

# EVALUATING THE EXHIBITION SEBASTOPOL



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**This could be re-titled, "A Possibly Prejudiced Primer for Judges". I've had and enjoyed this breed since the early '70s and it's possible that I have ingrained ideas that might not be quite clearly required by the Standard although I hope not. But forgive me if anything of that sort becomes apparent. Our present APA (American Poultry Association) Standard is actually a pretty good guide.**

Knowing what the SOP (standard of perfection) says isn't the same as understanding what it desires. This is where experience viewing birds, both very good and not so good, is helpful. Nothing will teach anyone what is desired so much as having an excellent specimen on the ground in front of you. For brevity's sake I'm not going to work through the SOP feature by feature. Darrel Sheraw does that very nicely in his excellent "Successful Duck and Goose Raising". We should walk up to the birds on exhibit and see the general impression of wide, deep, rectangular blocks with only medium length straight necks and large, round heads. Carriage should be or near horizontal. Standing at attention like Chinas isn't part of good Sebastopol type. They should not appear to stand well up off the ground as say a Pomeranian might. Eyes should be large and bold. We are seeing some small, hard eyes lately.

Body wise there should be no suggestion of refinement, daintiness or cute.

The very largest Sebastopols are not huge geese even within the Medium class, but the SOP does seem to desire that they have substance. In the words of one breeder "THICK".

There is a good picture on Feathersite ([www.feathersite.com](http://www.feathersite.com)) of a newly molted group from Brice Wonders. No feather on these but most there do show excellent body type and proportion.

Make allowances for the fact that they are on high alert and standing accordingly.



Photo: Kozakiewicz

Necks on many exhibits are found to have a slight backward curve, instead of giving the correct impression of a straight periscope coming up out of tons of feather. A long, refined or bowed neck is again very contrary to what is asked for. I would pay attention to Darrel's observations on length of back, as the SOP wording can be construed to possibly mean that a very short cube or round shaped body is wanted. That is not a normal body type for any other Medium class goose and there is no reason for a Sebastopol to be extremely short and compact. A very long body lacking width and depth won't cut it either.

Besides dealing with what is normal goose type there is the fact that a slightly rectangular framework gives much more body to hang all that feather on.

The illusion of being shorter than is really the case, comes about because a good bird will show no space between the ground and the underline. Short, stout shanks as called for coupled with all that feather filling in the space visually creates an impression of being shorter than actual fact.

## Feather

Long story short is there should be TONS of it. Well bred birds have this. Thick, heavy layers of feather as wide as can be gotten with length. The entire back including the rump is to be feathered in this way as well as the underline and paunch. Paunch is balanced dual lobes but on a good bird in good condition they are going to be awfully hard to see. The entire breast and the lower neck are required to have curled feather.



**Left: The entire breast and the lower neck are required to have curled feather. In reality curl is more likely on the front of the neck but can extend quite a ways up - like an elongated 'Adam's Apple'.**

**Below: Smooth or nearly smooth upper and sometimes middle breasts are very common but also very far from the ideal.**



In reality curl is more likely on the front of the neck but can extend quite a ways up - like an elongated Adam's Apple. The entire breast is to be curled or at least very deeply furrowed. Smooth or nearly smooth upper and sometimes middle breasts are very common but also very far from the ideal. A judge recently told an exhibitor that the upper part of the

breast should not be a big mass of long curls. That mass of feather is exactly what should be found on the best birds. Good birds will not show a smooth area at the back or nape of the neck. The neck will rise straight out of a lion's mane of feather. Feather should be very thick, heavy and substantial. Soft is relative. Breeders and experienced judges have learned that too soft with limp, pliable feather just hanging like toilet paper does not foster that walking haystack look that is achieved by harder feather with more body and curl. Neither does having only a layer or two of long ribbons glued to the body. All this feather from the lower neck clear back to the paunch should flow and blend visually. Sometimes huge side breast curl isn't supported further back under the wings and on the upper breast. It should all be long, thick and full with the feather on each section blending into the other areas of the body.

## **Wings**

Two, one on each side of the body. Feather is to be mutated here as well. Straight or normal flights are a clear DQ under the SOP and the placings of birds that appear to have been able to fly into the show under their own steam should not be happening. Straight should not be confused with stiff. Flights in reality will often be somewhat stiff, even though they are not normal. This can be more apparent sometimes on youngsters who will often have longer, narrower and pointer primaries than adults. A twisted, as called for, shaft with a bit of stiffness might stick somewhat away from the body. While not the ideal please keep in mind that this is permitted. Feathers that might stick out because of twisted tips are also permitted as long as we are dealing with a twisted tip and not a true angel wing.



