

# Jumbo Potential

Choosing Tosai with the potential to grow into jumbo koi is a skill in itself. Mike Snaden has some great advice about what to look for...

## About the author:



**Mike Snaden** is the proprietor of Yume Koi in Bristol, specialising solely in very high end koi. He has supplied three out of the last four BKKS Grand Champions. Mike's specialised field is water and growing koi to their maximum potential, as a Japanese breeder would. This approach has given him considerable insight into koi.

This Kohaku is extremely high class, and worthy of being grown with the greatest of care. She is 30cm and, in addition to having a very pleasant pattern, she has a great head and body. Kiwa is all ideal Maruzome throughout. Colour and skin quality are also superb. Look closely at the Sashi at the front of the dorsal, as this is the koi's only slight weakness, being very slightly too deep on two scales (one either side of the dorsal). However, since this is so pale where it is too deep, the skin will thicken as the koi grows, and cover this Sashi. You should refrain from buying 'high-end' Tosai with any more Sashi than this koi possesses. This koi has pretty much the limit of Sashi that will be ok in the future



Tosai may seem like a huge gamble to most people, and quite rightly so!

**K**oi keeping is an incredibly interesting hobby, and most people find themselves being drawn into the addictive whirlwind of buying better and better koi each time a new one is looked for. This is

mostly caused by our eyes getting better, and justification of price against quality making us want better and better koi each time. However, there are a few people who develop such a good eye for koi that they fall into the predicament of desiring only the best, but simply not being able to afford the

same level as their eye. This can quite often leave only one alternative... Tosai!

Tosai may seem like a huge gamble to most people, and quite rightly so! But, if you are one of those few people with the really gifted eye (and no money), then you can quite often do very well indeed with Tosai, and with considerably better odds than you would imagine. You see, for example, an exceptional Nisai Kohaku may be offered for sale by a breeder at perhaps one million yen. But, this being the case, the same koi may have been available for perhaps 200,000 to 300,000 yen. Maybe you would still rather have the Nisai, as it's a safer bet. But there is so much fun to be had with growing Nisai, if you have a very good and analytical eye.

Nowadays breeders raise Tosai big enough to be able to judge the sex, and also to have a better idea of their quality. Larger Tosai of perhaps 30cm can be reasonably easy to 'read', particularly if you have already raised a good number of Tosai up to big sizes like 70 to 80cm. You can learn so much from doing this. Take a 70cm Kohaku as an example. Perhaps it's covered in secondary Hi, or perhaps losing colour? Well, I would hedge my bets that if you saw a Tosai photo of it, you would be able to see evidence that this was destined to happen anyway! The same can more often than not be said of a koi that, compared to its siblings, just hasn't grown... the warning signs would have been there all along!

### finding that special tosai

So, imagine you are in Japan. How do you go about sourcing a really special Tosai, with a really special future? Well, read on...

When I buy Tosai I choose the koi that initially give me a good impression. This

becomes remarkably easy with time, as when you become 'trained' you can pretty much spot all of the attributes all at one time, in a glance. However, if it isn't that easy for you, then you should first choose a koi whose pattern pleases you. Once you have it in a bowl there are a number of things that you need to think carefully about.

The first thing I would analyse is the body and head of the koi, in order to ascertain its likelihood of getting big. Then, after that, I ask myself, "What will happen if it does get big?" What I mean by this is that you should look at the skin and Beni quality of a koi, and then try to 'read' its Sashi, and Kiwa. It is also important to understand the bloodlines and what the koi should actually 'look' like in relation to its siblings. I'll go into it all further...

### genetics and bloodlines

Most important of all is the lineage of the koi. The parents must be BIG! Male parent koi generally aren't so big, but this is largely because the breeders tend not to put them out to mudponds for growing. But a female parent really needs to be jumbo, and also have a good body type that is likely to be carried down to the offspring. A parent koi of 70cm stands very little chance of producing offspring destined for 80cm.

