



PUREBRED EXHIBITION OR PRODUCTION/COMMERCIAL?

“CLEARING UP THE CONFUSION”



Single Comb White Leghorns. Commercial-hatchery type on left. Exhibition Purebred type on right.
Photo compliments of Cindy Kinard.



Large fowl Jersey Giants. Hatchery type on left, Exhibition Purebred on right.
Photo compliments of Sher Jennings.

Here's an example of the difference between a Jersey Giant HEN that was purchased as a chick from the feed store, and a Jersey Giant PULLET purchased as a chick from a good breeder. Both birds had been raised in optimal facilities, and received the best care and feed. This picture was taken at a show and the youth gave us permission to share it. The story has a happy ending. He was picked up by a breeder who agreed to sponsor him with birds and mentorship. This youth has had birds on Champion Row at every show he's entered ever since.

“Why was my bird disqualified for being a commercial?”, “What’s the difference between a commercial and a purebred?” “The sign at the feed store said purebred.” “But, my chicken is so pretty...”

These are just a few of the questions that need to be answered for the beginning poultry exhibitor.

Purebred exhibition birds, commercial layers and commercial meat birds all have their place in the many county and state fairs across this country. These fairs are where most birds are exhibited by 4-H, FFA youth and poultry enthusiasts and thus are enjoyed by all. Without poultry exhibitors, some in the public would never see a live chicken, duck, goose, turkey or guinea. Because the general public is not “poultry savvy”, it is our duty as exhibitors to be correct when we enter our birds. Nothing is more confusing to the public than to see a coop card that has “DQ” written on it.

Usually one will first realize that there is a problem when filling out the show or fair entry form. “Is my bird a purebred exhibition, a commercial layer, or a commercial meat bird?”

To answer this often asked question, let’s take a look at these very different areas and how to enter them properly.

PUREBRED EXHIBITION

These are birds that are bred especially for the sake of being pure in their lineage and are held to certain standards that are outlined in great detail by the 2 world-wide organizations: The American Poultry Association and The Bantam Association. These two organizations have created the standards for each pure breed of bird and have published them in their guide books. They continue to make careful decisions when new breeds or varieties apply for acceptance.

The American Poultry Association, (APA) was organized in Buffalo, New York in 1873, making it the oldest animal association in the US. Through the years they have published a book called “American Standard of Perfection”. This book details through pictures and written words what each breed and variety of chicken, duck, goose, turkey and guinea should look like. It lists all of the defects and disqualifications for each breed. This book is what Judges use it to determine the best bird in a show, breeders use to know breed types, buyers use it to know which bird they should purchase and showmanship participants use it to learn everything they can about their particular breed. If one owns, breeds or shows poultry of any type, this book is a must.

In 1917 a group of bantam poultry breeders met and formed the American Bantam Association, (ABA). This group has dedicated its membership to bantam enthusiasts and publishes a detailed guide book called, “Bantam Standard”. This book is the ultimate guide for anyone choosing to show bantam chickens or ducks as it is the one that judges use when determining the winner of a show. It tells what the breeds should look like and lists all of the defects and disqualification of each one. Breeders, buyers, and showmanship participants use it as a guide for all these activities. If you do any of these, this book is a must-have.

The APA Standard includes large fowl and bantam chickens, waterfowl, turkeys and guineas. The ABA standard describes only bantam chickens and ducks. They also include some breeds and varieties of bantams that have not been approved by the APA. While all of this sounds confusing, it really is not in the showroom as the judges will handle all of that. These books are like the bible for poultry and like the Bible, they will do you no good if left unread.

When purchasing a purebred bird to show for the first time, the surest way to buy quality and not get “duped” is to attend an open poultry show of some size, say over 300 birds, look at all of the birds on display, decide on a breed you like, get the show list, find the exhibitor and talk. Exhibitors are usually thrilled to see someone express an interest in their birds and will be a great resource to you; even better, talk to several. Do not be afraid to ask about defects, disqualifications and how the exhibitor places at shows. **HINT:** *First time buyers should never buy from the feed store, order from a hatchery catalog, buy on-line or buy from an auction until you are much more familiar with the breeds and the standards. The safest way to make your first purchase of a purebred bird should be from a reputable breeder in a face to face meeting.*

Taking the time to study the breed standards and becoming familiar with common diseases and parasites are such important steps for any exhibitor. They cannot be emphasized too much, yet are often overlooked.

When showing a purebred bird at any show, make sure it matches either standard as closely as possible. Most chicks purchased from a farm store or catalogs do not meet the “standard” for purebred poultry. Go point by point and compare your bird to the standards...feather pattern, feather color, eye color, comb type, slope of back, tail set, etc. When you are satisfied that your bird does match and that it has nothing that would disqualify it

from being shown, then enter it as a purebred in the show. Remember, the bird with the fewest defects will be the winner of the show....and yes, judges do know the standards.

These birds can be large fowl, bantams, waterfowl, turkeys, or guineas and should be at least 5 months old. *Some breeds mature later and are not ready for showing until they are much older.* The breeder you purchased them from can help answer this question. Yes, they lay eggs, but they are not commercial egg layers and yes, you can eat them but, they are not as tasty or as tender as you would expect. On a fair entry form, these birds should be listed in the purebred area, never in the commercial section. If you enter them correctly, the show staff will have your cage ready and in the proper area when you arrive.

