



THE 80cm quest 2006

Mike Snaden continues his series from last year and catalogues the progress of some more koi on their quest for growth

Raising a koi from tosaï to over 80cm is something that is generally regarded as only possible in Japan. This article is a cut-down version of an ongoing one, that is tracking the progress of a number of koi belonging to three hobbyists, and myself. We are using the BKKS National koi Show as the necessary means of establishing that each year's goals have been met, and to also demonstrate how the koi progress in respect of their appearance.

Just to make things interesting, we came up with the idea that I should 'put my money where my mouth is' by setting targets for each year's BKKS National Show, and forfeiting one of my own featured koi in the event of a failure to meet each respective target, which are as follows:

- BKKS National 2004**, 60cm as nissai (two years old)
- BKKS National 2005**, 68cm as sansai (three years old)
- BKKS National 2006**, 75cm as yonsai (four years old)
- BKKS National 2007**, 80cm as gosai (five years old)

Failure to reach the above targets mean that at each respective event, I have to give one of the koi to the BKKS for auction, for each target missed! I am sad to say, that this year, there will once again be no 'free koi'!

Up until now, participating ponds have belonged to Colin and Lyn Hughes, Cliff Neale, and Ian and Jill Graham, but

unfortunately, Colin retired from this challenge before last year's show, so my koi that were in his pond, now reside at Cliff's, and to a pair of newcomers to the hobby, James and Amanda Carter. Each of these ponds is Bakki Showered. Perhaps it would have been better to include other conventional ponds, but I felt that it would be best to keep things simple, and feature ponds that have the same, or similar conditions.

Most of the koi being featured are bred by Momotaro, but a few others have been included as a point of comparison, in order to give a little insight into how much of the growth is genetic, and how much can be attributed to raising techniques.

colin's pond

Colin Hughes' pond contains 7,500 gallons, and is situated in an area where the mains water is very soft, with KH and GH readings of 2dh, and TDS of about 50ppm. Colin maintained a TDS in his pond of between 70-80ppm, and a KH of about

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1.5dh. This pond used to be home to about 50 koi, with most of them having lived there since they were tosai. Most of them are now sansai, and yonsai of between 60-72cm. Colin has already succeeded in growing a male Kohaku from sansai of 50cm, to 74cm in two and a half years. Typical pond water test readings for Colin's pond, were as follows: ammonia 0.01, nitrite, 0.02, nitrate 0 (using colour match test kit), and pH 7.1. Colin feeds a mixture of Medicarp and Nobori, and also gives them treats of cockles, and bread and honey.

ian's pond

Ian Graham's pond is situated in Bristol, where the water is very hard, with mains water being generally of about 300 ppm (TDS), and having a KH of about 8dh This is lousy water, in which, it is nigh on impossible to grow koi, and is also prone to making koi develop shimmies. Hence, Ian runs a Reverse Osmosis (RO) plant on his mains water, and then mixes a small proportion of raw, water back in, hence making a blend of good soft water, which I prefer to call, 'home-made Welsh water'! Ian runs his pond at a TDS of about 80ppm. This water has a KH level of about 1.5dh. Ian's test parameters are typically: ammonia 0.01, nitrite 0.03, nitrate 7.8mg/l, and a pH of 7 to 7.1. Ian feeds a mixture of Momotaro food, and Daisuki Gold.

cliff's pond

In Cliff Neale's case, two ponds are being used for this challenge. The main pond is some 18,000 gallons, and the second pond is an 8,000 gallon pond that uses the Onishi Streamflow, principle, which has a very high circulation speed, consequently making the koi more active, and hungrier. This Streamflow pond is likely to give exceptional results. The water in Cliff's area is also very hard, so he also uses a RO plant for

making 'Welsh water' great for growing koi! Prior to running his RO plant, Cliff never had any significant growth in his 18,000 gallon pond. This has all changed in the last couple of years, and even the BKKS 2003 Grand Champion Sanke, Hebetoo, has grown over 8cm since winning the coveted title. Other koi, that have never shown any significant growth, now grow very well since using RO water, and the Bakki Showers. Cliff's test results are typically, ammonia 0.0, nitrite 0.03, and a nitrate level of 12-16mg/l, which is still very low. Cliff feeds Momotaro koi food.

James and Amanda live very close to Ian, and run their 10,000 gallon Bakki Showered pond with virtually the same water, and food as Ian.

All of the above ponds are covered and heated all year round. There is much debate as to whether this is good for koi, but in this instance, it's the best way to go. The koi will still have a reproductive cycle, as the temperatures in all of these ponds are lowered during the winter months.

