

Goldfish Varieties – Rancho

By Peter J. Ponzio

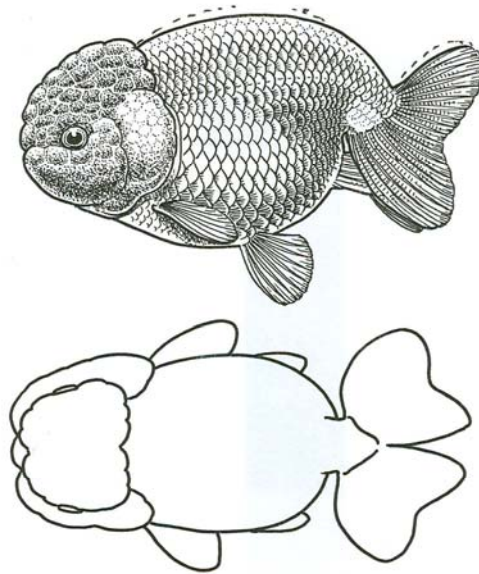
In the original article for this series, we defined a number of characteristics common to all goldfish, and introduced the concept of goldfish varieties, or different types of goldfish. Each subsequent article would provide detailed guidelines to appreciate and understand the characteristics of each variety recognized by the Goldfish Society of America (GFSA). Line Art for the GFSA standards has been provided courtesy of Merlin Cunliffe.

The Rancho originated in Japan, and is a modification of the Chinese Lionhead. Taking the Lionhead as the prototype, Japan goldfish breeders refined the fish to produce the Rancho that we know today. In goldfish books appearing in the mid-to late twentieth century in the U.S. , Rancho and Lionheads were presented as if they were the same variety, and were interchangeable. In fact, the Rancho is a distinctly different variety type than the Lionhead.

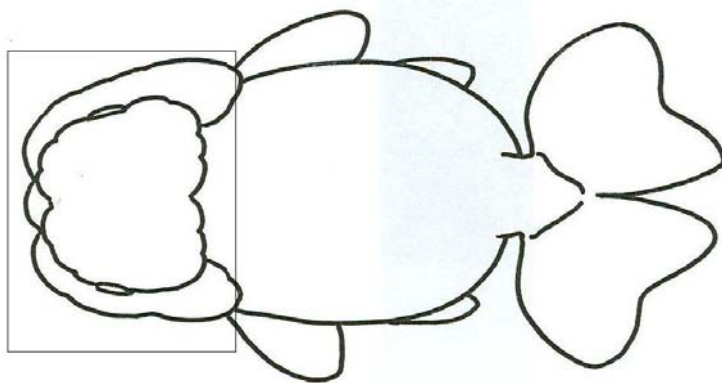
The Rancho, like the Lionhead, is a dorsal-less fish which has headgrowth, or a wen. The Rancho can be distinguished from the Lionhead, by possessing a more moderate headgrowth, and rounded, sloping distinct back and tail profile. In addition, the body shape of the Rancho appears less boxy-looking, and more rounded than that of the Lionhead. Finally, while the headgrowth is less pronounced than that of a Lionhead, headgrowth on the Rancho conforms to certain standards, developed by the Japanese, which give the Rancho a distinct appearance.

In Japan, societies dedicated to the development and breeding of Ranchus are common, but admittance into one of these breeding societies is very selective, and members are admitted by referral only. All members of the society must vote on the membership application, and the presence of one negative vote among many hundred will prevent admittance into the society. The Rancho is considered the pinnacle of goldfish-keeping in Japan. Rancho are considered to be highly refined fish, and are considered to be both elegant and strong at the same time.

The following line art drawing, supplied by Merlin Cunliffe, shows the body shape of the Rancho, which will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.



As mentioned above, the headgrowth of the Ranchu is one of its primary characteristics and can be divided into three areas: cranial growth, cheek growth and opercular, or gill growth. Cranial growth refers to the development of the wen over the top of the fish's head area. Cheek growth refers to the placement of the wen over the region surrounding the eye and extending into the cheek and frontal areas of the face. Opercular growth refers to the area covering the gill plates of the fish. All three areas of headgrowth should be fully developed in the Ranchu, and growth in one area should not predominate over the other areas. In considering headgrowth in the Ranchu, the Japanese judge the fish from the top down. When looking down at the fish, imagine that the headgrowth forms a rectangular area. The head should appear rectangular and should to fill the area inside the rectangle as completely as possible. The following line drawing illustration shows a rectangle around the headgrowth area, and shows the head occupying the area within the rectangle.



Line art drawing showing the rectangular aspect of a Ranchu head

A picture of one of John Parker's Ranchus also shows the rectangular head of an ideal Ranchu. Please note on this fish that not only does the head have a rectangular shape, but that the other areas of hood development, namely the cranial, cheek and gill areas are also highly developed, but not overpowering.

