

Judging Longfin – The Evolution Continues

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Background Information

In the November/December 2006 issue of KOI USA, Ray Jordan and Peter Ponzio, working with the AKCA, wrote an article that was intended to be a first step toward defining judging standards for Longfin. This article was followed-up by a presentation by Ray and Peter at the AKCA seminar in Phoenix, AZ., in June of 2007. The current article is intended to continue the development of the standard for Longfin. We will use the convention of referring to these fish as Longfin, and will use this word for both the singular and plural case for these fish. In addition, we intend that the term Longfin be used to describe fish that have been known variously as Longfin Carp, Longfin, Butterfly, and Dragons.

To summarize what we've agreed upon as a judging/hobbyist group, we have decided that Longfin, like ginrin koi, should have extra emphasis placed on the unique characteristics of the type of fish. In the case of Longfin, that characteristic is fin development. That is not to say that the other attributes of the fish should be ignored. In fact, we have stated that attributes of a koi should be emphasized. Following in importance after the finnage characteristic, we recommend that the fish should be of an identifiable variety (that is Kohaku, Sanke, Showa, and so forth); and that the fish should follow the guidelines for conformation, color, deportment and pattern, in place for varieties of koi.

In developing a guideline for finnage considerations, we have emphasized that fins should be proportional to the size of the fish. Excessive, deformed, badly frayed or thin fins should be avoided; rather the emphasis should be on how the fins complement the balance of the fish. It is important to remember that as any Longfin matures, the edges of the fins tend to become frayed. This normal fraying can be quite attractive, and it is only when the fins become torn, damaged or excessively long that fins will detract from the appearance of the fish. In our earlier papers, we recommended that the length of the fish be measured from the head to the tail stop, which is the area where the caudal peduncle joins the tail fin. We have recommended that conformation should be similar to that of traditional koi and that long or thin body shapes be avoided. In the area of deportment, we have emphasized that Longfin should have a graceful, elegant swimming motion that complements the flowing fins seen on these fish; jerky or hurried swimming movement detracts from the overall elegance associated with Longfin. Colors should be intense, deep and fully developed; "thin" or uneven patches of color are to be avoided. Pattern, as within koi varieties, is the least important of the criteria for selecting and judging koi and thus the same standard holds true for Longfin. Having said this, patterns should be clean and well defined with as little blotching or smudging as possible.

Having summarized the current state of the standard, it is fair to say that some confusion exists on how to purchase and judge these fish; hence the need for further clarification. In order to provide additional guidance on purchasing and judging these fish, we recommend that Longfin judging be related to current traditional koi judging standards as nearly as possible. To that end this article will focus on judging Longfin in two groups: the first group would encompass sizes one through three (typically up to 15 to 16"); the second group would encompass sizes four through six (greater than 15-16").

Current practice in separating koi into these two sizing groups developed out of a series of lectures presented by Toshio Sakai, where he explained the differences in judging/appreciation for young koi versus mature koi. Greater emphasis in young koi is given to color, deportment and pattern, and less emphasis placed on conformation. Conversely, in mature koi, the body tends to increase in volume, so that conformation becomes more important; and deportment, color, and pattern, are proportionately less critical. Criteria for judging young koi would follow an “approximate” distribution as follows:

1st consideration - Color

2nd consideration - Deportment

3rd consideration - Pattern

Final consideration - Conformation

Please note that in defining the characteristics for fish in sizes one through three we are trying to arrive at an “optimal” balance of all characteristics, knowing that in younger fish conformation will be slow to develop and fish will not exhibit the volume seen in the case of larger sized fish.

For fish in sizes four to six, conformation plays a more critical role followed by color, deportment and pattern. Criteria for judging mature koi would follow an “approximate” distribution as follows:

1st consideration - Conformation

2nd consideration - Deportment

3rd consideration – Color

4th consideration – Pattern

We have purposely hesitated to add percentages next to each criterion so as not to convey the impression that these attributes follow hard and fast rules and that each attribute can be expressed with a degree of precision. We also believe that by expressing percentages people have the tendency to “deduct” points away from a fish rather than viewing the fish in total. It is important to remember that when selecting and judging fish we are evaluating the fish as a whole not as a series of parts.

