

MICE-ELLANY by Tony Cooke

Joys of a partnership

I THINK that most fanciers would accept that Gill and I represent one of the few true functioning partnerships in the mouse Fancy. We are both active fanciers—a point which Jack Wormald made in his excellent 'Who's who in the Fancy' series a few years ago. But it goes further than that. Because of the nature of my job I would be unable to remain an active fancier if Gill was not one also. I am an industrial chemist by profession and my work can take me anywhere, literally anywhere in the world for one to three weeks at a time, sometimes at very short notice. There's no way that I could maintain a reasonable stud singlehanded in those circumstances.

Then there is the question of running open shows. In early March, when it looked as though we might not have a mouse section at the Nottingham Championship show I offered to step in and act as show secretary for the show. No trips were scheduled, no problems anticipated. Yet here I am, on the Wednesday before the show sitting writing this article (in a slack moment) in a chemical factory in Southern Canada—and it's snowing and blowing a blizzard outside.

Meanwhile, although it's 4 pm here I know that it is 10 pm back home in Petersfield and Gill has been dealing with all the entries for next weekend's show in my absence, sending off pen labels, putting entries in the book and onto the judging sheets, etc. and generally coping.

Mainly about Tans

INGRAM DAVIES says he does not want to upset Tan breeders but his comments do not help. If fanciers only select their mice for top colour, tan and feet colour as suggested by Ingram Davies then I wouldn't be at all surprised to find bad type in all Tans. Being more realistic, all litters of all breeds have some mice of better type. It may not be a large improvement but it will be a steady gradual improvement. All good fanciers will almost certainly pick the mice with better type for the breeding pen, even allowing a small disadvantage in other factors.

Getting back to Tans. I think it is all relative. Some Tans—notably silvers and blues—have as good a type as their Self counterparts or at least not a lot worse. But try comparing the type of a black Tan to a Self Black. In a large proportion of times you would find the Tan has the better type. In conclusion I would suggest some very good type Tans have been shown and still are being shown. In the south at least, there appears to be a shortage of Tans at the present. This being so, it is not surprising a few are being shown that may not have excellent type.

Changing the subject—isn't it amazing how easy it is to accumulate a large selection of different breeds of mice without really trying? Recently I went through my shed with an eye to cutting down the mice to a more reasonable number. Apart from my stud of Tans (black, chocolate, dove) I also had a stud of Argentines. Associated with these there were a few silver Tans, Pink-eyed Whites, Self Silvers and Chins.

As a sideline I have a few Creams and a few Pearls (more of these later). I had already disposed of my blue Tans and my silver Tans not too long ago. The trouble appears to be that I cannot resist most varieties of mice. If anyone offers me mice I find it very difficult to refuse. Anyway I did manage to cut down the mice but that is another story.

As mentioned above I had acquired a few Pearls from, as it happens, several different sources. They were acquired as 'Silver Greys'. They were very dark with good ticking and were shown successfully as Silver Greys. The mice were very prolific but as the youngsters grew more and more were getting lighter and lighter. At this point I stopped exhibiting them but continued to breed from them, trying to get them more even. On close examination the under coat was also getting lighter. They were now approaching Pearls. At this point in time they are really quite presentable, a typical specimen having an even top with good tipping. The mice could be a shade or two lighter to good effect but it makes you wonder how the original 'Silver Greys' were produced. One unusual feature is that they are reasonably handleable, unlike most Pearls.

An item of southern news. At the last table show of the London and Southern Counties Mouse Club it was very pleasant to see one of our more senior members get best in show with a very nice Cream. Obviously, as anyone on the receiving end of his judging would realise, our Mr Eric Smith knows his mice. It was not that long ago that he started up again with Creams.

It's nearly time for the agricultural shows again—back to the hot stuffy tents, swarms of assorted insects, hordes of kids with sticky fingers, and above all mud. Still would we be without it all?

GEOFF SQUIBB

Fortunately things are going well here at the factory and my job is just about wrapped up. I get on a plane at 8 pm tomorrow night and should land back in England around 10.30 on Friday morning in time for a few hours in bed and then to take over the reins again. But without a fancier wife none of this would be possible and the mouse Fancy would not have had a Nottingham Championship show this year.

