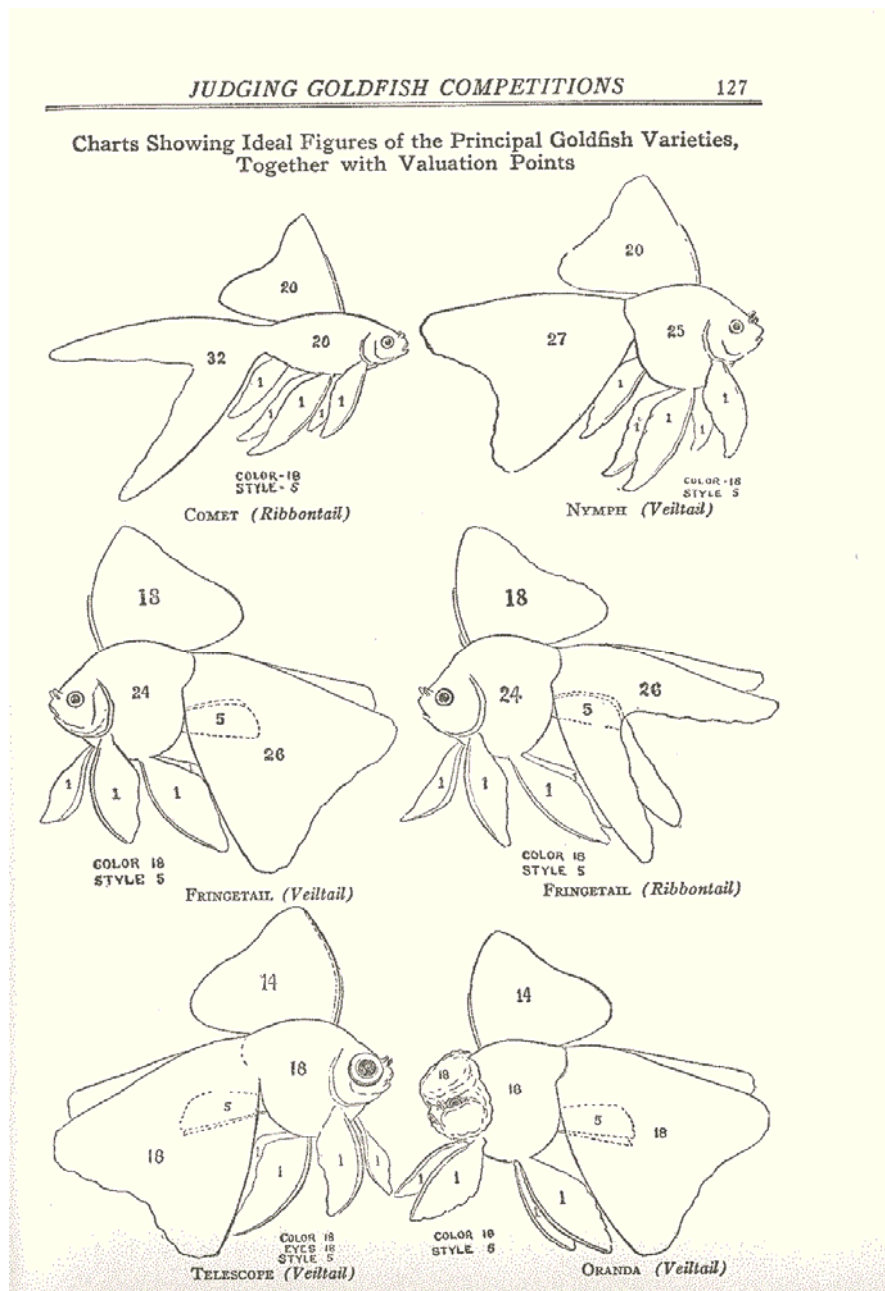
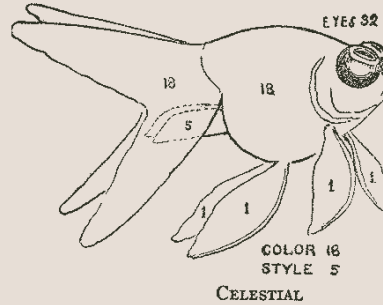
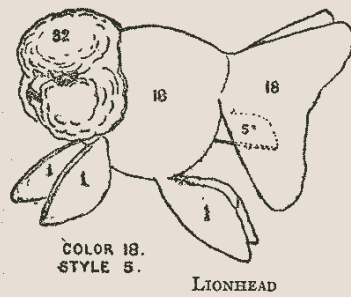