Developing Standard

Before defining approximate characteristics of the fish that will be used for judging it is perhaps important to actually provide examples of fish that meet the requirements for fin development and the “type” requirement. It is helpful to note that this article is departing from the earlier AKCA recommendation on length measurement. We now recommend that fish length be determined by measuring from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail which is consistent with measurements taken for “traditional” koi. An argument can be made that by

measuring this way, rather than to the base of the caudal peduncle, we will be encouraging excessively long tail growth. The counter-argument that can be made is that excessive tail growth will not give a balanced, proportional look to the fish and that such fish will be downgraded during actual judging. Pictures of fish used in this article were provided by Joel Burkard of Pan Intercorp, Joe Pawlak of Blackwater Creek, and Myron Kloubec of Kloubec Koi Farms, who have also acted as technical advisers for this article.



Fish A

We will now begin an explanation of the augmented judging standards by viewing a series of fish, and providing commentary on the features of each fish shown.

The fish pictured above (Fish A) is of an identifiable variety, being a Yamabuki Ogon. As mentioned earlier, AKCA standards recommend that each Longfin be one of the “identified” varieties of koi. Note how the fins are proportional to the size of the body, are evenly matched, and are not overly frayed, “thin,” or deformed. The conformation is good, although it could be a little fuller; the yellow color is excellent, as is the sheen, which is important for metallic varieties. Finally, when talking about the characteristics of color and pattern in single color varieties, we look at scalation and evenness of color (no light or dark patches on the body). In this particular fish the color is even from front to back and the scales line-up evenly down the length of the fish. It is difficult to judge deportment from a picture but the fish appears to be healthy and in good condition.

Fish B, shown below, is another example of an identifiable fish; in this case, the fish is also an Ogon and possesses long, flowing fins that are proportional to the size of the body. The conformation on this fish is very good and not excessively thin as is sometimes the case in

Longfin. Note that the fins are well balanced although the one pectoral fin on the left side of the fish appears to be split. Notice also how the tail fin compliments the beautiful, flowing pectoral fins. Some hobbyists may not like the appearance of the spine which is seen on the back of the fish. This is not considered a deficiency when judging and is largely a matter of personal taste. As the fish continues its maturation the additional bulk will tend to mask the appearance of the spine. As in Fish A, this fish possess excellent scalation and color, although the sheen, which is important in a metallic fish is not quite as good as on Fish A.



Fish B

We have mentioned several times that the pectoral and tail fins should be proportional to the size of the body of the fish and should not be excessively long. A common deficiency in Longfin is the presence of thin, excessively long, or twisted pectoral fins. The picture presented below (Fish C), shows an excessively long set of pectoral fins on a thin koi; this type of fin structure detracts from our appreciation of the fish. Also note that the pectoral fin on the left side of the fish is bent. This fish also lacks a shoulder structure on the pectoral fin which causes the pectorals to collapse. When comparing the conformation of Fish C with that of Fish A and Fish B, it becomes evident that conformation is an important element in presenting a balanced appearance. A robust body shape combined with proportioned fins results in a fish that has a pleasing appearance.



Fish C

It is important to distinguish what we mean by the “shoulder” structure of the pectoral fin. Simply, the “shoulder” is that area of the pectoral fin which projects from the body at a right



Fish D

Note the way that the pectoral fin extends at a right angle to the body and provides a structure for the balance of the fin.

angle and then allows the fin to be fully supported. The shoulder area is critical for Longfin; without this structure the pectoral fins tend to collapse and twist, causing impaired swimming motion and loss of beauty.



**Note lack of shoulder in this fish,
which causes fin to collapse.**

Fish E

Compare the lack of the shoulder area of Fish E with the appearance of the shoulder in Fish D. You will notice that the lack of a shoulder in Fish E causes the fins to lie flat against the fish and causes the fin to become twisted.

Fish F, shown below, is a Kohaku that has a twisted left pectoral fin. As with Fish C, this fish does not have a shoulder section on the pectoral fin which causes the pectorals to collapse. This “collapsed” pectoral fin also impedes the swimming motion of the fish. Fish that have “collapsed” pectorals will often have a jerky motion when swimming rather than having a graceful or fluid swimming motion. In addition to being bent, the pectoral fins on Fish F are too thin and also too long which detracts from our appreciation of the fish.



Fish F

The following picture shows a Gin Rin Shiro Utsuri (Fish G) with fins that are too long for the body. When we view this fish we have the impression that the fish looks out of proportion. This fish also lacks a “shoulder” area for the fins which causes the fins to collapse. The combination of thin conformation and excessively long fins detracts from the dark black of the head and body and the sparkling ginrin on this fish.



