

## **GFSA – Ask the Judges**

The judges selected for this series of articles are Larry Christensen, Peter Ponzio, and Scott Taylor. We will have guest judges occasionally assist in judging specific varieties. Each of these judges has had years of experience in the goldfish hobby, and have acted as judges and breeders of goldfish. A new breed with new fish will be presented each issue, and the judges will rank the fish and provide commentary for their selections.

For the first several articles, we will present pictures of fish from various magazines and books which represent high quality fish for the breed in question. Eventually, we hope that breeders and dealers will send in photographs, so that we can present new varieties to review.

Each judge will assign a rating of 1 – 5, with 5 being the highest rating and 1 being the lowest rating. The results will be tallied and presented in a table at the end of the article.

With the ubiquity of the personal computer, you'd think it would be easier to coordinate the submissions for the article. We actually get the articles from the judges, but at different times. This month we have Tony Reynolds and John Parker helping for us, with Larry taking a few months off. In this month's column, we will look at Ranchus. The Ranchu is a fish developed in Japan, originally from Chinese Lionhead stock. Beginning collectors often have a difficult time distinguishing between Ranchus and Lionheads. This is understandable, since these two fish are closely related. The current article, will, we hope, help to eliminate some of the confusion.

The Ranchu originated in Japan, as a direct result of cross-breeding specimens of the Chinese Lionhead to develop a slightly different type of fish. Early examples of Ranchus did not always possess a "wen" or bramble-head, and the desired egg-shape type body was not always present. In some early versions of the Ranchu, finnage was much longer than that seen today. Indeed, it has been speculated that the egg-shape fish, or Phoenix, which has a Ranchu-like body and long flowing fins, but does not possess a "wen" was an attempt at early Ranchu stabilization.

The modern-day Ranchu is considered the king of goldfish in Japan, and Ranchu societies, which strictly limit membership, hold prestigious Ranchu competitions throughout the year.

The Ranchu can become a large fish, with specimens ranging from 10 – 12” being attainable. Most mature Ranchus usually range in size from 6 to 8” in length. The Ranchu has an egg-shaped body with a deep belly that is between 5/8 to ¾ the length of the fish. The fish does not possess a dorsal fin, and the back should not have vestiges of the dorsal on it. The back is rounded – not flat as in the case of the Chinese Lionhead – and the area of the caudal peduncle should curve sharply downwards to meet the tail. Please note that the caudal peduncle should be broad and neither too long nor too short. The area where the caudal peduncle joins the tail is extremely important in this fish; if the caudal peduncle is not properly formed, the fish will have problems swimming, and the tail area will look messy.

The tail joins the caudal peduncle at a forty-five degree angle, and gives the fish a unique swimming motion. The tail juncture is also an area of departure from the Lionhead. In a Lionhead, the tail joins the caudal peduncle almost perpendicular to the body – there is no forty-five degree angle. The tail of the Ranchu can be partially or fully split, with variations in between. The tail lobes should be rounded, and all other fins are paired.

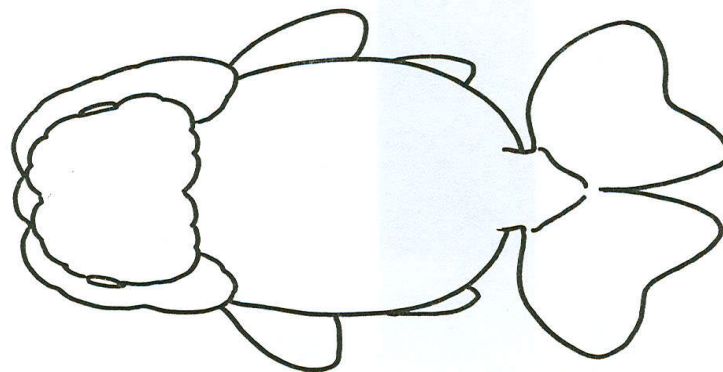
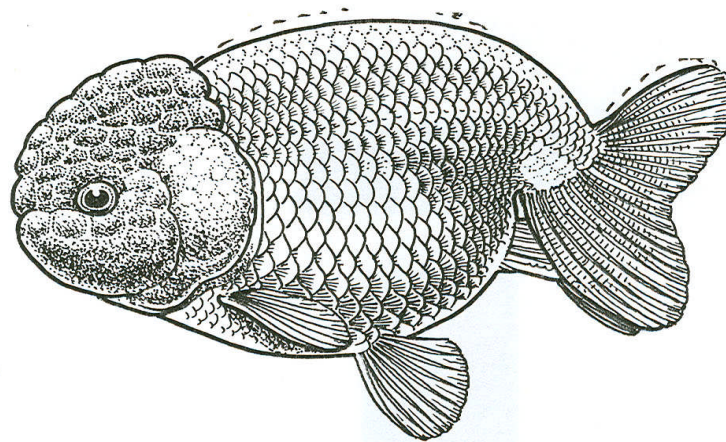
The “wen” on a Lionhead should be full –that is, it should cover the head, cheeks and gill plates, although the growth should not be as full as that in a Lionhead. The Japanese prefer a full cheek growth to the fish, and when viewed from above, the cheek growth should appear to be squared-off. The requirement of the squared-off cheek growth is not viewed as being necessary in the West, although seeing an individual fish with this growth is quite impressive.

