



**Left: One of the heifers.**

Although Gerrit has not been in the best of health recently, he enjoys every minute with his birds and said with a big smile: "Blood is thicker than water, so last year I borrowed a cock from Roel den Besten to mate to the remaining three old black Hamburg hens, and the offspring were once more great: four chicks, of which three were awarded 'Outstanding' at the show". The Blacks are beautiful, but the cocks are rather aggressive – at least his black cocks are – and the hens tend to pick each other's feathers, mostly at the base of the tail.



He likes his silver spangled Hamburgs best, and any surplus birds quickly find new homes, which feels good, he said, knowing he doesn't have to cull otherwise good birds. All stay until they have moulted into their mature plumage; as only then can they be selected on colour and marking. The same holds for Friesian hens, which can always be sold because of their superb laying capacity.

**Left: View of the chicken coops.**

His latest asset, the hen feathered gold pencilled Hamburgs, are easy to select (for the breeding pen), as the 'pencilling' is apparent in the cockerels. This is different from the Friesian, where the cocks have no 'noticeable' pencilling. For breeding, it is important to know their lineage to breed pullets with the desired pencilling.





**Above: Some gold pencilled Hamburg with a hen feathered cock.**

The various breeds/colours differ in character. Gerrit said: "If I would ever have to cut down with chickens and only keep ONE variety, I would choose the Friesian. The gold pencilled Hamburgs are the most flighty of the lot.

They also differ in laying ability, with the Friesian at the top as the best layers. Next are the Gold pencilled Hamburgs, the Black Hamburg and then the Silver spangled. None of them go broody. Once I sold a few... and those did go broody... so, never say never. Perhaps it depends on housing or care."

The chickens are fed mash and a handful of mixed grain in the late afternoon. They also get greens like common chickweed and short cut grass.



**Left: One of the yellow white pencilled Friesian cocks.**



## Breeding and caring

There are four breeding pens of the yellow white pencilled Friesians (four males and eight females); two breeding pens of silver spangled Hamburg (two males and six females); one pen of Black Hamburg (one male and three females) and one pen of gold pencilled Hamburg. All Gerrit's chicken houses have large, sunny runs. Selecting the birds for the breeding pens is something he has learned over the years. He knows, for example, that a two year old Friesian hen with good pencilling on the breast (they often get a different, more spangled marking in the second year) is of great value in the breeding pen.



**Left: The pencilling on the breast of this Friesian hen is rather spangled, or as we say: horse shoe shaped.**

It is very important to know the chick's father and mother, so he uses trap nests that shut when the hen lays her egg or he single mates.

He owns an expensive incubator, which has never been successful, but his good old home-made manually operated one does the job perfectly. Last setting he had

53 chicks from 56 fertile eggs. It needs constant attention though, and Gerrit is very careful with humidity. He believes breeding too 'wet' is a serious fault with many breeders.



**Left: The incubator. Right: Yellow white pencilled Friesian chicks.**

**Right: Silver spangled Hamburg chicks.**

The Hamburg take longer than the Friesian to mature, so the breeding season starts with incubating only Hamburg eggs. The 'second round' is Hamburg and Friesian eggs together, and the 'third round' only Friesian eggs. All together some 100 to 125 chicks are hatched. There are six chick coops, which are inside a large barn. When the chicks are about six weeks old and the leg ring is put on, he separates the cockerels and pullets, so they can mature in peace and grow to be a champion. If it just was that easy! His 2002 champion Friesian pullet never gave any chicks; she laid poorly and her eggs were unfertile.







**Above: The silver spangled Hamburg.**



**Left: A hen feathered gold pencilled Hamburg cock.**

### **Showing**

Gerrit is an active member of several clubs. His local club is 'Pels & Pluim' (meaning Fur & Feather) in Laren, where he was a board member for 27 years. He is also a board member of the NHC (club for breeders of Dutch poultry breeds) and member of the Hamburg and Friesian breeders' Club.

He likes to attend local as well as national shows (Oneto, Noordshow, Avicorni) where he is often a proud winner. Twice he won

the 'Grand Prix of the Netherlands' at the former Ornithophilia Show, and his biggest wish is to win the 'Golden ten-guilder piece' for Best in Show at the Noordshow (the Grand National of the Dutch Poultry Union).