GIRL 5-JOHN



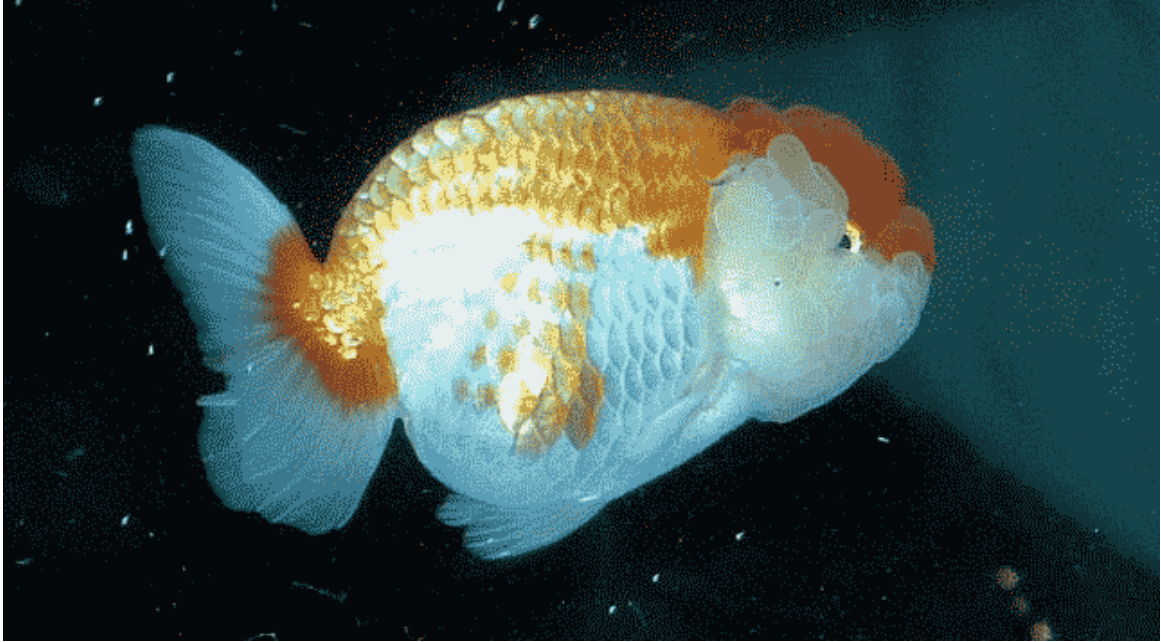
John Parker female Ranchu

In addition to the headgrowth, the Ranchu has a unique back and tail profile. Where the back of the Lionhead slopes slightly towards the caudal peduncle,

and is relatively flat, the back of the Ranchu slopes drastically downward in an arc, where it joins the caudal peduncle. The tail is upswept at a forty-five degree angle where it joins the peduncle. The caudal peduncle, that is, the area where the tail joins the body is very thick in order to support the sharp back curve and the angle at which the tail is joined to the body. This unique thickness of the caudal peduncle is a distinguishing characteristic of Ranchus, and can be used as one of the methods of distinguishing between Lionheads and Ranchus. The following pictures illustrate the unique characteristic of the peduncle when viewed from the top, and the back profile of a Ranchu when viewed from the side.



Notice the thick caudal peduncle of this fish when viewed from the top



Notice the back profile and tail position on this fish when viewed from the side

Finnage is paired for the pectorals, ventrals and anal fins, and the tail should show a fork. The amount of forking permitted in the tail is from twenty-five to seventy-five percent, but this should be evaluated by eye-site, and not by a strict attempt at measurement. The degree of forking in the tail will determine the fish's swimming motion. If the tail is forked at less than twenty-five percent, the fish will collapse its tail and swim with a lurching motion from side-to-side. If the tail is forked by more than seventy-five percent, the tail will spread out too greatly, causing the fish to sink while swimming. A tail split of approximately fifty percent seems to produce the best swimming motion for the fish. John Parker has observed that if the tip of the tail extends beyond the arch of the back of the fish, the fish will also have an impaired swimming motion. Please note that the finnage for the Ranchu is more rounded at the edges than that of the Lionhead, which can appear pointed at the edges of the fin. The body shape of the fish should appear rounded and full, not elongated. Elongated body shapes are signs of fish that were not properly culled, or bred with Lionheads.

The Ranchu is available in all colors seen in goldfish, and although calico varieties are very rare, a strain of calico Ranchus called Edonishiki, is known. In practice, most Ranchus are red, red and white, and black with other colors being uncommon. Ranchus can grow to lengths of eight to ten inches, although they are generally seen in the five to six inch size for mature specimens.



Calico Ranchu from Goldfish by Paul Paradise; note that each scale is outlined in black

Ranchu are large fish and require extensive biological filtration due to their body mass. In addition, Ranchu require extra aeration due to the large headgrowth in the cheek area; failure to provide adequate aeration can result in harm to the fish. In Japan, Ranchu are raised in shallow ponds (approximately eight to ten inches in depth) that are quite long.

Ranchu are hardy fish, and can be raised outdoors in the summer months; they should be brought indoors and placed in aquaria during the winter months. Ranchu, like Lionheads, require a diet higher in protein than most goldfish in order to produce well-balanced headgrowth and live foods should be added as supplements to their diet. A diet of forty to fifty percent protein is recommended, and sinking food – not floating- should be fed to these fish in order to minimize swim bladder problems.

When judging Ranchu preference is given to fish with full hood development, emphasizing the rectangular appearance of the hood and the curvature of the back, thickness of the caudal peduncle, and angle of the tail as it connects to the body. The AGA is encouraging judges to view Ranchu from the side as well as from the top. The top profile of the Ranchu is very appealing, as the following picture demonstrates.

BOY 5-JOHN



Picture of one of John Parker's fish, showing the top-down appeal of the Ranchu

Ranchu and Lionheads often compete in the same category in most fish shows, and preference is usually given to a good Ranchu over that of a Lionhead, due partially to the fact that good Lionheads are not as common as good Ranchu.

Recently, Lionheads have been crossed with Japanese Ranchu to produce a fish with the back profile of a Ranchu, with the hood growth of a Lionhead. These fish are not a recognized breed, but have been winning major awards at competitions in the United States. The term "Lionchu" has been coined to describe these fish, and they are becoming more popular at fish shows across the country.

Ranchu are considered to be one of the premier fish in goldfish keeping, along with the Oranda and Ryukin. Considering its refined looks, relatively easy fish-keeping requirements, hardiness, and its ability to win the Grand Champion award, it is easy to see why the Ranchu is so popular among goldfish collectors.