Recently, there has been an effort, originating in Thailand, to cross the Ranchu and Lionhead varieties, to produce what is being termed a Lionchu (see Peter Ponzio’s article “What is a Lionchu?” at [www.goldfishpages.com](http://www.goldfishpages.com) for a fuller description of this fish). The Lionchu combines the deep body, back and tail profile of a Ranchu with the head growth of a Lionhead to produce a very beautiful fish. The GFSA may consider developing a new standard for these fish if their popularity increases.

A line drawing, taken from the GFSA breed standards, is presented for the Ranchu, so that readers may become acquainted with the breed. As a final point, most fish shows in the West are judged in aquariums, which present fish from the side profile. When selecting and judging Ranchus, it is important to look at the fish from the side and the top. In addition, it is important for judges to examine the fish when swimming, especially when evaluating the attachment of the tail to the caudal peduncle, and when evaluating the motion of the fish.

Acceptable scalation for the Ranchu is metallic (most prevalent), nacreous (commonly called calico), and matte. Colors can be orange, red, red and white,

white, black, metallic blue, black and white, black and red, natural, chocolate, and calico. Ranchus with a pale yellow body and bright red head were once common, but are fairly rare these days – they are spectacular looking when seen. Good examples of mature Calico Ranchus are still fairly rare, and when seen, can be gorgeous.



Fish 1, Calico Ranchu



Fish 2, Black Ranchu



Fish 3, Red & White Ranchu



Fish 4, Black Ranchu



Fish 5, Calico Ranchu



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## **Judge's Rating and Comments**

### **John Parker**

Notwithstanding that the Ranchu is probably the variety of Goldfish which is most widely kept and bred by serious Goldfish hobbyists in the UK; there is no specific UK Show Standard for it. The really serious Ranchu enthusiasts have



their own Society, Jinchu Kai UK, where the fish are judged to Japanese standards and exhibited in bowls. In all other major shows in the UK Ranchu compete in "Lionhead" classes and are judged to the "Lionhead" show standard. Strange as it may seem, this works surprisingly well, probably because the original Lionhead standard, save for minor adjustments, was agreed several decades ago. That standard was based on fish imported from Japan but in those days we were not familiar with the name/term "Ranchu". However, imagine my surprise when on checking the GFSA's standard for the Ranchu I find that it is virtually the same as the UK's Lionhead standard!

In all UK shows, other than that of Jinchu Kai UK, Ranchu are exhibited in aquaria and are judged largely from the side; I guess the same applies in the USA. However it was not until my first visit to Gary Hater's GFSA Breeders' Social in Cincinnati in 2001 that I was introduced to the terms "Top View Ranchu" and "Side View Ranchu". In the UK (and of course in Japan) a Ranchu is a Ranchu is a Ranchu!

Ranchu are part of Japanese tradition and enjoy the same award rankings as Sumo Wrestlers. Ranchu are designed to be admired from above and should give the impression of immense strength with a short thick caudal peduncle and wide shoulders supporting a large, slightly flexible tail. It is the Ranchu's rear end which is its most difficult characteristic to get right but of course this difficulty does not exist with "Side View Ranchu"; indeed from the side Ranchu without shoulders and the correct tail carriage will look more attractive than those with.

