

Countdown to the Three Counties Show 14-16 June by Allison Littlehailes

Although our weekend in April is HUGE, we are also planning another massive event at the Three Counties Show in June. There will be a large EXHIBITION for the public to see, a major SOCIAL EVENT with the RBST and the OLD SPOT CELEBRITY CHALLENGE. To make a success of this, we want as many exhibitors as possible there and there are lots of inducements! The Club is offering £100 to the Breed Champion and £50 to the Runner-up. There is a special class for Novice Exhibitors and an extra Sow Class. What's more, every exhibitor will receive a special Centenary Bone-China Mug. So, for those especially who have not shown before or not been to a major show, this edition of *Spot Press* starts off a countdown of what to do by Allison Littlehailes so there can be no excuses! This will continue through our Workshop in April with practical help and again in *Spot Press* in May so that, come June 14th at Malvern, you'll all be experts!



Showing pigs is a lot of fun and much less daunting than dogs or equines. What's more, it's a great advertisement for the breed and the exhibitor.

Well, hopefully you have thought about showing, were possibly even asked about going and as a Club and breed we really need your support. GOS are the most numerically strong pigs amongst the rare breeds and yet very few are shown. Through all the doom and gloom currently swirling around the industry, wouldn't it be fantastic to get out there and get to it. Show us how much you love your GOS and how fab they are as a breed to everyone at Three Counties and beyond. Let's make Three Counties the year of the GOS!

Here's where we get serious, showing needs preparation and if like me you go weak at the knees at the thought of picking a piglet, conditioning, training, when to enter the show, what class to enter, fear not. Over the run up to Three Counties there will be articles in *Spot Press*, area mentors and a session at the workshop - a half-way point to get us all walking (or running) around the ring this June.

This first article will concentrate on those July born gilts and boars coming up to seven months, but the same principle of selection can be applied to those January litters currently snuggling in neonatal contentment outside right now. So, how do you spot a good prospective show pig?

First off check for objections and disqualifications to the breed standard (shown on the Year Planner), so if your pig has:

Crooked legs.

Short, thick or elevated ears.

A rose in the coat or a line of mane bristles or a sandy colour to the coat.

Blue undertone not associated with a spot or serious wrinkles.

A heavy jowl.

Remember that the breed standard (except for the rose and sandy colour) says 'objectionable', so does not condemn your pig from registration for breeding pigs, just showing and even that can be down to the judge!

Underline needs to be checked and at six months any extra or blind teats should show clearly and the pig should be rejected. Your pig should have a minimum of fourteen evenly spaced teats (boars as well).

Study the legs and general conformation, watch the pigs walk

around. Legs should be straight and strong, back should be long and level and hams should be full and filled down to the hocks. Your pig should look well put together.

Now to the Januaries: they should be checked thoroughly at weaning or earlier. The more you can run on to fatten the easier it will be to spot that special one that stands out. Check your pigs regularly up to registration for showing as they can alter a lot over the months, especially the ears and nose, but you do have to start off with most things looking right. The teats need most attention because teats can alter.

Your January needs to be big. Size matters in the show ring and you should not waste your time with runts as they will never put on enough weight to compete with their peers. One top exhibitor remembers being told, "A good big pig should beat a good little pig." So, no matter how good a pig you have, unless it is fed well it will not be shown to its best. So be liberal with your food.

Planning for showing usually starts in the previous year picking out any possible superstars from your July & September litters and then in February when you pick out your possible Januaries and the first of the show schedules start to drop through the letterbox. Show dates are usually available well in advance from websites like www.asao.co.uk/events which lists many of the agricultural shows large and small around the UK so there's bound to be a pig show near you.

At most shows with GOS pigs, there are usually depending on the time of year a selection of the following classes:-

1. July boar born between 1 July and previous December 31.
2. January boar from same year as shown.
3. Sow born before previous 1 July in pig.
4. Female born between 1st January and 30th June previous year
5. Gilt born between previous 1 July and 31 August.
6. Gilt born between the previous 1 September and 31 December.
7. Gilt born after January same year.

This is why we mention that your planning starts a long time before the actual show with preparing your farrowing times in advance to coincide with these classes. Make sure you birth notify your litters and register any show pigs before the show.



At smaller local shows you may see different class headings; GOS generally come under coloured or traditional breeds classes and do not have their own classes at smaller shows, with a wider age range of pig.

