

From the Archives — How the Breeds were Viewed

The following extracts and illustrations are taken from Pigs and Bacon Curing by R E Davies published by Crosby Lockwood and Son in 1923. They show how a number of our breeds were viewed over 80 years ago with regard to the bacon market.

The Middle White

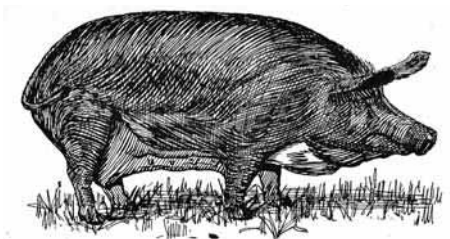


The Middle White is really a cross between the Large White and Small White, and is a most useful pig, inheriting points of quality from both the last-named breeds.

Early maturity and extreme docility are two of the most important characteristics of the breed. They are profitable and economical, growing fine grained, lean meat, which is very well distributed throughout the carcase, and they put on flesh at a lower cost for feeding than does their bigger relatives, the Large Whites. These animals are prolific, and both healthy and hardy. They breed very true to type, and although some prefer them for porkers rather than for bacon pigs, they are very suitable adapted for either purpose. When crossed with the common pigs that are ordinarily found in so many sties they greatly improve the progeny by producing quick growing, rapid fattening, and cheaply fed pigs. Pedigree Middle Whites often throw very small litters of not more than five or six, while a cross with the Large White, Large Black or Berkshire will produce a litter of ten or twelve.

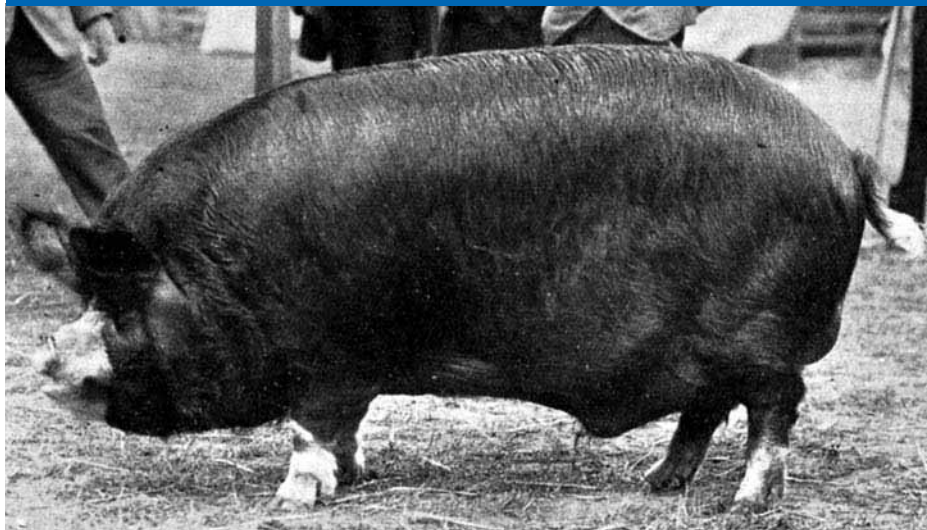
The Tamworth

The characteristics of this pig are as follows: Colour, whole and rich sandy, and size of carcase a good deal above the average; the head, body, and legs are long; the jowls are light; snout, long; back somewhat narrow; ribs, deep and flat; hide rather thick, but has a kind touch, and the bristles well cover and protect the skin. It grows rapidly under generous treatment, but is quite capable of roughing it a bit if needed. Tamworths are mostly at home in Staffordshire, but are



The Tamworth

The Berkshire



found dotted about in all parts of England. As breeders, there are no better mothers; few as good. They bring big farrows and suckle them well. For pork the race excel.

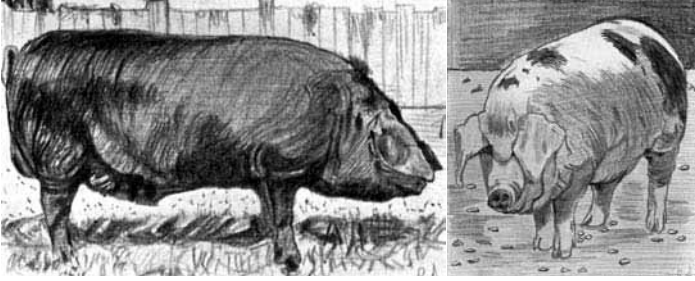
The youngsters come to early maturity, and when ready for market are much admired by butchers, because they cut a good proportion of lean to fat. As with pork, so with bacon in Tamworth pigs properly fattened, there is a maximum of lean to the fat, and these middle of England hogs are much in favour for bacon factories, where the curers will have the best. This breed has the distinction of being reputed to be the oldest pure race of pigs in England. A light shade of hair suggests too much Yorkshire blood, which was used to improve the slow maturity of the old Tamworths. So useful are these red pigs that in the Midlands they are very popular with all classes of pig keepers, from farmers to cottagers. It is greatly in their favour that they are so hardy and sound in constitution, being so nearly related to the wild boar. Cold and generally bad weather does not affect them, and for this reason they are specially suited to the conditions of the open-air system of pig breeding and rearing. Tamworths cross satisfactorily with almost every kind of British swine. Perhaps the Large Whites are the least desirable sort to blend. They add prolificacy to the Berkshires, and they add size; they give quality and constitution to the Middle Whites; they fine down the grain of the meat in the Large Blacks. The Tamworth and Berkshire cross is superior to the pure Tamworth, though perhaps