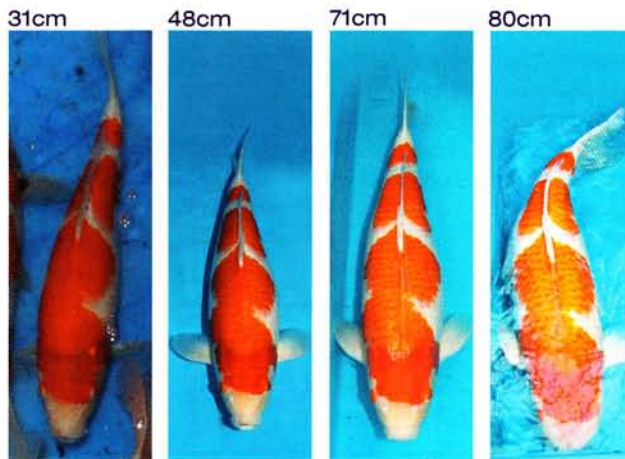
fair's fair

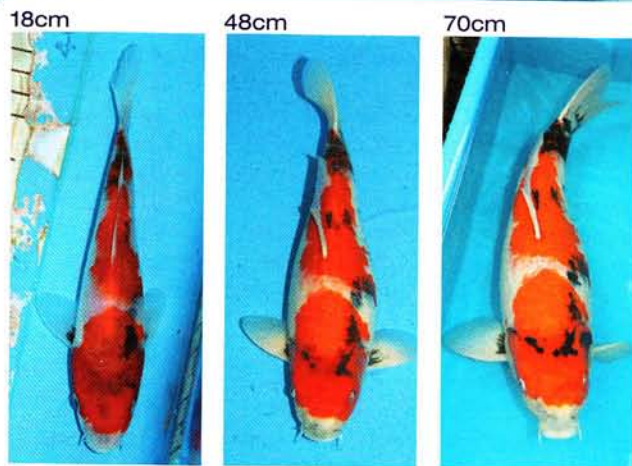
To keep things fair, all of the koi in each of the ponds are from the same breeders, age, and bloodline. The koi are generally from Momotaro, and Takeda, as both breeders place great importance on bloodlines, and genetics. There is no point in trying grow a koi to 80cm, that isn't genetically capable. There is also no point in trying to grow koi of inferior bloodline, as it is quite common for such koi to lose their colour and quality, if grown quickly. I would, however, urge you not to give up on your existing koi, and to rush out and buy ones from the breeders featured here. It is far wiser to keep them, and grow them alongside your new additions, to determine for yourself which breeders koi you desire in the future. This is the best way to learn. We have also added an Omosako Shiro Utsuri to give an interesting comparison.

Unfortunately, since we have to keep the size of this article limited, we will feature just a few selected koi, and this year, these all reside in Ian's pond, as only two of Cliff's koi turned female, and one of those jumped out over a year ago to its death.

Kohaku 4

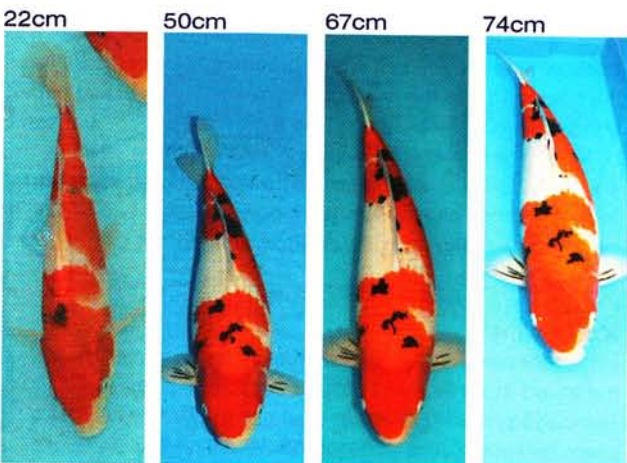
Ian's Kohaku no 4 (below) is Momotaro Seio Bloodline and measured 31cm in June 2003, 58cm in June 2004, and measured some 71cm at last year's BKKS, with six weeks spare before the June 2005 deadline! This koi has an exceptional body. This koi has reached exactly 80cm as of 7 June 2006, at just four years old! Alas, we are a year ahead of schedule! However, this koi was far too restless to get a decent photo. The quality of this koi is OK, but not exceptional. It is likely to exceed 85cm within the next year.▶