You will also see classes for 'maiden gilts', gilt-in-pig, pork & bacon pigs, pairs, progeny etc if you have any queries about these please get in touch with a member of the GOS committee who will be happy to explain them to you.

At the Three Counties, there's two shows to enter so don't miss out. The main show for all breeds is on Friday and Saturday and then there's a brand new show on Sunday for Rare & Minority breeds with different judges and a chance to do better than you did two days earlier—it happens!

Make sure you read the schedule of the show relating to pigs; some shows have rules about sows having had so many litters, gilts being in pig and boars to have fathered X amount of litters so read up the rules page, there will also be information regarding the identification of your pigs and about the AML requirements. You will generally find all this information just before the list of classes. The larger county shows may seem daunting at first and you may prefer to just visit these and watch and then start at a couple of your local one day shows where the classes are a bit less formal but no less serious and you can gain experience without the added pressure of being away from your holding/farm for a few days.

Once you've decided which show and which of your pigs you would



A January gilt class at the late-lamented Royal Show 2009. Photos by Richard Lutwyche

like to enter, you will need to fill in the entry form; some shows now allow you to do this on-line, whilst others use a paper entry form. Check the entry closing dates carefully so as not to miss them - lots of people make their entries close to the wire so as to maximize their choice of pigs but most of us know well in advance which pigs we will be using for the forthcoming season. When you fill in the forms you will need to have at hand your pig's pedigree name, its date of birth, its registration & ear number and also those of its parents. Not all shows ask for the same information so it's worth making a 'show file' in which you can have copies of pedigrees, keep all your show schedules and to keep all your tick-

ets, directions, vehicle passes, numbers & programmes in when they start to arrive a couple of weeks before each show. We use a binder filled with clear wallets and slide each show into an individual wallet, label it and that way we don't get mixed up. Once your entry form is filled in, check over it and make out the appropriate

Remember that one of your Member benefits is automatic Public Liability Insurance covering your pigs while at a show in the UK. Some shows insist that you show proof of such insurance in which case you can request a copy of the document from the Club (£5 admin charge). Otherwise, it's one thing less to worry about and if you go for your own cover from the likes of NFU Mutual, expect to pay a premium running into hundreds of pounds!

cheque or pay by card on-line, make a copy for yourself so you know what you've entered or print off from an on-line entry and add to your growing file.

Now you've made those entries it's time to start training those pigs! Each showman will have their own method of training pigs and when they start with them. We first of all separate our selected show pigs from the rest of their siblings. If you're going to do a lot of shows you will need to speak to your vet regarding an isolation unit (we use a separate stable block and yard for ours) and your show team will live in there throughout the season. Our show pigs also get a slightly increased

ration of food (full 6lb per day + extra veg/fruit) as judges like to see them quite rounded; exercising helps them produce muscle and strengthen their legs.

We keep our show pigs in pairs and start walking them out individually at about 12 weeks old, we usually have our board and stick with us but for the main part it's just used as an occasional stop board or for gentle guidance, at this stage we just want them to get used to walking alone with us, most of the time we lead and they trot along behind often chewing our stick or have a gloriously giddy gallop off into the horizon! As time progresses set up a miniature show ring if you can and get your team walking in a clockwise direction, you need to be on their left side with your board and your stick in the right hand (a bit of a nuisance if you're left handed!), both tools are for guiding and controlling your pig. Practice walking out as often as you can, a sharp tap of the stick under the chin or on the shoulder will keep them in line so they learn that you are boss. We do not use or approve the use of punishment as a tool to teach pigs. We train our pigs in fairly short sessions as the pigs get bored or decide to riot! Twenty minutes two or three times a day if you can for each pig you plan to show and don't forget boars requires two competent handlers to show them.

Starting with just a July and a January gilt is a good idea until you feel more confident. It is time consuming and can be frustrating, some pigs just don't like showing but we find by spending time with our show team and fussing them, ours all have pet names, they do become more socialized and enjoy the attention. Ours are also trained to the rattle of the feed bucket so that if they do decide to make a run for it during a show they can always be coaxed back by the sound of the bucket!

99% of all training should be before the show rather than expecting the pig to learn at the show though tolerance towards January born pigs is usually exercised. You do learn as you show and at most shows the judge may come to you to tell you why your pig won/failed, in his/her opinion, which is usually good, impartial criticism and useful for future shows. The main thing is to enjoy your showing and go in at a level that suits you. Three Counties is a great place to start.

