

The Year of The Trout

The Trout-coloured Indian Runner has recently become one of the most successful of the show varieties. This year it has overtaken the popular White and the Fawn colours to win *Best Runner* at Shropshire & Mid Wales, BWA National, Devon & Cornwall, Poultry Club National and the Federation Show at Stafford.

This has always been an attractive variety and one which shows an excellent 'type', i.e. it has a neat head shape, straight bill, good shoulders and correct proportions. Trout Runners cope well with outdoor conditions, possibly because of their more natural plumage pigments. They suffer less from mud-staining than the Whites and bleach less in the sun than the Fawns or Chocolates. They look smart!

Historically, many UK routes (roots?) lead to and from Germany. Horst Schmidt, in his 1989 *Puten—Perlhühner—Gänse—Enten*, states that the first Trout Runners probably came to Germany from France after World War II. The colour was widespread in Germany in the 1950s, and took first place at most shows.

The German name *forellenfarbig* does mean 'trout-coloured', perhaps referring to the more sober brown camouflage colour of the ducks which closely resemble the brown river and lake trout. It is described as lighter than the Mallard which is also a popular colour on the Continent. The male's head is said to be a brighter green; the white neck ring is broken at the back (i.e. it does not completely encircle the neck.) The breast is wine red, 'sprinkled lightly'.

Modern research suggests that this is merely a light phase (li) variant of the wild mallard plumage colour (Li+).

Trout to the UK

Both Mallard and Trout Runners were probably imported into the UK by Jacob Lory, a Cornish breeder, in the 1970s. He obtained Black, Fawn-and-



Trout Runners at Tom Bartlett's Folly Farm in the early 1980s (published in *Fancy Fowl*, 1983).



Mallard Runners, a shade darker than Trout, exhibited at Hannover 2009. Like exhibition Mallard in the Rouen, there is no white fringing to the feathers on the stern of the drake. This is considered to be a fault in UK, Australian, German and USA Standards. The duck is well pencilled, and her ground colour is richer than the light phase Trout.



waterfowl sale being held there in 2002 by the BWA). In 1984, trios of Trout were sold by Jacob Lory, Vernon Jackson and Graham Ashworth; pairs also by Roy Pryce, Ashworth, Filbee and Austin. A single drake, acquired by a friend of ours, was rehomed at my parents' house and paired with a duck from

white, Trout and Mallard Runners from a breeder in Switzerland. Simon Windle also imported them from Germany and his exhibit at the Great Yorkshire show won *Best Waterfowl*.

The colour Trout does not seem to be specifically mentioned in show results before the eighties. The UK standard was published in 1982. Five pairs of Trout were exhibited by Ashworth, R H Filbee, Roy Pryce, and C Austin at the Stoneleigh Rare Breeds Show and Sale, 1983. This event was held at the Royal Show Ground in September each year between 1976 and 2001 (a further annual



Exhibition Trout females

Roy Pryce. We bred from this pair and an astoundingly beautiful trio of these ducks fetched £75 at the Show and Sale in 1985. Such prices were unheard of at that time, most pairs of Runner ducks fetching £12 – 27. In the Trout, there were 4 trios for sale, plus 15 pairs.

By 1985, the colour was specified in show catalogues, and at Stafford (1985) there were these entries:

Trout Drakes: 1 T Bartlett, 2,3 Ashton (9 entries)
Trout Ducks: 1 DR Bullen, 2 Mark Rubery, 3 Ashworth & Crowther
Pairs of Runners (8 entries): 1 M Froggat (Fawn) 2 G Guthrie (White) 3 C&M Ashton (Trout).

Attraction of the Trout

Trout Runners were our first ducks - by accident as much as by design. We've kept, bred and exhibited these birds since 1983,

and will probably hang onto them whilst some of the other breeds and colours are reduced in number.

What is the attraction of the Trout? Does it have better attributes than other Runners – or are people attracted by the name? I suspect it's partly the latter because they are not the best layer in the Runners, nor do they have the best temperament. But they are often the most healthy and long-lived.

However, the colour is very eye-catching. The bright green head, smart collar and brightly coloured legs and bill of the drake make these birds stand out, whilst everyone loves the natural colours of the female, rather like the wild duck.

Show Birds

During the eighties and the nineties, Trouts were quite petite birds. They were a beautiful shape, but always on the small side. Was this their natural style, or had the UK stock been selected originally from small birds, or was this the result of 'inbreeding'? (The wild-colour M' does not cross comfortably with the dusky variant m').

At the German shows they were certainly larger. At Sinsheim 2003, they were as large as the Mallard Runner, and at Hannover 2009, they were the largest of all the 600 Runners exhibited.

