

Good Gray Color by Theresa (Kortbein) Schwandt, printed in the April/May/June 2006 issue

It never ceases to amaze me, all of the variations on gray color. Being a breeder of gray Dutch myself, I take notice of this at local and national shows alike. You have your grays that are too dark and your grays that are lighter, some that have no ring color and then you get that gray with ring color that jumps out and bites you.

As much as I don't want to be bitten, I love a gray with some good ring color. There is just something eye catching about a sleeked up, properly colored gray Dutch!

So how does one get good color on their grays?? I am by no means an expert on the subject, but even so, I do have my opinions about it. (I am a bit opinionated, anyone that knows me will attest to that.)

First off I breed only good colored gray to good colored gray. I realize that some breeders use gold and maybe even torts to get better color. I have never tried this so I really cannot comment on whether or not it works. The breeders that do utilize those colors to help improve the gray color, say it works. Maybe someday I will try it, (I myself do not have torts, but I have connections and could find a tort to use if needed) but for now I stick to breeding gray x gray.

When I say that I use good colored grays, basically nice definition of ring is an absolute must and that ring must be carried over the top of the back as well. If the gray is going to lack ring color, it will be on the top of the back.

I also look at the underside of the animal. It seems to me that if the animal's undercut can be seen without blowing into the fur to visualize undercut placement, this is an indication that the rabbits will have better color. Maybe I am way off here, but I am noticing in my herd that the better colored animals will have an undercut that is easily visualized without blowing into the fur. I would love to hear other's opinions on this. Also, I like a more rufus colored Dutch as this seems to accentuate the intermediate band and make it wider and brighter.

Another aspect of gray color is fur length. I have heard other breeders' comment about having longer fur in the gray color to get better color. I believe that it is true, but I also think that one has to be cautious not to get too long of a coat which will spoil the sharpness of the markings. Again, as with most things you have a fine line to walk and it is one heck of a balancing act.

Gray color should not be assessed during a molt because an animal with very good color may have terrible color while in molt.

I start looking at my gray bunnies for color as soon as they start coming out of the nest box. From experience with my gray herd, if you can see ring color at 5-6 weeks of age, then they will usually have better color later as well. I will usually cull out bunnies at the weaning age if they have no ring color and poor surface color. They may develop good color later, but probably not.

Breeding grays with good color is not only challenging, but very rewarding as well. We all need to work toward better, more proper color to improve our Dutch. There shouldn't be such a variation in our gray color in the future if we continue to work to improve it. I would love to hear other's thoughts on this topic as well.