Showa 5

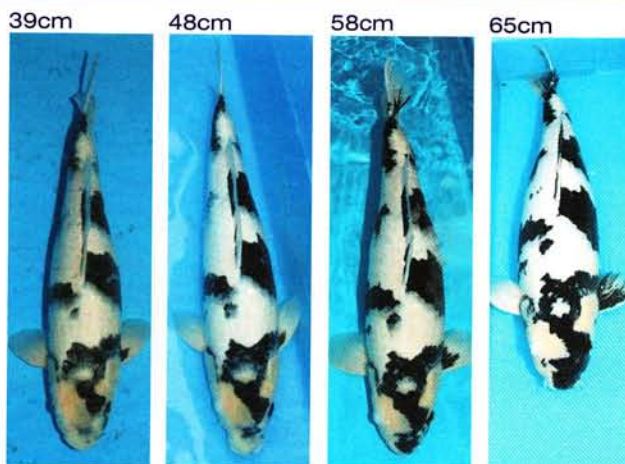
Ian's Showa no 5, measured just 18cm back in December 2002. She is a child of Momotaro's Shiro Showa parent koi (92cm). This koi measured 58cm in June 2004 (nissai) and 70cm as sansai (May 2005). The hi (red) quality is getting better, and the sumi is now starting to come up. The area of messy sashi on the shoulder isn't really sashi, but secondary hi which lies on the underside of the scales. The body is strong, and she has a good head. The growth of this koi has been surprising. This koi now resides at James's pond, and measured 80cm about a month ago, and hence is also a year ahead of schedule! Since last year's pic (above), the quality of this koi has improved greatly!



Sanke 8

Ian's Sanke 8 (above) is from Takeda, and by an 84cm Hiroshima Sakai female x Momotaro Mako, male parents). This Sanke measured 22cm in December 2002, 58cm in June 2004, 67cm at last year's BKKS, and is now 74cm, which is 1cm short of this year's target. This koi's strongest point is its shiroji (white ground). The body is also very good. Its weak point is the development of secondary hi, and the fact that although the sumi appears to be good, it all falls on top of the hi pattern, so since it can't be regarded as decent sumi, and hence lacks value. The menkaburi (hooded head) also detracts from its value. But, at £90, it was the cheapest koi in the article, and still attractive in it's own right. Note the way that the kiwa has

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stretched out to the edge of some scales since the last photo. This may be something that some people will be happy about, but this development of extra hi, has also occurred elsewhere (secondary hi). Personally, I don't get too excited about Kiwa that changes (by creeping to the outer edge of the scales) on a koi, since can also deteriorate just as easily when the koi gets older. Easy come, easy go!

Shiro Utsuri 9

Ian's Shiro Utsuri 9 (above) is an Omosako Shiro Utsuri. This koi measured 13cm in December 2002 as to sai, 48cm in June 2004, 58cm at last year's show, and now measures 65cm (now 10cm behind schedule). Shiro Utsuri of this level are very few and far between. Such a koi would cost in the region of 400,000-600,000 yen if bought at this size and age from Omosako. This koi has Sumi of the absolute highest quality, being a deep glossy black, so much so, that the scales can barely be seen! The shiroji is also wonderful, and the body is also very good. Motoguro is still only present in one pectoral fin, and won't come up in the other one. This koi still has a chance to get big, but Shiro Utsuri have a tendency to grow slow and steady, rather than fast and furious.

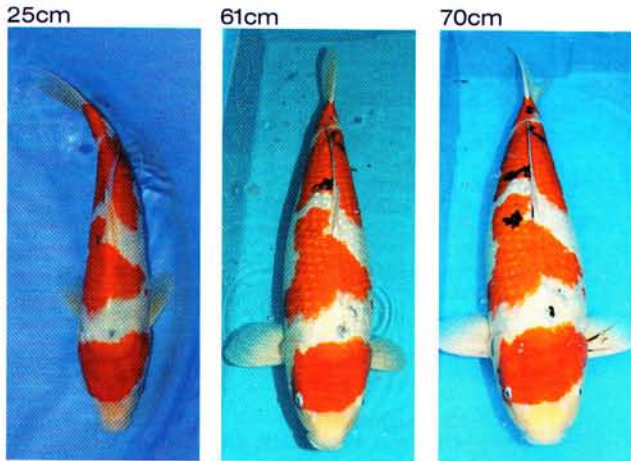
summery

To summarise the koi in this article, you should be able to see how subtle differences on the koi as to sai, have become much more dramatic as each koi has grown. It is easy to see how something like incrementally better colour on one koi, can develop as the koi grows, to far outshine its marginally lower quality siblings. Also, you should repeatedly see how subtle differences in the head, or body type, can result in hugely different size koi further on down the timeline. A small or medium size koi for koi shows, is a very different animal when compared to a koi destined to become a Grand Champion of the future! A fat can can seldom become a big koi, but once big, a big koi can become fat!