The Evolution of Judging Goldfish in America

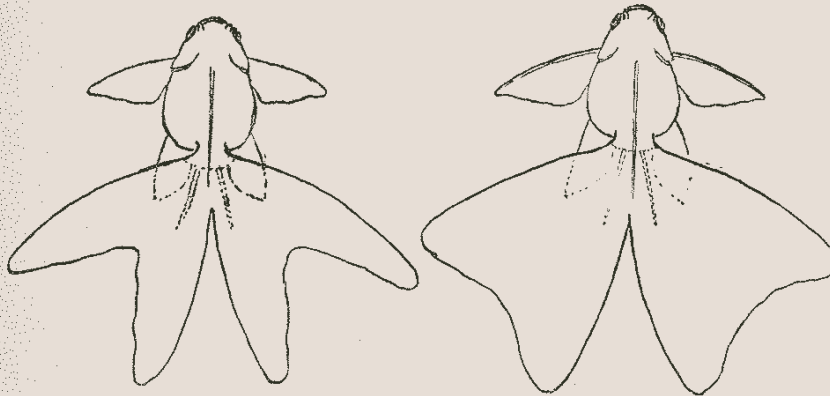
By Peter J Ponzio, Chairman, AGA

Formalized goldfish judging in America was first undertaken at the turn of the twentieth century, most probably in Philadelphia. At any rate, the first published standards that I am aware of were those of the Philadelphia Aquarium Society, which are depicted here, and which were taken from *Goldfish Varieties and Water Gardens*, by William T Innes, published in 1947.





	Body	Tail	Dorsal	Fins	Color	Double Anals	Style	Eyes	
Telescopes	18	18	14	4	18	5	5	18	100
Japs	24	26	18	4	18	5	5		100
Nymphs	25	27	20	5	18		5		100
Comets	20	32	20	5	18		5		100
Telescope Nymphs	19	19	16	5	18		5	18	100
Celestials	18	18		4	18	5	5	32	100
Shubunkins	10	10	10	5	60		5		100
Lionheads	18	18		4	18	5	5	32	100
Orandas	18	18	14	4	18	5	5	18	100



The above two illustrations show the two types of tails. At the left the "Swallowtail", "Ribbontail" or "Cut-out-tail," the right the "Veiltail" or "Broadtail." All varieties of the fancy goldfish may be subdivided into these two classes for purposes of competition, but it is a step of doubtful wisdom, for in many cases it is impossible for the judges to decide even to their own satisfaction in which class a fish belongs, much less to the satisfaction of the contestants.

As can readily be seen from the standards, the judging system was points-based, with well-defined standards for each variety. From the literature I've been able to consult, judges were expected to use the points system and record the points for each fish in the competition, with the winning fish being selected from a comparison of the judge's scorecards. This system seems to be similar to the one used in Great Britain today. In fact, if I had to hazard a guess, the system used in the U.S. was in large measure, based on the system in use in Great Britain.

At the time the Philadelphia standards were promulgated, fancy goldfish were bred by amateur hobbyists who gathered together to show fish, and exchange specimens to improve certain characteristics of their stocks. So far, this system appears to be similar to that employed in the U.K.

Sometime in the nine-thirties or forties, goldfish breeding on commercial fish farms appears to have markedly expanded. Initially, common goldfish, comets and fantails were the primary fish bred, and much of the stocks were sold to large outlets such as Woolworth's or Kresge's stores (large department-type stores prevalent at that time in the States). Serious goldfish hobbyists continued to breed their own fish, and the appeal of mass market fish was limited. Goldfish shows continued to be held independently, but more and more, goldfish shows were adjuncts to tropical fish shows. The Philadelphia standards continued to be used for purpose-run goldfish shows, or the more general tropical shows.