COMMERCIAL EGG LAYERS

Egg production birds are ones that have been bred to lay heavily in any condition. They are used by the commercial industry as well as home flocks for laying large eggs. The most common breed of commercial layer is the white leghorn. Because this breed is sold in feed stores and hatcheries across the country and is listed in the APA American Standard of Pfection as a purebred, a great deal of confusion exists. But the purebred type and the commercial type are worlds apart. The purebred birds have been selectively bred for many years to conform to certain standards....commercial birds, although the same breed, have been selectively bred for production. Therefore, the body types of these two are very different. The exhibition leghorns are large and long, full breasted, and possess wider and deeper bodies. The commercial leghorns have been bred over the years to have smaller bodies yet have large abdominal cavities well suited for heavy egg production. They have the ability to lay 300+ large white eggs a year on minimal amounts of feed; regular laying machines.

Commercial brown egg layers are generally specialized cross-bred birds that go by any number of names: red sex-link, black sex-link, sil-go-link, red star, comet, Rhode Island Red, etc. Many of these names have been chosen by companies to distinguish their own personal breed of brown egg layers from other companies' birds. Most of the confusion for exhibitors and from the public comes from the Rhode Island Red breed. Remember that purebred exhibition birds have been selectively bred for many years for exhibition and they possess the qualities that are listed in the standards while the commercial strains have been selectively bred for heavy egg production and do not possess the qualities that would allow them to shown in a purebred class. *Many feed stores sell and hatchery catalogs carry "purebred Rhode Island Reds" when in fact they are the commercial strain and not exhibition birds at all.* The commercial types are shorter bodied, more round, are orange to red orange feathering and many times have black or white flecks on their feathers. The purebred exhibition Rhode Island Reds are long, rectangular, and have a very deep mahogany coloring with black tails. The commercial types are very heavy layers of the beautiful and much coveted large to jumbo brown eggs. Because these birds eat more, and require more space to keep, their eggs cost more. It is simply a matter of economics.

All commercial type layers should be entered in the commercial section of the show and never entered as an exhibition purebred. They should also be in production (laying) at the time of showing....remember this is a commercial class and their commercial value is egg production. The judge is judging these birds on abdominal capacity for production...so they should be young, laying, healthy, alert, clean disease free and parasite free, and have a large abdominal cavity. The judge will not be using either standard to judge these birds; production is the name of the game here.

Although some fairs will allow male entries of some commercial breeds, it is the female that is the real competitor. These birds are large fowl only as bantams lay smaller eggs and have no commercial value.

There are many other breeds of chickens that are popular with backyard poultry lovers that want some pretty layers running in the yard. They are pretty chickens but remember, they usually are not show birds if you get them from other places than an exhibition purebred poultry breeder. Some of the most popular are Dominique's (sometimes called Dominiquers, they have a rosecomb that is completely different from a Plymouth Rock although they look similar to the untrained eye), Plymouth Rocks (sometimes called Barred Rocks due to the stripes on the feathers and they have a single straight comb), Orpington's (a pretty buff color), Brahmas (a pretty black & white). Then there are the "funky" looking chickens such as Polish (they have a funky hat or crest on the top of their head), Langshans that have feathers on their feet, Faverolles (they have 5 toes, ear muffs & a beard, feathers on their feet

& a multitude of colors in their feathers), Speckled Sussex (they have white spots all over their mahogany colored feathers).

Don't get confused. These are beautiful birds but unless you get them from an exhibition purebred breeder they MIGHT NOT be show birds that meet the "standard" of the American Poultry Association and they are not a commercial breed that is used on layer farms to put eggs in the grocery store so many fairs won't allow them to be shown in the commercial production class.

COMMERCIAL MEAT PENS

Some shows allow exhibitors to show poultry meat pens. These are crossbred birds that have been bred for extremely fast growth on minimal amounts of feed. Historically they were bred from the white Cornish and the white Plymouth Rock breeds but have long since become a much different type of bird. They are white feathered because of the pigment that can be left on the carcass after slaughter. Dark feathers leave dark spots where each feather was plucked whereas white feathers leave no markings on the carcass.

The actual breeding lines of the commercial hatcheries that deal with these birds are closely guarded. These birds provide the world with so many ready and reasonably priced products: Cornish game hens, fryers, lunch meat, chicken strips, ground products, parts and pieces and roasters. Fast food vendors rely heavily on these products. All of this comes from the same birds; we just harvest them at different ages. The Cornish game hens are actually only 4 weeks old at harvest, while the oldest bird is only 12 weeks old when they are harvested for the large oven roasters. All of the other poultry products that we consume are harvested between these ages. These birds cannot be allowed to get older because of their body weight. They can actually grow so large that their legs cannot support their body and they can no longer stand.

These birds are sold as meat birds at feed stores and from hatcheries all of the time and make an excellent food source for anyone desiring to raise their own meat and fill their freezers. Ideal harvest time is between 5 and 7 weeks when a dressed bird will weigh 2 ½ to 3 lbs.

When a fair allows a showing of meat pens they generally will provide all of the exhibitors with 10 or so day old chicks 6-7 weeks before the fair. The exhibitor is responsible for all areas of raising these birds and then will return to the fair with 3 to 5 birds to enter in a "meat pen". While these birds must be clean and healthy, they are basically judged on the amount of meat that can be harvested from each one.

When entering this type of show, use your widest and meatiest birds and try to match them so that they all look alike. It is not usually advised to mix pullets with cockerels in the same show pen because of size differences. Again, make sure that these birds are healthy, clean and alert. The largest, meatiest, clean and most well matched entry will be the winner.

These birds are to be entered in a meat exhibit only...never in a purebred exhibition or a commercial egg production class. Remember, they are only 12 weeks old at the final harvest, so they never lay eggs. Properly entering your birds not only proves that you are knowledgeable and the general public is educated about poultry. This is a win-win situation.

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