It is also important to understand the bloodline, as this will dictate what the koi will end up looking like. Also, there is no point in buying an attractive Tosai if it is from a lineage that you won't like when it becomes a jumbo koi. So, as far as lineage is concerned, it is important to ask to see older koi from the same parent set, as this will give some insight into how the koi will look when they are older. ▶



Head A



Head B

Although neither of these koi have an inferior head, 'Head A' is both longer, and wider in the mouth than 'Head B'. It is when trying to grow these koi to jumbo that the significant difference in size potential will become apparent

This Kohaku is extremely high quality, and represents a very good all round package of attributes that will hopefully result in her growing up big and beautiful



To make an extremely attractive and interesting jumbo koi like this 89cm Kohaku, you need to study your Tosai very hard, and try to envisage what it will look like big. You then need to put a great deal of care into trying to raise her to become like this



A parent koi of 70cm stands very little chance of producing offspring destined for 80cm

This Kohaku is very red as Tosai and, hence, it is important to understand the raising techniques that have been used. As you can see, when she grew to 74cm as Yonsai, her Beni colour was much paler than when Tosai



Skin should be considered as the foundation of quality

However, it also helps to see the breeder's best Tategoi Tosai, as this will set a benchmark as to what is the best Beni colour for koi of this particular lineage. What I mean, is that if all the breeder's best Tosai possess a soft thick orange Beni, don't buy one that has a red Beni type, as this is most likely the very reason that the breeder is selling the redder ones.

When it comes to looking at different breeders' Tosai and comparing them to siblings that are Nisai, Sansai, etc, you will notice that some breeders' Tosai may be generally redder than his Nisai. In the case of a different breeder it may be the other way around. This is because raising techniques differ from one breeder to another. One breeder may raise his Tosai through the winter using a lot of colour food, so his koi may look red as Tosai, but more orange as Nisai. Another breeder may have Tosai that are very orange, that become

very red Nisai. So it helps if you understand the raising techniques.

## assessing your koi

So, now that you have established that a certain breeder's koi is what you desire, it's time to choose and evaluate one. Assuming you have chosen a koi with a pattern that appeals to you, the first thing you need to assess is its body and head. The head should be broad in the mouth, with the eyes well set apart, a good long head, with plenty of length between the eyes and mouth. As for the body it should also be long in relation to the head. A body that appears stocky and short won't get big.

There should be reasonable strength to the backbone, with a reasonable degree of height to it between the back of the head and front of the dorsal. A body with too much



Sanke A



Sanke B

Here we have two very high quality Tosai Sanke. 'Sanke A' however, will most likely very much outgrow its sibling 'Sanke B' because of its head and body being better than 'Sanke B'. Growing a koi to perhaps 70cm from Tosai is relatively easy. But growing one up over 80cm is a whole different matter. It is when trying to grow these two beyond this size that the difference in growth between them will really be noticed

height gain in this area will develop the kind of body of a bream, where its relation in height between the highest part of the body and deepest part of the belly is simply too high in relation to body length. Such a body will just get fat, without putting in length.

A thick peduncle wrist is a good thing, but far from essential with Tosai, as they will build up this area as they grow up, or at least, they will if you do the job properly. If the peduncle is particularly thick, make sure that the tail tube isn't too short. This can be determined to be the case if the rear end of the dorsal fin leaves too tight a gap to the base of the tail. This will also give the appearance of the body being too short in relation to the head. You have to pay particular attention to this with Tosai as it can be hard to assess, but when the koi grows it becomes very obvious if there is a problem.

Also look at where the thickest set part of the body is. If the thickest part is just behind the gill covers, then it is likely that the body will put on too much of a 'chesty' appearance as it grows. Ideally, the thickest part should be around the front of the dorsal.

Skin is a difficult area to describe accurately, as it is more of an instinctive thing. Recognising good skin improves with experience. However, skin should be bright and very glossy. White to slightly 'whole milk' creamy skin is good. Skin with a slight greyish look to it is very low quality. It should also appear reasonably thick, rather than too transparent, and not too much of a dazzlingly hard white. However, Beni and Sashi will give you a little more insight into this.