As a "Japanese Ranchu" enthusiast I do not want to engage in debate "Top View" versus "Side View" but I simply must express an opinion on the so styled "Lionchu". What a total nonsense! I hope that the GFSA will not be conned into accepting such mongrels on the show bench. Pets they might be but pedigree show fish – never! The Society should, in my view, foster and encourage those members who are actively involved in breeding Goldfish to a Standard whatever the variety. Pandering to "commercial whims" will, in the short term, demean the efforts of American Goldfish breeders and, in the long term, could reduce the small number of dedicated American breeders still further.

And so to judging the five Ranchu before us. A really mixed bag comprising 2 calicos, 2 blacks and only one red and white. Metallic red and white (and red and white) are the only colours acceptable for Ranchu in Japan, albeit the calico is accepted as Edonishiki. All other colours are dismissed by my Japanese friends as "Chinese" pets regardless of their country of origin.

I have assumed that all five exhibits have twin annals and division in the tail – any that didn't would be disqualified in the UK.

### My Judging Sheet

	1	2	3	4	5
	Calico	Black	Red/White	Black	Calico
Body (20)	17	11	13	11	8
Colour (20)	15	12	13	16	12
Fins (20)	9	9	15	12	11
Condition/ Department (20)	17	17	17	17	17
Special Characteristics (20)	6	12	15	15	9
----- 100 -----	----- 64 -----	----- 61 -----	----- 73 -----	----- 71 -----	----- 57 -----
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>

As can be seen from my judging sheet –

#### **First – Fish 3, Red and White**

Although this fish is my clear winner scoring 73/100 its body shape concerns me. The dorsal contour is superb but the ventral contour is dreadful resulting in a near triangular body shape. I suspect that if I saw this fish in the flesh it would lose marks under "Condition and Department" for I am certain that with that body shape its swimming motion would be poor, possibly inclined to scull through the water with head up and tail down. Colour is average and the head needs to be developed but even now the hood growth is interfering with its eye(s).

#### **Second – Fish 4, Black**

Whilst personally I do not like this fish, it qualifies for second place in that no major faults, other than its short, fat body shape and weak tail, can be determined from the photograph. Its hood development, whilst not special, is as good as any in its class and its colour appears to be very good indeed for a black

although perhaps the fact that it has been photographed from above might hide bronzing below the lateral line, a common failing with blacks.

### **Third – Fish 1, Calico**

This fish has the best body shape in the class by far. It is a great pity that the head lacks development and the tail appears weak. Colour is good.

### **Fourth – Fish 2, Black**

There is little to commend this fish. Its fat stomach and ski-slope caudal peduncle destroys its body shape. Colour is too bronze to be considered an acceptable black.

### **Fifth – Fish 5, Calico**

Although the ventral contour on this fish is good, the dorsal contour is very poor; the ski-slope being even more pronounced than in Fish 2. The tail has a strange upright carriage and the head lacks development. Whilst it has the required range of colours for a calico, from the photograph the colours appear dull and muddy.

## **Peter Ponzio**

Each of these fish is a good example of a Ranchu, which makes the competition difficult. Two of the fish are calico, and of good quality, and each of them immediately catches the eye. In fact, the calico coloring of these fish is so eye-catching that we tend to concentrate on the color, and miss other points in the conformation of the fish. Whenever I see a calico fish, my first instinct is to rate the fish highly – I then have to step back and look at the overall composition of the fish to get a truer picture.

### **First Place Fish – 5 points; Red & White Ranchu, fish 3.**

Like most people, my eye was drawn to fish number 1 and fish number 5, which are both calico fish, and which are good fish in their own right. To borrow a phrase from the NFL, "Upon further review," the quality of fish three comes out. The back profile on this fish is perfect, with the nice rounded contour, and the joining of the caudal peduncle. The coloration is very good, the finnage excellent, and the head growth is nice and full without being overpowering. If there was more head growth, this fish might be considered a Lionchu, but the growth is just what is expected from a Ranchu. Believe it or not, this fish is young (under 1 year old), and will continue to get better with age.