the bacon of the latter is better than any other breed – at least that is the opinion of some breeders.

The Berkshire

“The Farmer’s Encyclopædia” of 1842 mentions the following qualities of this pig: “Activity, combined with strong digestive and assimilating powers; hence they return a maximum amount of flesh and fat for the food consumed. The sows are unequalled for prolificacy, and are careful nurses and good sucklers. The pigs are strong, smart, and active at birth, and consequently less liable to mishaps. They can be fattened for market at any time, while they may be fed to any reasonable weight desired, their flesh is the highest quality of pork. The power of the animal to transmit the valuable qualities of the breed to its progeny when used as a cross. Their unsurpassed uniformity of colour, marking, and quality.”

For turning the smallest quantity of food into the largest amount of best quality meat, the Berkshire pig excels. It holds the same rank among pigs as the Southdown does among sheep. For lean meat it cannot be surpassed, even by the Tamworth. Some object to it because, by injudicious feeding, it occasionally becomes too fat for the fashionable taste, and it has been described as “an animated bladder of lard,” though the Berkshire pig is not to blame for this. It is entirely the fault of the feeder. If kept till eight or nine months old in good store condition, and then fed on barley meal for a few weeks just

The Large Black, Gloucestershire Old Spots

to harden the flesh, it will produce an unrivalled side of bacon. For supplying small joints of pork the Berkshire is also a capital breed. If there is any drawback to the Berkshire it is in connection with some of the pedigree stock, the first litters of which are often very small in number; but when once a good type of sow is secured this proves as prolific as most other breeds, and on the average a good class Berkshire sow will have ten or twelve pigs, and be capable of doing them all well. Crossed with the Tamworth, the Berkshire produces a very useful bacon pig, with a larger proportion of lean flesh than the pure Black possesses.

The Large Black

These pigs seem to possess the qualities required to meet the growing tendencies in the market of inquiries for lean meat. They have exceedingly good hams, long deep sides, good loins, and comparatively light shoulders and neck. They do well running rough, as they are good grass feeders, and eat up house and garden refuse readily; consequently, they form plenty of lean flesh, and, when put in to fatten, do very well and add weight rapidly, with but small outlay in meals, etc., containing more than the usual proportion of lean, and, if carefully slaughtered, make good carcasses.

This breed attains a great length of body at an early age, which is

maintained throughout growth, combined with gradual filling out of the whole substance towards the back parts. The Large Black produces very good quality bacon, but for pork the youngsters are inclined to continue making growth rather than fat, with the result that they cannot be fattened until growth has been to some extent completed. The Large Black crosses remarkably well with the Berkshire. A Large Black sow crossed with a Middle White boar produces very useful pigs for the production of bacon, and can be finished off at 10 to 12 score lb., a weight which is most appreciated by bacon curers; in fact, where pigs are cured for home consumption it is not advisable to have them much heavier than this, as the day has passed when pigs were killed on the farm at the weight of 20 or even 24 score lb.

Some bacon curers object to black breeds of pigs, as they think the side of bacon from a white pig has a more pleasing appearance. But there are large curers who maintain they can make the carcase of a black pig, after burning and dressing, look quite the same as that of a white one. A black, spotty discolouration of the milk ducts in the belly, known as "seedy cut," is frequently seen in black pigs, though white pigs seldom show this defect. It can, however, be eliminated by discarding the pigs of any breed so marked, and breeders should endeavour to produce pigs free from this blemish, which causes considerable loss every year to both curer and provision dealer.

Other Breeds

The Wessex Saddleback and Gloucester Old Spot (sic) are breeds which have come to the front considerably of recent years, mainly by the efforts of societies formed to introduce them to more general notice than was possible when kept by a relatively small number of breeders. They are essentially bacon pigs, and as such are deserving of the attention which they are now receiving.



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