**Left: A grand old gander is showing a twisted wing tip, something that can almost not be avoided with a very heavily feathered bird. This is not angel wing.**

**Below: This bird shows the very long, stiff flights most often seen in a young bird just developing it's wing feathers. These are usually replaced by a shorter, wider and softer flight , though not always before fall and the show season. A lot of birds will show this "quiver full of arrows" look in late summer. This is not angel wing.**



The various "wing things" in this breed merit an article of their own. Judges are just cautioned to learn what is and is not angel wing as only the angel wing is a listed DQ (to disqualify).

On a heavily feathered bird, as they should be, a lot of stiffness and/or sticking out might not be readily visible. This in itself is a pretty good



indication that whatever that birds wing issues may be we are not seeing a true angel wing.

**Left: Dropped/Lazy wing as a youngster due to weight of blood quills and unique feather mutation can developed into angel wing. Sometimes taping is required.**



**Right: Same bird/same wing, as a two year adult without intervention.**



There is some idea that using smooth breasted Sebastopols helps prevent some of the wing issues common to the curly birds but many who have done a fair amount of work with the breed feel that as soon as they get back to overall curly they are back to the jutting primaries and twisted tips caused by the mutated feather.

**Left: A beautiful smooth breasted bird showing excellent type and the waterfall of feathers off the back that they are Standardized as having in Europe.**

Since smooth breasted Sebastopols have normal wings (a DQ) they, of course, have no problems themselves. There is some interest on the part of some in trying to transfer what is sometimes excellent body type in the smooth breasted to the curly birds. Jury still out on that one. Useful or not the smooth breasted with the proper feather pattern are beautiful birds in their own right. These are not to be confused with curly factored birds with poor breast curl making the upper breast quite smooth. Neither is a bird smooth or nearly so all over to be considered a smooth breasted Sebastopol of good quality. These birds can still be very much misunderstood in North America and have been the subject of hostile attitude and seller's hype. Dave Holderread works with them and has bred and sent out some beautiful specimens.



### **Colored Sebastopols**

These have been the subject of much interest and discussion. Sometimes that interest is a genuine interest in trying to create a colored bird equal to the very best whites and sometimes the "interest" in the colored stock stems more from the hot commodity end of things. Those starting out with a sincere interest should attempt to find breeders with a like mindset and avoid those who simply propagate and sell off their "rare, hard to find" colored birds.

**Left: A smooth breasted lavender saddleback with a large, well rounded head, thick neck and broad back. The impression of the gray in back is not so true to Sebastopol breed type, a common problem with varieties still in the development stage. They are shown with the sort of white female who reminds us all of what we are striving for.**



**Left: Two superb females showing true breed type and impression and a profusion of thick, heavy layers of feather. Note that the saddleback has curl well up past the lower breast onto the neck. Saddleback can be a difficult pattern on normal feather and never looks as cleanly defined on a well feathered Sebastopol. This bird is a true colored Sebastopol and a huge credit to her breeder Jenifer Krause.**

**One could wish that all whites were this good. Her white companion is a wonderful bird for type and feather. Exactly what we are after.**

Sometimes even a genuine interest isn't maintained due to the reality of the colored feathers often not having the

same color intensity as a smooth feathered bird. To some this effect just isn't attractive and they give up. Colored stock can sometimes be off type due to the fact of their existence owing to something with color that wasn't a Sebastopol.

White birds are often off type as well though so this shouldn't deter someone with a sincere interest. Like the whites colored birds can be an interesting and challenging project.

**Right: A buff and gray both showing nice heads/necks and plenty of feather. These birds show a lot of progression towards Sebastopol type. They also show the usual fact of solid color not expressing itself the same way on the long, soft Sebastopol feather as we are used to on a normal feathered bird.**



### **Procedure**

A word or ten about procedure. No judge is going to instantly handle all the birds that may need it. They need to be viewed in a relaxed state and before any checking of a physical nature done in order to make final decisions after the initial impression merits it. Well handled Sebastopols are generally at ease and show well, but of course will be excited, erect and "tight" after being handled by a stranger. We are looking for as close as we can get to an ideal bird. Leave your breeder's hat at home and evaluate based only on the merits or lack of in front of you on the day. This can be hard I know. My own breeder's hat is rather tightly stuck to my head at all times. No exhibit will be perfect and for a judge to judge one dimensionally by going through and tossing all faults and negatives with a view to seeing what is left does no service to the breed, the present exhibits or the exhibitor.