### **Second Place fish – 4 points; Fish 1, Calico Ranchu.**

This fish is perhaps one of the most famous goldfish ever to be seen. So why did it place second to fish number three? It has a good back profile, good caudal peduncle, spectacular coloring, and good head growth.

Before we answer the question, let's take a look at the coloration. I've never seen a fish where each scale is outlined in black, as on this fish. I've also never seen a fish with the type of calico coloration exhibited here. I'd take this fish in a minute, but I don't think I could afford it, were it still alive (this photograph is over 30 years old).

The reason this fish finished second is due to the head growth. While the hood is full, it is not fully developed, and probably never did develop as well as in fish number three. Of all the fish here, this is the one I'd like to own, but it just isn't the best Ranchu on the page, and I have to rate the fish according to standard, not my personal preference.

### **Third Place fish – 3 points; fish 4, Black Ranchu.**

Here is a fish seen from the top, whereas the other fish on this page are seen from the side. This picture gives you an idea of what to look for in a fish, when viewed from the top. In the case of black fish, a top profile usually shows better than a side profile, simply because the scales on the top of the fish are less metallic than the scales on the side of the fish, producing a deep, velvety black color.

This fish shows the importance of the broad caudal peduncle, and broad back of the fish. The caudal peduncle is just the right length and thickness to support the tail, and give the fish an elegant appearance. The tail is good on this fish, and is separated about  $\frac{3}{4}$  the length of the tail.

The head growth is good, and notice the broad width of the head, which allows the "wen" to be seen clearly. A good example of a Ranchu, but not in the same class as fish 1 and 2.

### **Fourth Place – 2 points; fish 5, Calico Ranchu.**

This fish caused quite a commotion at the MAKC show this year. It is a beautiful Calico Ranchu with wonderful black finnage, which offsets the body color quite nicely. It is also a young fish, which will get better with age.

Like all calico fish, this one catches your eye immediately. This fish is even more eye-catching due to its black finnage, which calls out the body colors. Again, why did this fish finish behind the others?

The fish reason is the back profile, which is not as good as on the other fish. The back is not as rounded, nor does it meet the caudal peduncle as well as in

the other fish. This will not be corrected with age, but as other areas of the fish improve, there will be a tendency to compensate for the back. The head growth is not as developed as in fishes 3 and 4, but is better than in the first fish. The head growth will improve over time, making this a better fish. The coloration is excellent, and with good care, will improve with age. This fish has the most upside potential of all the fish shown.

**Fifth Place – 1 point; fish 2 Black Ranchu.**

This is a good fish, with good coloration, excellent head growth, and good size. The back profile is what lowers this fish in the standings. The back is curved, but not as much as it should be, and the area where it joins the caudal peduncle is not angled as it should be. The back will not get better over time, but the other points on the first will; this fish has upside potential, as does fish number 5, but it will be difficult for the fish to compete against top-notch fish like number 3.

**Tony Reynolds**

In general I found problems with all fish. None of the five met my expectation of a perfect Ranchu. Most of the fish are good and I would be happy to have any of them swimming at home.

**The number one fish (Fish 1, Calico Ranchu)**

was selected based on its body shape and the peduncle/tail configuration. The coloration is interesting and eye catching; I would prefer to see a broader range of color and more blues. The head growth is a little tight compared to most good Ranchus we see today. Overall this fish, meet the criteria we use in qualifying a Ranchu fish. It is not the best fish I have seen, but based on the photos, the best of the five.

**The number two fish (Fish 3, red and White Ranchu)**

is a close second. The head growth is representative of most the Ranchus I have been seeing recently. The coloration is good and the back smooth. In proportion to the body, the tail is large for this fish. I do like the transition of the back into the tail and the angle in which the tail projects. The egg shape of the body looks over developed. I would like to see another view of this fish. If the body is symmetrical it could move into first place, but based on the photo presented, I rank it second.