In the nineteen-sixties, two events occurred which changed the goldfish hobby in the States. The first of these events was the use of plastic bags to ship fish easily, and over long distances. Suddenly, it became affordable to ship high quality fish to various locations within the States, and even from foreign countries. The second event which changed the goldfish landscape in the U.S. was the availability of fish from the Far East. Prior to the use of plastic bags for shipping, it was the occasional hobbyists who had high quality fish from Japan or China; often these fish were expensive and were not of the first grade. These two events led to the importation of a much better grade of fish from the Far East than were available from commercial fisheries in the U.S.

Looking back, these events were both a boon and a bane. From the perspective of having high quality fish from Japan and China, the events could be seen as a godsend. From the perspective of hobbyist fish breeding, these events were a bane. Soon, most people in the U.S. were keeping imported fish, and hobbyist-bred fish became less and less common. Where goldfish shows were held, they became more and more an adjunct of tropical fish show, and less purpose-held goldfish shows.

At about the same time that fish were being imported into the U.S. in increasing numbers, there was an explosion of popular books on goldfish. Most of these books were written for the general fish hobbyist, and were filled with inaccurate variety descriptions, pictures, etc., and tended to produce more harm than good. As a result of the misinformation being published, and as a way of organizing the hobby in the U.S., the Goldfish Society of America (GFSA) was formed by Bill Parsonson, Al Thomma, John Arenello, and others. The GFSA began publishing informational newsletters and publications, and organized a series of fish shows, held primarily in California. The GFSA grew from a few people to a membership of about 2,000 hobbyists at its heyday in the early nineteen-nineties when Gary Hater, Tony Reynolds and I acted as successive Chairmen.

By this time, the Philadelphia standards were being used less and less, due in part, to the age of the standards, and in part to the changes that were occurring in the types and quality of fish being offered in the U.S. In the late nineteen-seventies Bob Mertlich, who served as Chairman of the GFSA, headed a group of hobbyists who produced a new series of "guidelines" for the hobby. The name of the

publication was officially changed from “standards” to “guidelines,” implying that these were “suggested” criteria, and not “absolute” means of selecting fish. The “guidelines” were not widely distributed, and were not universally accepted, even within the GFSA. By this time, there was a growing rift within the Society: one group of members wanted more strict standards; the other group believed that strictly controlled standards were a nonsense, and that a points-based system could be “jobbed” so that the judge would rig them to pick a winner.

The debate between a formalized standard and a looser standard went on for about ten years, until it was evident that a new standard had to be developed. In 1996, the GFSA introduced a new set of standards, which were still called “guidelines.” I headed-up the group that developed these standards, and it was agreed that they would be widely distributed in the U.S. In fact, the standards were published in a separate edition of the *Goldfish Report*, and were adopted as the “official” judging tool in the U.S.

To be clear, the new standards were a compromise. They allowed judges to use the points-based system, or to use a hybrid system, whereby they would use the guidelines as a means of supplying a theoretical “best type” for each variety. The judge would then select among the fish at a competition the one(s) that best represented the “type” in the guidelines. Of course, this presupposed that all judges would be trained to understand and appreciate the standards, and that judges would be able to distinguish the “best type” for each variety while judging at the show. A copy of the guideline for a Ranchu is reproduced below; all line art was provided by Merlin Cunliffe.

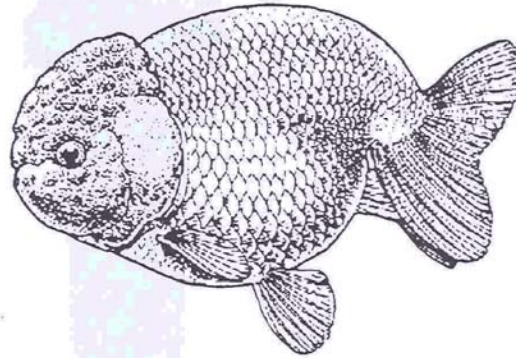
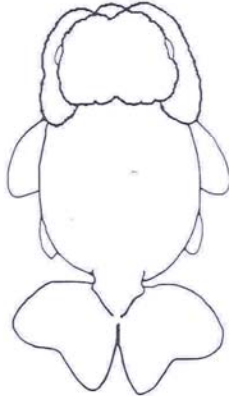
As is evident from the guideline, the commentary was brief, and dealt with body shape, finnage, coloration and the points table. The brevity in the guidelines was due, in part, to the hope that judges would meet on regular occasions, and that continued observation would lead to a development in the eye of the judge. Sadly, whilst the intent was good, the sheer size of the country, and the relative lack of goldfish shows did not allow judges to meet with regular frequency. In fact, the number of purpose-held goldfish shows declined year-on-year until there were only two to three shows being held in the U.S. per year.