So I took David Montgomery to task when I saw him at Doncaster for writing that my ambition was to win the Mendel Gold Cup with a Dutch—that's one of our targets! We believe that it is achievable and were delighted to see our Dutch (and bucks at that) taking 1, 2, 3, in the 'best marked type' class at the last London Championship Show.

Ambition

I think that it is important to have ambition and targets as a fancier—something to work towards. On the first page of our FUR & FEATHER scrapbook, dated 1966, is an article by Ernie Higgs. In it he tells of his desire to win all of the NMC cup shows. At the time that I stuck that cutting in the book we had never won a first prize. Starting with Brokens it took us two years to get our first red card at an open show. But in those early days we could see the dizzy heights that were there to be climbed—and we could see a number of 'intermediate' targets.

Initially it was our first red card, then to win a best in section (best Marked) and then best Marked with a Rump-White (at that time a new and rather under-nourished breed). And always looking up higher, towards a best in show, or perhaps a specific class or cup, or to win an NMC cup show best in show. We find now, thirteen years on, that we are two-thirds of the way towards Ernie Higgs's objective, have taken Bradford Championship, the NMC spring cup show and the London Championship. Which means that we must strive even harder to win best in show at the NMC summer cup show and Annual show.

And we still have other targets—like the Mendel Gold Cup with a Dutch as David M mentioned, or establishing some dramatic Tricolours (like the cavies) or winning all five sections at an open show, and a few less optimistic ones. Think about it and set yourself a target or two for the coming year. Take an unpopular or uncommon breed and develop and improve it until you are getting winners and people are coming to you for stock (like John Kellett has done with Pearls and Silver Greys).

Travel

Looking out of the window I find that two inches of snow has arrived in the last hour whilst I was writing the above part of this article. It occurs to me that I might pen a few thoughts and observations on Canada—a country that I am working in for the first time. Indeed, I think that in my future articles for FUR & FEATHER I will include a small section sharing some of the experiences and my observations in some of the countries I have had to visit. For I have been fortunate enough to have visited or worked in more than thirty countries—some grotty, some fabulous, some hot, cold, some rich, many poor, but each different from the next one. Take Canada for example.

Canada

My first impression was one of immenseness. Vancouver on the West Coast of Canada is further from the Eastern cities than London is! You get some feeling for the scale of the country from the air because the route goes down the line of the gigantic St Lawrence Seaway from Nova Scotia to the populated areas. Of course from November to March the seaway is frozen—even though it is miles wide. Indeed, most of the Great Lakes freeze completely during the winter months when temperatures regularly reach minus twenty degrees to minus thirty degrees. The Lakes are vast fresh water inland seas—Lake Ontario (by no means the biggest), close to the

factory, is more than 200 miles long and 60 wide. Scotland would vanish in it without trace.

I found some strong United States influences. For example, more than thirteen TV channels! Jet-lag plays tricks on you and I was up at 5 am on my first morning in Canada, so just out of curiosity I turned on the television whilst I was running a bath. At that time in the morning there were no less than six stations putting out programmes. There was a sports programme, one on Montgomery's North Africa campaign, cartoons, a religious programme, a woman's keep fit and a cash and prizes quiz show with people rushing around all over the studio!

In the summer months the weather is good and the area between Toronto and Niagara is known as the 'banana belt'. Not that bananas grow there, but certainly cherries and vines do in profusion and local Canadian wines are produced—something I had not appreciated. There are a significant number of European immigrants now settled in Canada—Poles, Armenians, Yugoslavs and Latvians and these all add a dimension of their own. You see green-domed Eastern Orthodox churches with their Makarios-type priests (bearded, dressed in black flowing robes with tall black chimneytop hats). Or you are fed on Polish-style 'cabbage rolls' or the very dark, almost black, German bread.

And houses are different. They all have underground basements which provide superb games/TV rooms for the kids, utility rooms for the freezer, washing machine, central heating boiler, etc. plus masses of storage space for everything from skis and skates to apples or home made jams or pickles. They would make perfect mouseries.

Above ground double-glazing and minimum ten inches of roof insulation protect against bitter winters. Strangely enough the very deep snowdrifts provide insulation and protection from the elements for the local mouse population. They thrive and breed under the snow, doing considerable damage to plants and to the bark of trees in some areas.