Fish G

The Ginrin Showa (Fish H), shown below, has a tail fin that appears to be as long as or longer than the body itself. When viewing the fins on this fish we notice that they are not properly proportioned: the tail is longer than the pectorals causing us to think the fish is “unbalanced.” The unbalanced fins mar an otherwise nice looking fish.



Fish H

The next example is a Kohaku (Fish I). Unlike the previous fish which had excessively long fins, the Kohaku has a tail that is not proportional to the other fins on the fish. While it would seem that this fish would do better than Fish C, F, G and H at a competition, it would also have trouble competing against Longfin with better fin proportions. When this fish is compared with Fish C, F, G and H, the following statements can be made:

- The conformation of the fish is superior to Fish C, F, G and H.
- The pectoral fins are proportional to the body size and are balanced; the tail fin, however, is too short for the body and is not proportional to the size of the pectoral fins. On the positive side, the pectorals have a good shoulder that does not collapse and that the pectorals are not twisted.
- The coloration on the fish is even with no lighter or darker areas of *hi* appearing on the fish; the white ground is also good.



Fish I

In developing the standard for sizes one through three, we suggest that we adopt the standards already in place and modify them for Longfin. We therefore give precedence to finnage development and then emphasize in order of importance: identifiable variety, color, deportment, pattern and conformation. A presentation of these characteristics in some sort of “approximate” order might look like this:

1st consideration - Finnage

2nd consideration - Identifiable Variety

3rd consideration - Color

4th consideration - Deportment

5th consideration - Pattern

Final consideration – Conformation



Fish J

We will use the new standard to rate a young fish such as Fish J. We will weigh heavily for finnage (which is very good in this fish). Next we place emphasis on the fish being an identifiable variety, in this case, a Sanke. Next we rate the fish high for color; the white ground is good, the *hi* is even and well-developed, and the black, while not fully developed, is of high quality and well placed. We continue our judging to include deportment, pattern (with a three step *hi* pattern and good *sumi* placement) and then conformation which is good for a young fish. Under this type of weighting system this fish would receive high marks. The relatively greater weighting given to identifiable variety than to deportment and pattern will encourage the entry of “identifiable” varieties in fish shows and in selecting Longfin by hobbyists.

Following is another example of a young Longfin, this time an Asagi (Fish K). Notice the size of the fins relative to the size of the body. While the fins are long they are proportional to the size of the fish. Note also that the fish is of an identifiable variety (an Asagi) and that the fish possesses the deep blue coloration on the body, which is characteristic of the Asagi, along with the red accent marks on the side of the body and in the joint of the pectoral fins. The head is clean and the scalation even. This fish can be expected to do well in a judging exercise or in selecting a fish for purchase.



Fish K

In developing the standard for fish from sizes four through six, we will also recognize the unique characteristics of Longfin and adapt the standard from that used in judging “traditional” koi. We give precedence to finnage, emphasize identifiable variety, and then place emphasis on body conformation, color, deportment and pattern. Using these criteria, an “approximate” ordering might look like this:

1st consideration - Finnage

2nd consideration - Identifiable Variety

3rd consideration - Conformation

4th consideration - Color

5th consideration - Deportment

Final consideration - Pattern

Applying these criteria to an actual fish, pictured below (Fish L), we would arrive at the following conclusions: the pictured fish is a Benigoï with good fin development that is proportional to the size of the body. The conformation is very good; the red or *beni* color is deep and even with no washing out of color anywhere on the body. The scalation is even and difficult to detect due to the thickness of the *hi* coloration which masks the individual scales. This type of deep coloration is considered ideal and is sought after in all koi varieties. It is difficult to judge deportment from a picture; however, the fish appears to be very healthy. This

fish can be expected to do well in a competition for Longfin, and indeed is one of the finest examples of a Longfin that the authors have seen.



Fish L

Special Considerations When Selecting Longfin

Longfin were developed by crossing Asian Longfin Carp with traditional Nishikigoi to develop a new type of fish. Certain characteristics of Longfin deserve special consideration since they can contribute to defects and or deficiencies in the fish. Excessively long fins or fins that are unbalanced (that is pectoral fins being longer than the remaining fins or a tail fin that is markedly longer than other fins) are considered to be a deficiency when selecting/judging for Longfin. Twisted or bent pectoral fins which are sometimes seen in Longfin are considered to be a defect.