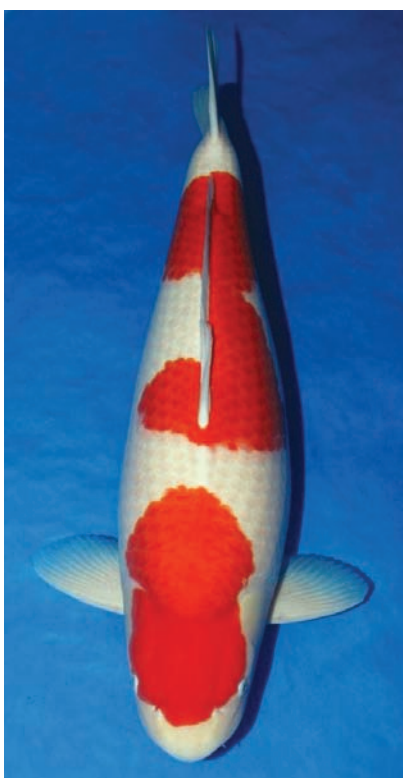
### foundation of quality

Skin should be considered as the foundation of quality. Without good skin, you can't have good colour! Without good skin, you can't have ideal Sashi either! Sashi and Beni will tell you the most about your prospective purchase, but of course, you also need to understand the lineage to some degree. So, as far as Beni is concerned, it is best to 'play safe' in these areas, unless you have considerable insight into 'long-shots' that you think can come good.

The Beni should appear not too red, but very thick, soft and glossy across the scales. If ▶

There will always be one or two koi that you will disregard that come good later in life...

These photos are of a Kohaku as Nisai (two years old), and then as Yonsai (four years old). A big koi can look very different to a smaller koi, so when looking to buy Tosai, try to imagine how the pattern will look when the koi grows big



you look close, it should almost look as if the pigment cells are 'high resolution' rather than looking grainy in appearance. The tricky part is that if a breeder is using a lot of colour food for raising his Tosai over winter, then the koi will most likely look redder, than they will do as Nisai. It helps to understand what his Nisai of the same lineage generally look like.

Sashi is extremely important, as it gives an indication of colour quality, and colour elasticity. For each scale on the koi that is exposed at the surface, the rest of the scale is overlapped by the scale in front, and also the one in front again. In short, only a third of each scale is exposed on the surface. As such, if a koi is a 'safe bet', it should have what will appear to be one scale of Sashi depth (where the colour on the scale is overlapped by a white scale in front). If it is deeper than this, it is an indication of either lack of skin quality, or an indication that the koi is likely to develop secondary Hi later on in life. This is more of an issue if the Beni is thick and soft, of high quality.

If the Sashi is consistently one scale deep it should tighten up as the koi gets bigger, as the white scales in front will get thicker with age/size, and make the colour much less obvious where it underlies the white scale in front. If it is two scales deep however, then this is more of an indication that the skin quality is below par, and letting too much of the colour show through.

As you can see this Kohaku as Nisai had a very pale Beni colour, and yet after being grown in a customer's pond from 59 to 70cm as Sansai, her Beni colour has changed greatly, becoming much redder. This is because the breeder doesn't use colour foods in the mud pond. So as you can see, it is important to understand bloodlines and feeding



Kiwa, is the rearward edge of each step of pattern. Two types of Kiwa exist, one being the more desired Maruzome, which follows the edge of the scales, and the other is Kamisori, which cuts across the scales. Maruzome is highly prized, as its style results in an elegant Sashi, which is usually very sharp because of the nature of how it follows the outside edge of each scale. Kamisori isn't so prized, because it is simply less attractive, and also has a tendency to look a little blurred. However, a koi with a mix of both types of Kiwa is often very well regarded, as koi with a mix of both types of Sashi tend to be particularly robust as far as colour stability is concerned.

## success comes with experience

If a koi doesn't fit the criteria above, it doesn't mean that it is no good. It simply means that the chance of it becoming a high class jumbo koi isn't as high as it would be if it did conform to the criteria. There will always be one or two koi that you will disregard that come good later in life, and hence, you will wish you bought it when you saw it as Tosai. But, if you analyse the koi as per this article you will find, in time, that you have a great success rate with koi becoming good later in life.

This article focuses on Kohaku, as Sumi (as per Sanke, and Showa) would need a whole article to itself! 鯉



Sashi is extremely important, as it gives an indication of colour quality, and colour elasticity