MY THOUGHTS ON BREEDING
JAPANESE BANTAMS

By: Greg Davies, Australia

I have been breeding fowls and bantams for some 40 years, and have kept many breeds over that time. If somebody had told me back then that the breed I would fall most in love with would be Japanese Bantams, I would have said they were crazy.

Some years ago, I was given some white Japanese Bantams in exchange for a job I had done for them. Unfortunately, a fox took the lot one day when the pen door was not secured properly, so I went out of them for a while. At the time I also bred Pekins and didn’t intend to change breeds any time soon.

After judging a show in northern New South Wales, I was offered a little Japanese cockerel. I don’t know why, but I bought the little guy and brought him home.

I did not have a hen to suit, so I called in a favour from a friend who supplied me with a nice type Grey pullet. So I started out with Japanese Bantams for the princely sum of $5.
Both of these birds were short in back and leg, both had the distinctive U-shaped back which is absolutely essential for maintaining the correct body shape, and both were deep and full in the body. From these two birds, I have built a strong line of crow-winged Old English Game-coloured Japanese Bantams.

**My breeding methods**

Back in 1970, as a boy, I was taking photos at a country show in South Australia when I was approached by a kindly gentleman who happened to own the little Japanese Bantam hen I was shooting. He said: “A Japanese Bantam should look like a tiny shoebox with a big tail”. When I started out with the breed myself, those words came back and I have strived to keep my birds fitting that description.

I always breed short legged to short legged birds. I discard the long legged ones early on as I see no point in breeding with them. Some breeders insist that the long legged birds are useful in the breeding pen, but I see no point in using birds that do not fit the standard and will give me chickens with long legs that I will only have to dispose of anyway. I have never had any issues with low fertility breeding this way.

In Australia, the standard awards 55 points for type and just 10 points for colour—so I ignore colour completely when mating up my breeding pens. As my birds are fixed in a crow-winged pattern, I always get birds with true Old English colours that are perfectly acceptable in the show pen.

The things I do look for are:
- Strong boxy type, deep and wide in body and bold of front
- Correct wing setting. The tips of
the first secondary flights should always be the ones that fray and are damaged first. The wings should not droop downwards, rather they should sweep around the curve of the body so they almost sit parallel with the ground.

- Short legs with stout round bone and sound toes. Many Japanese are weak in the outer toes, which often twist in the middle joint. I also like strong spurs like a game fowl—I believe this is a trait which keeps the legs strong.
- Short U-shaped backs in both sexes.
- Soft, wide feather
- Strong combs, particularly in the males. Japanese Bantams often carry small double serrations and weak, pencilly serrations.
- Strong eye colour.

I usually mate proven old cocks with hens early in the season. This sets the year with birds from proven and reliable breeders from the previous year. The hens are then mated in line with their sons from the previous season. I seldom mate pullets until they are almost first year hens. That’s just me.

Right: Lemon Birchen cockerel.
Below: Dark Black-breasted Red pullet

The myths about Japanese Bantams
There are a number of myths surrounding Japanese bantams.

Myth 1: The lethal \( Cp \) gene. It is this gene that produces the short legs required in the show pen. Contrary to some belief, the chicks with the double-dose of this gene (the lethals) simply die in the shell quite early on in the incubation, fail to hatch and do not suffer. My own line of bantams gives an average fertility and hatch rate of around 70 per cent which is more than acceptable.

Myth 2: Japanese Bantams are hard to rear. I have found Japanese bantam chicks to be vigorous, fast-growing and very active.
Myth 3: Japanese Bantams are poor layers. I have found Japanese Bantam hens lay incredibly consistently... they start early in the season and lay well into winter. They are also excellent mothers.

Show preparation
I single out likely show birds at a very young age. The best ones seem to stand out right from a few weeks of age. I find the chicks that grow fast and are the most boisterous, seldom turn out as good show birds. Rather, it is the smaller; less vigorous-looking chick that always end up the best. Perhaps that is just my line, who knows? Providing these chicks are raised carefully and protected from bullying, they always grow out strong and active.

I allow the pullets to run out in small groups and I handle them just a little to get them quiet. I find they feather out better this way.

The cockerels are penned into individual cages about 3 x 3 feet square and handled daily. In this way they train very easily in the smaller show pens and will always stand in perfect position for the judge.
Unfortunately, many judges will use a stick on Japanese Bantams which is totally unnecessary and undesirable as it makes them want to stand up instead of sitting low as the standard demands. Like Pekins, Japanese Bantams should be set down quietly and low to the ground, not stirred up and nervous. I usually train them lightly to accept the stick so that should the judge not understand the breed, the birds will not be unduly bothered by the touch of his stick.

Below: Streaky-breasted Orange Red cockerel and Mottle hen (showing undesirable red in the neck hackle)

Finally...
These days, I cannot imagine not keeping this delightful little breed and can’t see a time when my yard will be absent from them. Never have I kept a breed that has given me so much delight as these quaint little heart-breakers.
I thoroughly recommend Japanese Bantams to anyone who loves the unusual, wants a challenge in breeding and showing, or simply wants some birds that are friendly, productive and take up little space.

Japanese Bantam Club of Australia, website
http://www.japanesebantamclubaustralia.com/
The club welcomes overseas breeders to discuss their birds and breeding systems and to join our site.