

CHICKEN RUN

NEW HAMPSHIRE
and AMROCKS
at
JO DE DOOIJ's

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The beautiful New Hampshire fowls of Jo De Dooij are living proof that a breed, when kept by a devoted fancier/specialist, can be bred to perfection. Of course it helps that these ones can spend their chicken lives in such a paradise-like situation, in the green grass of the Dutch village of Ossendrecht. And that Jo certainly is a gifted breeder.

Jo De Dooij

Some 25 years ago Jo visited a poultry exhibition in the village of Fijnaart and saw all those different chicken breeds; most completely unknown to him. Until then he only knew two sorts of chickens: layers and broilers, and the show opened up a whole new world to him. From all the chickens he saw that day, the New Hampshires looked very appealing – love at first sight, as Jo says today. The breeder – a well known fancier in those days – sold him 30 setting eggs. Next he bought a second hand incubator – a Heka, with a capacity of 42 chicken eggs. “I had to turn the eggs by hand, three times a day”, says Jo, “but that is also part of the hobby.”

While the incubator was silently doing its job, Jo laid out his plans for his new hobby. His wife Jeanne was not very enthusiastic about it, but he had a cousin who kept broilers on a piece of land, just outside the village. His cousin allowed





**Above: Amrocks.
Right and below:
New Hampshires.**

Jo has been a poultry judge now, for the past 14 years. In a bid to learn more about breeding chickens, he studied the books and lessons for poultry judging.

After working through the whole course he thought he might as well go and take the

Jo to house his chickens there; Jo could keep the 'good ones' for breeding and exhibiting and he would have the 'offal'.

From the 30 eggs, 17 chicks hatched and Jo joined the local club in Wouw as a proud breeder of New Hampshires. Pretty soon his cousin also caught the 'chicken fancy' bug. The two of them really got into chicken breeding and as 'Combination De Dooij', entered many beautiful birds at exhibitions all over the country.



examinations. Over the years he kept studying and passing many examinations, and soon he hopes to be qualified as an A-Judge (Note: In the Netherlands, all breeds must be studied and examined; after passing the first examination the applicant is appointed as a C-Judge. Continuing on through B level, one can reach the 'top' as an A-judge, who is qualified to judge all poultry breeds.) Jo views his judging duties with pleasure, and, as he lives close to the Belgian border, he is also often invited to judge in Belgium. Looking back, he regrets that he didn't start earlier, as he finds studying more difficult than when he was younger.

New Hampshire

The New Hampshire was created at the beginning of the 20th century, mainly in the state of New Hampshire (USA). The breed began from selective matings from

Rhode Island Reds, and gradually emerged as a new breed. It was known for rapid growth, fast feathering, early maturity and vigour. While the Rhode Island Reds were mainly used for laying, the New Hampshire was created as a dual purpose chicken, selected for both meat and egg production.

The breed was recognised in the US Poultry Standards of Perfection in 1935.

Shortly after World War II the breed arrived in Europe and was kept by commercial poultry breeders, until the

new hybrids took over. Like many other breeds, the New Hampshire ended up in the pens of devoted fanciers who kept it from extinction and improved the breed to its present show quality.



New Hampshires are medium-sized chickens weighing 3.25 to 3.75 kg (cocks) and 2.5 to 3 kg (hens). The body is medium length, with a broad, deep and well rounded breast. The back inclines with a hollow line to the tail, which should be not too long, but covered with broad tail feathers and sickles in the case of males. Seen from the side, the body top-line and under-line are curved in a sweeping, uninterrupted line.

The legs are not centred under the body – as in the Wyandotte – but

somewhat towards the rear, thus there is more 'body' before the legs than behind them. The stance is of middle height – if lacking in breast, the birds look too high and when carrying too much fluff, their legs appear too short. The stout, smooth legs are deep yellow with often a pinkish-red glow, although in laying hens the leg colour often fades to cream or white.

They have large, brown-red eyes and a single comb, moderately large and straight in the cocks, with five well defined points, the blade not to high from the

neck line. In the females, the back part of the comb is allowed to fall a little to one side.

In the Netherlands, the New Hampshire is recognised in two varieties: red with black markings, and red with blue markings. The colour of the cock is displayed in three distinct tones; golden-red in the neck hackles, deep chestnut red in the shoulders the saddle hackles being a slightly darker golden-red tone than in the neck hackles. The down colour is salmon. The only 'black' allowed is in the wing and tail feathers. In the blue-marked variety, black is replaced by blue. Although the colour is called 'red' the birds almost look golden, especially in the shining parts of the male plumage. The hens are lighter in colour than the males; an even golden-red colour, somewhat lighter in neck, with the characteristic black tipping in the lowest hackle feathers. The tail feathers are black with red lacing.

Some characteristics of the Amrock

In spite of the name Amrock – meaning American Rock – this breed is not known in the USA. The Germans imported the old type of utility 'Barred Rock', before the breed was perfected and recognised as Plymouth Rock. In 1958 the Amrock was standardised in the German Poultry Standard, with the intention of keeping the dual-purpose quality, although they are not really selected for that these days.

The most obvious difference between the Amrock and the Plymouth Rock is type. The



back line of the Amrock sweeps upwards towards the rather high tail giving the breed a typical bell-shape when viewed from the side, particularly the hen. In contrast, Plymouth Rocks appear longer than Amrocks, having a rather long, broad, straight back, rising only very gradually in a slight incline to the tail.