Well, there it is—a very brief potted view of one week in one part of Canada—by no means representative of the country as a whole of course. In my next article I will look at El Salvador in Central America.

Ailments in hamsters (Part 1)

Dennis Homes

HAMSTERS ARE quite hardy little creatures and, provided they are fed a well balanced diet and adequate measures of hygiene are observed, their health will present few problems. With many diseases prevention is far better than cure. Cages should be cleaned out at least once a week and washed in a mild antiseptic such as Savlon Hospital Concentrate. Greenfood and root vegetable should not be allowed to stay in the cages for too long as they soon go bad. Fouled grain should also be removed.

A sudden loss of weight is often the first indication of something being wrong, so it is good policy to handle each of your hamsters daily. You should inspect the animal's vent each day to ensure that there is no diarrhoea. Faeces in the cage should also be looked at. They should be slightly moist when first passed and harden very quickly. By doing this regularly diarrhoea and constipation can be corrected before the condition becomes too serious.

First signs

At the first sign of illness a hamster will go off its food and sit in a hunched up position. Ears are usually held back and the eyes appear dull. The coat becomes open and the animal looks in a very sorry state. If you find a hamster in this condition then the first thing that you must do is isolate it from the rest of your stock. Sawdust and bedding should be disposed of and the cage thoroughly disinfected. Once fresh bedding has been added the cage should be brought into a warm room that is free from draughts. If you are unable to diagnose what is wrong the animal should be taken to a veterinary surgeon as soon as possible. Make sure that you thoroughly wash your hands, preferably with an

antiseptic, before attempting to handle anymore of your stock.

Abscesses

These are usually caused by bacteria entering an open wound that may have resulted from the animal fighting or cutting itself. At the first sign of a wound the area should be thoroughly cleaned with TCP, preferably before it has had a chance to close up. The cage should be cleaned out to lessen the chance of bacterial infection. Abscesses sometimes develop on the hip spots and also on the mammary glands of the females. One of the nastiest types of abscess are those that develop inside the cheek pouch. This is often the result of a sharp object cutting the membrane and as there is no saliva there to cleanse the wound and the animal is unable to lick the area, infection develops rapidly.

Obviously prevention is the best medicine. Hamsters should be separated by the age of six weeks and sharp objects should never be allowed in the cage. Only soft hay should be used for bedding, as of course hay is likely to cause abrasions. Crushed oats should be fed in preference to whole oats, as the latter can also abrade the pouches. If an abscess is discovered the animal should be taken to a veterinary surgeon, who may prescribe penicillin or tetracyclin to kill the bacteria.

Cannibalism

The devouring of a litter by the mother is an unpleasant facet that prevails among a great many rodents. At one time it was widely believed that to feed a hamster meat would give it the taste for blood and thus increase the chances of cannibalism. This theory, however, seems most unlikely because the act of

cannibalism bears no resemblance to the instinct of feeding.

Just prior to the birth of a litter a hormone is released into the body which, as well as causing the physical changes necessary to ensure a normal birth, also transmits a genetically controlled message to the brain that causes the mother to act instinctively in certain directions. This action causes the mother to deliver each baby, chew away the umbilical cord, eat the placenta and lick the baby clean. This is nature's way of survival. The cleaning of the young stimulates the heart and respiratory system, and the eating of the placenta recycles valuable nutrient back into the mother's body. It also destroys any strong smell that may attract predators. Sometimes outside influences put a great deal of stress on a mother and, in a state of anxiety, she goes through the 'cleaning up' process for a second time. This time, however, she mistakes her babies for the placenta and eats them.

Cannibalism has been found to be stronger among certain strains than others. The tendency is also partly inherited. When a litter is due care should be taken not to startle or alarm the mother in any way. The mother's feeling of security should, in fact, start long before a litter is expected. If she is handled frequently and becomes tame and used to noises then she will be far less likely to suffer any stress during the crucial birth period.

Sometimes a mother will eat just one or two babies from a litter and then quite happily proceed to feed and nurse the rest. This is usually because she has given birth to a litter that is too large for her body resources to handle and her distress signals the act of 'placenta eating' to begin again. The process of natural selection seems to take over in these circumstances, as she usually only devours the weakest of the litter.