Since 2000, there have been further imports of this colour. The size of the birds has increased, so much so that the winning Trout drake at the Poultry Club National this year was a huge bird. But there have been drawbacks as well. These German birds are not necessarily what UK exhibitors want. The rump tends to be raised and spoils the back line of the birds; in addition, the stern is short and the legs are typically too long for the UK preference.

Also, at some point, imports of Trout or Apricot Trout (the *German Blau-gelb*, sometimes mis-named 'Saxony' in the UK) also ruined the colour of the UK stock for a while. The 'Appleyard' face-markings were introduced either quite strongly, or as a sprinkle of white feathers, on the green hood of the drake. These face markings are still seen in some *Blau-gelb* drakes today.

Judging Runners

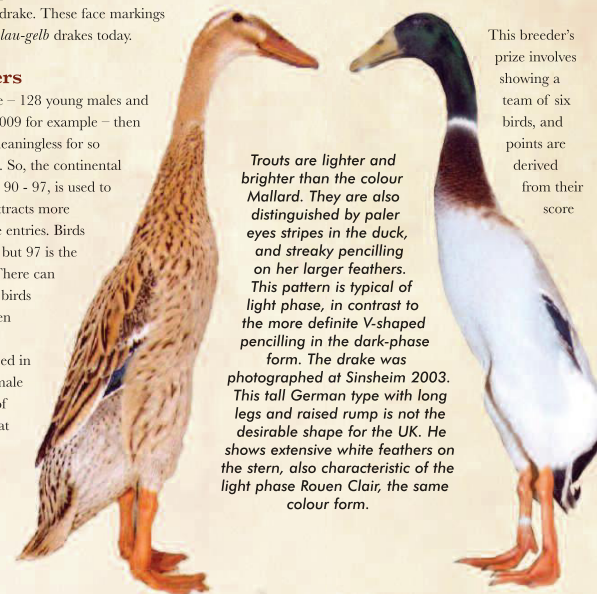
Where entries are huge – 128 young males and females at Hannover 2009 for example – then 1,2,3 prize cards are meaningless for so many top-quality birds. So, the continental system of grades, from 90 – 97, is used to advantage. This also attracts more exhibitors and multiple entries. Birds are 'satisfactory' at 90, but 97 is the top score at 'superb'. There can be numerous excellent birds and credit must be given where due. The same assessment system is used in Italy and France. A female Trout Indian Runner of the Cellinis gained 95 at an Italian Championship and 96 at regional show this year.

Colin Brierley gained top honours with his



Best Runner at the BWA National 2012: Lisa Hiron's Trout drake. Photo: Rupert Stephenson.

Chocolates and Blacks at Orthez (Southern France) in January, and was well-rewarded not only with silverware but also with six bottles of vintage Bordeaux in true French style! His 'Grand Prix d'Expo' was a 2011 Chocolate drake with 96 points, best of all the palmipeds (webbed feet). In addition, he got the 'Grand Prix d'Elevage' with 52 points.



Trouts are lighter and brighter than the colour Mallard. They are also distinguished by paler eyes stripes in the duck, and streaky pencilling on her larger feathers. This pattern is typical of light phase, in contrast to the more definite V-shaped pencilling in the dark-phase form. The drake was photographed at Sinsheim 2003. This tall German type with long legs and raised rump is not the desirable shape for the UK. He shows extensive white feathers on the stern, also characteristic of the light phase Rouen Clair, the same colour form.

(typically 97/15pts, 96/13pts, 95/12pts, 94/10pts, 92/6pts, 91/3pts, 90/0). The birds must be of the same breed/colour and both males and females must be represented. In the event of a 'draw' (only one grand prix given) the number of top awards (95 or 96) gained is the winner.

This way, breeders are rewarded for consistency—and it is the breeder, not the owner, that counts. Colin scored 52 points, adding to his four silver cups, certificates, rosettes and gold medal from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries!

Colour Faults of the Trout

Crossing Runner colours has led to faults in the Trout in the past such as white flight feathers, and patches of white in the hood of the drake. These can still occur but more commonly, dusky (m') and harlequin (li' [silver]) genes) spoil the birds. These alleles are both recessive and might not be noticed in an F₁ (split) cross. They will appear in a percentage of the F₂ offspring if brothers and sisters are used and the allele is homozygous (pure) for m' or li'.

Completely dusky 'Trout' have turned up where the duck lacks eye-stripes in the feathers of the head, and the underwing and axillars are coloured. In pure Trout, the underwing is ivory. In duskies, the characteristic blue of the wing bar is also dull instead.

Where Trout have been crossed with Silver Runners, the faults are much less obvious, especially in the drakes, in the first generation. One reason is that many Silver Runners are not pure themselves, whereas they should be pure dusky (m') rather than mallard (M'). A basic knowledge of colour genetics is very useful in understanding the colours. This is particularly important now that there are more colours. In addition, colour crosses also turn up from birds raised from hatching eggs where the background is unknown and sometimes quite mixed up.