The very worst negative is a lack of virtue and the characteristics that are the hallmark of this or any other breed. An absence of faults shall never, ever be confused with merit.

**Left: An adult close to being fully feathered showing the pattern, thickness and body (or "stand away quality" might be better wording than "body") of a bird with excellent feather quality. Photo credit Jenifer Krause.**

When stupendous birds with some stiff flights are tossed in favor of a faultless bird with no real redeeming traits are we really putting the right idea across? As judges are we not to balance positives and negatives in our exhibits in

order to come up with an overall best bird? Shouldn't we be evaluating what is there in front of us instead of patently tossing out any perceived negative? The SOP may mention defects that are commonly found within a certain breed and this is good. But when those defects occur they need to be noted and balanced against whatever virtues may be present. Exhibition halls and breeding programs have never benefited by one dimensional fault judging.

The Sebastopol more than many is a very complicated multidimensional project that may possibly require more care and wisdom in its evaluation than some breeds. We should all have something of a mind's eye ideal in mind and should always remember that faultless can still be really awful when the hallmark feather and type of the breed just isn't there.

**Right: This adult female is in late spring feather, but shows a beautiful head and neck and gives a nice impression of 'Thick'.**

These last remarks may be provocative but are said with no ill will or intent. Judges are mere mortals like the rest of us except for having taken on a usually thankless assignment. Most often they deserve a great deal of respect for their integrity and sincerity even if we do not all agree on the end results or how to get there. My one big wish would be that the exhibitor's efforts be positively and fairly evaluated. I am unable to exhibit my own birds at this time so they are not part of this scenario. Judging to me means merit counting for something in the same way that any defects do. When exhibitors in other breeds look at the Sebastopol results and wonder: "What happened here", perhaps there has not been enough emphasis on what is positive and correct.



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*In the below text, Jonathan Thompson (UK) gives a few pointers from his own experience & those of John Hall in breeding Sebastopols.*

## **SEBASTOPOL PAIRINGS**

There has really been no true scientific or genetic study made of the 'curly' genes since Hadlow College found that breeding continually from only the Curly-type resulted in plumage that resembled the Silkie Fowl. Most undesirable!

My own experience has been to put together a pair formed from one Curly & one Trailing-feathered ~ either way around.

However, the outcome is never certain.

In some seasons some extremely good Curly-type have been produced, along with some good Trailing-type & some indifferent Curly-type with smooth breasts.

I have only ever retained or sold-on the best of either type. Those which do not make the grade go as Christmas Geese & make a small but meaty carcass.

As to colour, I have personally only ever approved of the pure White form. All coloured-forms are the result of an out-cross, the true & original form being pure White; & retaining any length of feather in these cross-breeds is doubtful.

However, having said that, I have found that some of my best quality females display some grey feathering on their rumps & in their flight-feathers for the first season & then moult-out pure white.

As goslings they appear to have olive/ grey-green down ~ while the ganders have down which is bright golden yellow. Possibly some form of sex-linked gene ~ but nothing proved.

I have found that fertility is impaired when a heavy-feathered Curly-type does not have the feathers around its vent trimmed~ this goes for both sexes. This is done in advance of the breeding season to keep the birds well paired & not stressed when they commence to lay.

Both the Curly- & Trailing-feathered type make very good mothers; I have found the Trailing-type can be left to fend in the open field, but it is best to give the Curly-type some shelter, with a dry nest, as they are not as 'water-proof' as the Trailing ones.

The eggs also hatch well under hens, & the goose will continue to lay until she is satisfied she has a nest-full.

I believe Dave K's article on the type to strive for will be useful to anyone with a keen interest in producing/maintaining the correct type bird.

I hope this brief account will assist you in your endeavours. For those who are not familiar with the breed: The below photos clearly show the difference between Curly & Trailing-feathered ones.

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**Left: Trailing-feathered (Smooth breasted) Sebastopol. Owner Richard Hedges (UK)  
Right: Curly feathered Sebastopol, owner Steve Dace (UK) Photos Rupert Stephenson.**