Longfin can have a tendency to have a thin body shape which is also considered a deficiency. The body of the fish should be similar to that of a traditional Nishikigoi with the streamlined “torpedo” shape preferred. Please note that as with traditional Nishikigoi awkward conformation such as a pot-belly or excessively tapered tail joint are considered to be deficiencies.

Two of the unique characteristics of Longfin are the presence of narial bouquets and longer barbells. A narial bouquet is a growth that is sometimes seen over the nasal passages of the fish. In some cases this growth is excessive and unsightly and is therefore considered a deficiency. Similarly, Longfin have barbells which are considerably longer than on traditional Nishikigoi. In evaluating whether a barbell is too long the overall facial appearance of the

Longfin is taken into account. If the barbells prove distracting or are not proportional to the head of the fish then it is also considered a deficiency.

Shown below is a head shot of a fish (Fish M) which possesses long barbells and a narial bouquet. Notice that the barbells are long but not too long as to be excessive. Also note that the fish possesses a narial bouquet which is seen just in back of each barbell and does not detract from the overall appearance of the fish.



Fish M

In traditional koi, the placement of the dorsal fin is in back of the pectoral fins about halfway down the length of the fish as seen in Fish N. In the case of Longfin, the placement of the dorsal begins at the end-point of the pectoral fins so that the pectorals and dorsal fin appear to form a triangle with the head of the fish. Setting the dorsal as far back as on traditional koi make these fish appear to be dis-proportional and seems to be linked to the production of shorter pectoral and tail fins (see Illustration O for an example of fin placement).

Notice the placement of the dorsal fin, which is after the pectorals and about half-way down the body.



Fish N

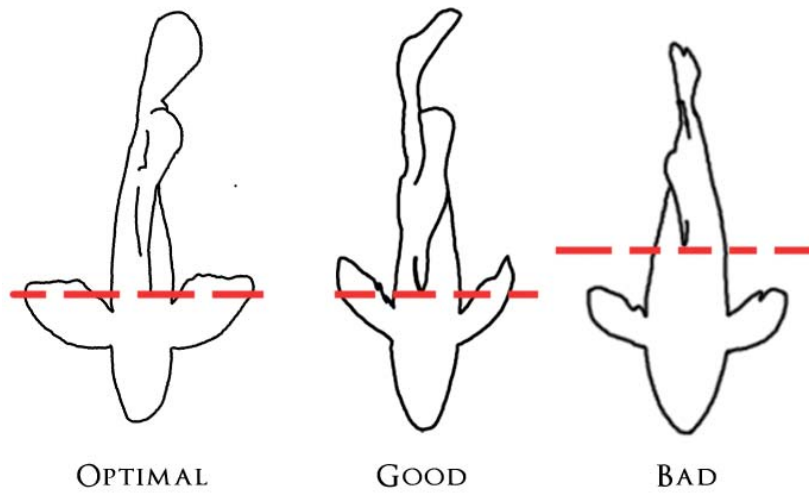


Illustration O, courtesy of Joe Pawlak

In selecting Longfin that are GoSanke, it should be remembered that in younger fish the tips of the pectorals and tail fins will tend to be more translucent causing the fish to appear to have fins that are too small for the body. As the fish matures the skin on the edges of the fins tends



Fish P

to thicken causing the fins to look more proportional. Fish P, pictured above, shows the translucency of the pectoral fins in the Longfin Sanke.

To summarize, the following points are important when identifying a Longfin for purchase or competition:

- Eyes are drawn to the pectoral fins first when evaluating a Longfin
- For this reason, the shape and size of the pectoral fins is important
- The pectorals should extend slightly back of the dorsal area
- The pectorals should have a “shoulder” so that the fins are carried almost perpendicular to the body
- The dorsal fin should start after the shoulder and not too far in back of the body
- The tail should be long enough so that the Longfin does not look like a “traditional” koi
- How long is long enough? About the same length as the pectorals

We hope this article is helpful in providing an understanding of the purchase and display of Longfin, and that the character and beauty of these fish will be enhanced by further efforts to refine and improve these unique fish. The authors recognize that it will take time for these standards to result in the breeding of optimal Longfin and that there will be a transitional time period during which several of the less desirable finnage characteristics will continue to be produced. We believe that the breeding of Longfin will be enhanced once these standards are accepted by hobbyists and breeders.