**The number three fish (Fish 4, Black Ranchu)**

is presented in the photo for top down judging. In judging Ranchu and Lionheads a top down view is always good to have. It is not a bad thing in judging any fish. I think it is good to view fish that are being judged from

multiple angles. One view can disguise a defective feature or drop a fish a place or two by not showing its best qualities. This fish looks exceptional from the top. The head growth appears to be symmetrical. The back is thick with a clear downturn moving in to the peduncle/tail area. The tail is split and symmetrical. The color appears to be consistently solid. Being that all other fish are being judged from the side, without this profile I can't give it a higher ranking or lower the other fish without the overhead view. There are too many other characteristics that can be discerned by the side view that keep this fish away from the top spot.

#### **The number four fish (Fish 5, Calico Ranchu)**

is still a nice fish. It shows good coloration with a nice mix of blues, blacks and reds. The back isn't as smooth as I like to see. The head growth looks to be not as fully developed as it shown in the photo. The peduncle/tail transition appears too long in the photos. This is a good fish but the lumpiness on the back keep it near the bottom in the judging.

#### **The number 5 fish (Fish 2, Black Ranchu)**

shows several attributes that move it into the last place in this judging. The back transition looks irregular and not the smooth curved transition I like to see in the Ranchu variety. The tail looks good, but from the angle shown it doesn't project at a severe enough angle for a Ranchu, it looks closer to a straight out projection, more like a Lionhead. The body shape looks more ball like than egg shaped, could be the angle of the photo. The coloration is washed out. The head growth looks to be this fish's best quality. Not a bad fish, but not a good fish.

All in all, I find the photo judging to be to a little biased to angles presented in the photographs. Based on other views the top three fish might change their placing order. However the photos do present factors that we regularly face in judging fish in shows. Department and tank presentation play significantly in how fish are perceived. The opportunity to judge based on photographs is a good exercise. Hopefully you will find my discernment and placement well explained and you will agree.

### **Scott Taylor**

I really like Ranchu goldfish, and like Peter I have noticed that the Ranchu and Lionhead crosses are becoming more prevalent at fish shows. The pictures in this competition show fish which have Ranchu characteristics, and are not

crossed with Lionheads, which makes it easy for goldfish enthusiasts to understand what to look for when choosing a Ranchu.

**First Place Fish – 5 points; Red & White Ranchu, fish 3.**

I chose this fish for first place because the tail at the peduncle is very, very strong. The lower and upper back are perfect for a Ranchu. The wen is clearly shown, and the peek-a-boo eye is a nice added attraction.

**Second Place fish – 4 points; Fish 1, Calico Ranchu**

Color wise, fish number one is a "WOW" fish. But after a closer look, the structure seems to lack in size to the rest of the fish. By this I mean that the fish appears asymmetrical, as if the head were too small for the body. The head growth (wen) is lacking in fullness which a Ranchu should have.

**Third Place fish – 3 points; fish 5, Calico Ranchu.**

This fish has outstanding color and the black accent is nice. The wen, which is an important part of a Ranchu, is all but missing. At first glance, this would be a highly rated fish, but a comeback look would change my grading of this fish (Peter's note: I had the same reaction to this fish when I saw it at the MAKC show). This is why I do a walk around among the fish before judging begins.

**Fourth Place – 2 points; fish 4, Black Ranchu.**

The picture shows the head and body definitions very well, but because of the intense competition offered by the other fish, this fish drops down to a lower level. A nice example of a Ranchu when viewed from the top.

**Fifth Place – 1 point; fish 2 Black Ranchu.**

The photograph shows the last half of the back is not shaped like a regular Ranchu with a smooth, round curve. It could be caught in the middle of a swimming motion, but because of the competition, I ranked it last among the Ranchu shown.

**Judge's Consensus**

Looking at the attached table, we can see that fish number 3 captured first place, followed by fish number 1. Fish number four finished in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, with fish number five in 4<sup>th</sup>. The final black Ranchu remained in 5<sup>th</sup> place.

Fish 1 – Calico Ranchu  
 Fish 2 – Black Ranchu  
 Fish 3 – Red & White Ranchu  
 Fish 4 – Black Ranchu  
 Fish 5 – Calico Ranchu

Fish #	John		Peter		Tony		Scott		Total
	Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points	Points
# 1	3	3	2	4	1	5	2	4	16
# 2	4	2	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
# 3	1	5	1	5	2	4	1	5	19
#4	2	4	3	3	3	3	4	2	12
# 5	5	1	4	2	4	2	3	3	10