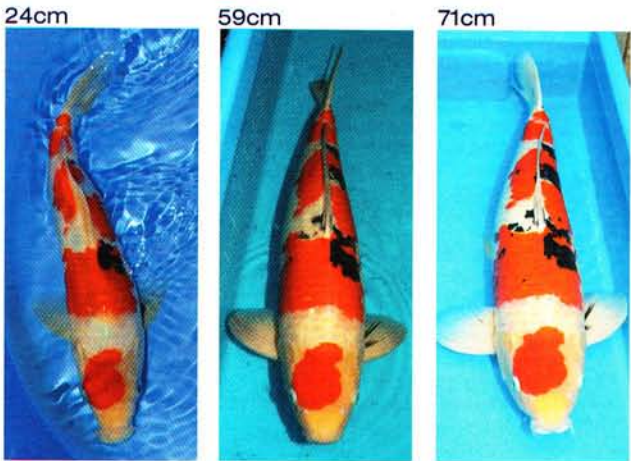
I hope that this article continues to be of interest, but please remember that keeping koi means compromising. If you don't compromise, you will never be satisfied. A perfect koi that is destined to get to jumbo proportions will almost always be financially out of reach. So, enjoy the best you can afford, and decide which attributes you can compromise on, and which ones you can't. You don't have to be rich to get good results with growing to sai. But, the key to success lies in choosing the right koi, and then to being in control of any many variables, as possible. By controlling the light that hits the pond, temperature, water hardness, feeding regime, etc., you can moderate the koi's environment as they grow, and hence control how fast they grow, and how fast they develop. The most important thing though is to have fun and enjoy your koi!

sanke experiment...

You may recall me writing in last year's show programme that Cliff and Ian had exceeded our sansai target of 68cm with nissai (actually 71cm and 68cm respectively). Well, I have decided to include five out of six low price Sanke that Ian bought as small tosai. They have all way exceeded the targets, with one Sanke now reaching 80cm as sansai!



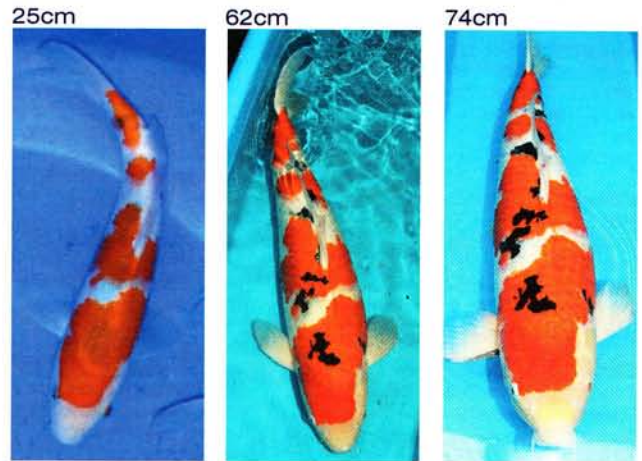
sanke A was bought in February 2004 at 25cm. Just before last year's BKKS Show, this koi measured 61cm, and now measures 70cm – it is of very high quality. This quality of koi will become extremely impressive when she grows beyond 80cm.



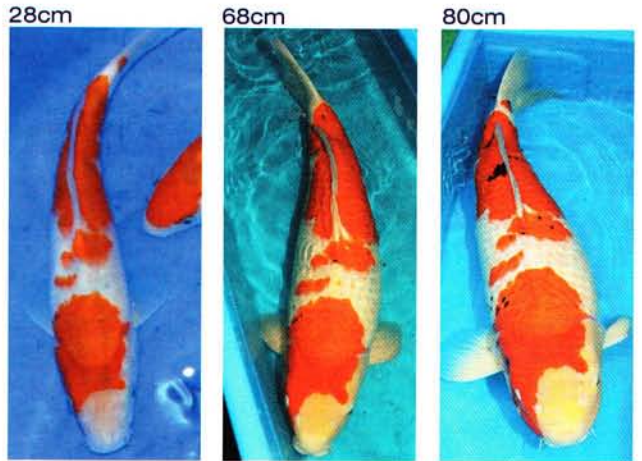
sanke B measured 23cm in February 2004, 59cm last year, and now 71cm as sansai. This koi is male, but of extremely high quality.

sanke C was 25cm as tosai, 62cm as nissai, and now measures 74cm as sansai. This is an extremely high quality Sanke. This koi is the highest quality koi that has been featured in this article series. A koi such as this one, will become world class, when she exceeds 80cm. Perhaps you will see her at next year's BKKS National...

sanke D measured 28cm as tosai, 68cm last year as nissai, and now has hit the magic 80cm as sansai! This koi may not be particularly pretty, but she is of very high quality. Pay particular attention to the head of this koi as tosai, and you will see just



how long the head was, and how wide the mouth was. This aspect of a koi is a telltale sign of one that will get big. The quality of this koi is extremely good, and she has attributes that would potentially very good for breeding from. However, the pattern is very much 'love it, or hate it!'



sanke E was 24cm as tosai, 62cm as nissai, and now measures 73cm. Unfortunately, this koi will never fair well at any show, as the sumi is predominantly only surrounding the dorsal area. The quality of this koi is very good, but the sumi pattern is highly unlikely to ever become attractive.