There was talk of expanding the judge’s program and of revising the standards, but this never happened. In 2007, the AGA was formed after the GFSA declined to lead the efforts to recruit new judges, and provide judge’s training. Since 2007, the AGA had sanctioned 36 goldfish shows across the U.S. (up from 2 – 3 per year previously), trained four new goldfish judges, and released several publications to the U.S. goldfish community. The AGA will be releasing new goldfish standards in 2010. These standards are intended to produce a more consistent way to view goldfish in the U.S. Importantly, the standards will add new breeds such as the Jikin, Phoenix and Tosakin, which have not been covered in previous standards; will cover variations in finnage, headgrowth and other special characteristics of the various varieties; and will include artwork or pictures to illustrate the various tail types, etc. Commentary will be expanded, so that beginners and judges alike will understand the important varietal characteristics of the various goldfish covered.

Dorsalless

Breed: Ranchu

American Goldfish Association



Description:

The body shape of the Ranchu is short and egg-shaped with no dorsal fin present on the fish. The body depth of the fish is approximately 5/8 to 3/4 the length of the body. The back contour is smoothly arched from the back of the head and then takes a sharp downward angle change at the point where the body meets the caudal peduncle. When viewed from above, the back and peduncle should be broad, and the peduncle should not be too long. The caudal fin is double and the individual lobes are 25% or more divided from each other, or the caudal fin can be webbed. The caudal fin is approximately 1/4 to 3/8 as long as the length of the body, and the lobes are rounded, with moderate forking. The pectoral and pelvic fins are short, and should be rounded to match the caudal fin. The anal fins are also paired, and should match the caudal, pectoral and pelvic fins in appearance and shape. The distinguishing features of the fish are the appearance of the hood which should

cover the head, cheeks and gill covers in an even fashion, and the juncture of the caudal peduncle and tail. Acceptable scale types are metallic and nacreous. Colors within the metallic category include orange, red & white, black, bluescale, ancient bronze and white. Within the nacreous group, bi-color, tri-color and calico (with or without spangles) are acceptable.

Point Schedule:

Body Style	20 points
Coloration	20 points
Finnage	20 points
Special Characteristics:	
Development of hood, including head, cheeks and operculum;	
juncture of tail and caudal peduncle	20 points
Department and Condition	20 points

Having explained the development of the standards in the U.S., it is important to note that there will continue to be differences in how goldfish are judged in the U.K. and the U.S. These differences can be summarized as follows:

- U.K. emphasis on hobbyist bred fish; U.S. emphasis on purchased fish

- U.K. judging done by means of points-based system; U.S. judging not points-based, more subjective
- U.K. system based on “ideal” type; U.S. system based on “achievable” type
- U.K. system relatively fixed, more difficult to introduce new varieties; U.S. system quite flexible, new varieties introduced with increasing frequency

It should be obvious from the article that each system of judging has developed based upon the conditions prevalent in our two countries. It is a commonplace saying that we are “two countries separated by a common language.” To this, I should like to add that we are also “two countries separated by a common love of goldfish.” In the final analysis, judging goldfish is an art; there is really no “best” way to judge goldfish. In our two countries, the art of judging goldfish has evolved over the past hundred years or so, largely as a result of an emphasis on hobbyist fish in the U.K., and on imported fish in the U.S. Let us hope that we can work together to develop the goldfish hobby, and continue our tradition of being the “best of allies, the best of friends.”

Cheers,

Peter