The Amrock has a single comb, orange to red eyes, red earlobes, a yellow beak and yellow legs, and come in the barred variety only. Their markings are not as refined as

that of Plymouth Rocks, but also not as coarse as cuckoo barring. The whole feather, including the down, is barred which should be rather sharply defined. The cocks weigh 3 to 4 kg. and the hens 2.5 to 3 kg.

Jo on his chickens

Jo keeps his large fowls just outside the village at a spacious grassy meadow, a few minutes drive from his home.

Jo says: "The New Hampshire is my favourite breed; it was my very first chicken breed and it will always stay, although I like the Amrock very much too.

"My first Amrocks came from the north of our country. I was looking for some Amrock setting eggs and met a girl in Ter Apel – she was very young and was told by her parents to reduce her poultry stock. I bought some eggs and also took some of her adult birds with me.

"I won my first 'Excellent' – 97 points grade (the highest ranking in Holland), with an Amrock cockerel," he says proudly. The present Amrocks come from Mr Jacobs from Berkel en Enschot.

"I also keep a number of partridge and white Dutch Bantams, but they are in the garden at my home; it would not be wise to have those little ones free-ranging here. Lately I became a board member of the Dutch Bantam Breeders' Club, and I think it is important to know the breed inside-out. I chose the white variety because I wanted to experience what it takes to keep white birds white and to prepare them for showing," he added.



Left: The chicken coop in the garden.

Right and below: Partridge and White Dutch Bantams.



Breeding and caring

Jo is fortunate to have this plot for his chickens. The breeding pens of the New Hampshire and Amrock each have their own part of the garden house, which serves as the main chicken house. And of course they also have

a large area of grass to free range. The garden house is situated on the neighbour's premises, because Jo was not permitted to build anything on the plot, and the neighbour was agreeable to housing the birds. The 'spare' cocks have part of the chicken house plus their own free-range territory. Even experienced, skilled breeders cannot do without spare cocks, because having

only one cock is very risky; Jo experienced this last spring, when his selected Amrock sire turned out to be infertile.

As he starts the breeding in February, he has to provide extra light to get fertilized eggs. In autumn he sets the lights in the hen house (with a time-switch); gradually increasing the daylight hours each day. This stimulates the birds to lay; the chickens wake earlier and eat more.



Extra light is also very important for the male fertility. In this way the pullets do not stop laying during winter.

Left: The cream coloured eggs are from the Amrocks, the brown one is from the New Hampshires.

Jo goes to see to his chickens at least once a day, preferably a few hours before dark. When he cannot get there, or when on holidays, his neighbour takes over. Everything is checked; are the coops in order, are the chickens okay, and when



the temperature dives below zero, the combs and wattles of the cocks are rubbed-in with Vaseline, to prevent freezing. In cold weather cocks can suffer so much that they don't mount the hens, and the negligent breeder finds the exhibition value of his cock is also lost. The eggs are collected each day, and the feeders and waterers are filled. His chickens are fed grower pellets (no layer pellets), with an additional handful of mixed grains. This is fed all year round, except during the first weeks of their lives, when they have chick starter.

Each year, 80 to 100 chicks are hatched in his incubator. According to Jo, the New Hampshire hens sometimes go broody, but the Amrock hens don't. This is about the only point in which the two

breeds differ; both are docile, not flying over the 1.2 metre high fences and not aggressive when grown together. Also the lay is similar in both breeds; the hens laying three or four days in a row and then skipping a day.



Selection for colour and marking can only be done when the birds reach their mature plumage. Those with the standard colour and markings are of great value at the shows, however, for the breeding pen there is even a stricter selection. A valuable breeding hen should be of an even deep red-golden colour, and it is important the black ticking in the neck hackle is true black and not greyish.

Left: In this picture you can see the black ticking in the neck hackles of the hen.

Below right: Primaries with the correct black markings.

Sometimes there is too little black ticking, but excess black running up to about a half to two inches in length is not desirable, as this gives black in the hackles of the male offspring.

The under-colour is also important; chickens with black or grey down don't belong in either exhibition pens or the breeding pens.

The wing marking is often not in conformity with the written standard, but this is a relatively minor fault at the show.

In the breeding pens, Jo wants his birds to have a noticeable amount of black in the wings, otherwise the offspring will be too light in their red colouring. He stresses the importance of having the black markings of



the birds in the breeding pen complementing each other. That also holds for the Amrocks.

Each year many of the young chickens bred don't pass muster, but Jo has no problem getting rid of them. Being such beautiful and elegant chickens that still have proper utility qualities, they are very much in demand.

Showing

For many years Jo, together with his cousin, zealously exhibited his birds, travelling across the country to enter the larger and National Shows. His most remarkable feat was at the 1989 European Show in Gent, Belgium, where he was awarded European Champion with a New Hampshire cockerel. At the same show, he also won European Champion with a Jersey Giant cockerel. During the years he has bred many different breeds, mostly to prepare himself for various judging exams.



The urge to exhibit has faded during the last few years, especially now his cousin no longer takes part. 'Combination De Dooi' no longer exists. "Showing my birds is becoming less and less each year," Jo said modestly. Well, I think this is an advantage for other breeders, isn't it?

To end with

Other challenges are more and more taking the place of showing. Recently he became board member of the Dutch Bantam Club – a new challenge to him – though he still is a member of the New Hampshire Breeders' Club, and, for the past 20 years, of the local club in Roosendaal.

Thank you, Jo, for taking the time to show us around.