The Silver spangled Hamburgs are washed before showing and he sometimes washes the (white) tails of the Friesians. Neither breed is 'easy' to show in top quality as the markings are difficult to breed in perfection. The best results were gained with his Friesian fowl. Remarks are sometimes made on the pencilling in



the breast of the hens, looking too much like spangles. Other remarks are the tail being carried too high, or leg colour too light or having white toes. In the Hamburg there are remarks on the combs of the hen feathered variety, which are not as good as the combs of the Blacks and the Spangleds. In the Silver Spangleds the eye is sometimes too dark.



**Above: Some of the Yellow White Pencilled Friesians.**

Another proud event was Gerrit being chosen Friesian Breeders' Club 'Breeder of the Year'. Several years ago he suggested this 'honorary title' by having the club members vote, and this year he was the lucky recipient, with a majority of 18 votes.

Gerrit is always willing to help other breeders: "Last year I sold setting eggs to two club members, and this year the three of us competed at the Club Show in Sneek. One breeder was Best in Show, the other was Second Best and I was third which felt good. We'll see what happens next year – are they able to hold the quality?"



**Right: Head study of the black Hamburg cock.**





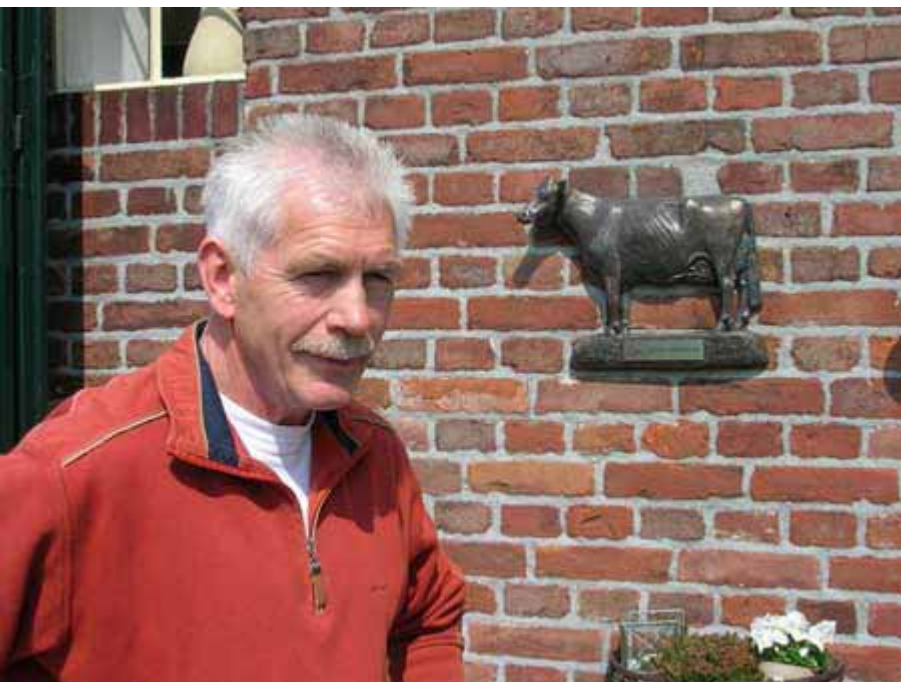
**Left: The black Hamburg, cock and hens.**

**Below right: Silver spangled Hamburg, cock and hens.**

### **To end with**

When we re-entered the house, after finishing the tour of the garden and chicken coops, I noticed the Family name-plate, engraved on an unusual and beautiful sculpted plaque of a cow. Gerrit explained that it was from the company where he worked, an international enterprise in the field of cattle improvement.

His wife Gerrie proudly showed us a small bronze statue of Sunny Boy, the famous Dutch Holstein bull whose semen is used worldwide. Gerrit said: "Such a character! I raised him and cared for him. It was a real pity he was put to sleep because of health problems, at only eleven years of age, but his semen is still available." It is easy to imagine this gentle, calm man raising bulls.



The afternoon ended after tasting Gerrie's delicious apple cake washed down with a cup of lovely hot coffee.