

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 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.



Mike Snaden visited Japan for 38th All Japan Show – the largest koi event in the world. Here he shares his views on the show and the nine champion koi...

world class

shiny beni at its best. But, alas, the koi would freeze to death if the January event were held in the open air. It's not all bad news however, as flash photography can pretty much overcome the shortcomings of the artificial lighting, so you get to see the koi looking great, here in the magazine!

catching up with old friends

Aside from being the world's foremost koi show, the All Japan Show, is for me at least, a wonderful social event. It is an event where I get the chance to meet up with friends and acquaintances from so many different countries... people that I would otherwise only bump into occasionally when scouring Japan in the hunt for good koi.

The show is run by the Shinkokai (Japanese Breeders' Association) and the event this year was, as always, a 'well oiled' one. The koi arrive on the Thursday, and are released into the show pools by those who have been responsible for getting the koi to the show, whether a hobbyist, or handling dealer. I feel that this gives a huge advantage to the entrant, as preparation during the weeks/months prior to the show, as well as transportation methods, can make the difference between winning, or losing.

I am a firm believer in slowly mixing pool water into the bag over a period of several minutes, and then releasing the koi and water into the pool, as opposed to attempting to lift the koi from a bowl, and placing it into the pool water. Such sudden water chemistry changes can often completely ruin a koi's skin appearance for the show, as can too much aeration in a transport tank on the way to a show. The handling of a koi is just as important as the level of the koi itself if you wish to win.

the judging

Judging took place on the Friday, as always, with only judges, or those with press passes allowed into the show area. On the Saturday morning, the public are allowed into the show,



Mr Katsuo Shibayama proudly holding his Grand Champion trophy. Photo courtesy of Hikari, the food manufacturers the Grand Champion koi was fed on

The coveted 38th All Japan Combined Koi Show was held on 20-21 January. As usual, this event was held at the Tokyo Ryutsu Center. Quite simply, this koi show is, and always will be, the biggest and most significant koi show in the world, with people descending upon the show, not just from Japan, but from all over the world. Over the last few years, the number of foreign visitors to the show has risen dramatically, as has the number of foreigners competing in the event.

The sheer size and scale of the Tokyo show really has to be seen to be appreciated. However, since KHV has become a risk to the industry, the show has been held 'English style', which means that the number of koi per pool isn't nearly as high as it used to be several years ago. The standard of the koi however, was as good as ever.

a winter event

In the UK we hold koi shows throughout the summer. The Japanese however, are very strict about using the summer months for growing koi, predominantly in mud ponds. The risks of moving and handling koi in the higher temperatures of summer are also very high, as are the risks of transferring viruses and other diseases – another good reason for having the show in January. Unfortunately, this means that the event has to be held indoors, using artificial lighting. This makes judging and appreciation of colour quality extremely difficult, as the lighting makes soft beni (red), however beautiful, look particularly washed out. Only thicker redder colours can stand up to this kind of lighting. In my eyes, there is no substitute for good sunny daylight, for showing off beautiful


Pictured right: Prize: Grand Champion, Kokugyo,
Best in Variety Variety: Showa Size: 85cm
Owner: Mr Katsuo Shibayama

the winning koi have their relevant award positions in place over the pools.

On Saturday evening, there was a celebratory buffet held in an adjacent hall within the Ryutsu Center. Tickets cost 5000yen, and this part of the event offers some interesting food, plenty of beer, and a chance to socialise with hundreds of like-minded koi people. After the buffet, people usually venture out in smaller groups to enjoy the rest of the evening as they see fit. Many of these groups go off for elaborate restaurant meals, if you still have somewhere to fit the food!

a worthwhile trip

If you have ever considered going to Japan, I would strongly recommend visiting the All Japan Show. You will never see such a collection of koi anywhere. Sure, you can pick fault in many koi there, but you have to remember that being living animals, no koi is perfect in every respect. Every koi will inevitably have a weakness. You have to remember how much the Jumbo koi in particular have to go through, year after year, to get to the size and standard to compete in any serious koi show. You will often see a few battle scars, and will have to treat them somewhat sympathetically, and concentrate on the koi's qualities.

I am going to comment a little further on some of the winning koi. Take these comments not as a statement of fault or criticism, but an opinion of any weakness – not unworthiness of its award. Remember the strengths are the reason the koi won its position in the first place. 

Grand Champion

This wonderful Showa was bred by Dainichi, and sold by Narita Koi Farm for a very low sum of money when small. You could argue that the Kohaku pattern is somewhat weak. But, my feeling with Showa, is that where there is an absence of hi (red), a presence of sumi (black) can fill in and balance the koi. Well, this Showa is blessed with beni of a very rare standard in Showa. The beni is incredibly thick, soft and glossy. As for the sumi of this koi... this is also of a very rare quality, and incredibly refined to boot, with no scattered scales of sumi, or shimis to be seen. Truly a wonderful koi, as Showa are incredibly hard to produce, and prone to so many inherent faults. The only weakness in this koi are the few scales of hi that appear to be slightly breaking away from the pattern near the koi's right pectoral fin.



Super Jumbo Champion

This Kohaku is extremely beautiful indeed. I heard comments about the head being a little misshapen, as if it had tram-lines in the top of it. However, I found this very easy to overlook, as the koi has so many good qualities... This koi has a very attractive and balanced pattern. The beni of this koi is incredibly beautiful, with wonderful teri (gloss or lustre). Each and every scale of kiwa (trailing edge of pattern) is razor sharp, with most of it being maruzome (scalloped), and the sashi (leading edge of pattern) was absolutely perfect, with no weakness anywhere. This koi has some truly precious qualities. The body is perhaps a little plump for my liking, but she carried it just so well, with her backline being perfect, and bellyline that showed no sings of pulling in tight where the pelvic fins are.



Prize: Super Jumbo Champion, Best in Variety
Variety: Kohaku Size: 90cm
Owner: Mr Richard Tan (Singapore)

Jumbo Champion

This is a very attractive Showa, with a very balanced pattern as Kohaku, and the same can be said for the sumi pattern. The wonderful head, and body are the koi's strongest points.



Prize: Jumbo Champion
Variety: Showa Size: 80cm

Owner: Mr N Budiono Gunawan (Indonesia)

38TH ALL JAPAN SHOW

Jumbo Champion (male)

This Showa is evidence that male koi can indeed get big, and this koi has to be given a huge credit for that. This koi had an excellent head and body for a male.



Prize: Jumbo Champion (male)

Variety: Showa Size: 90cm

Owner: Mr Tadashi Koguchi

Senior Champion

This is a Shiro Utsuri that makes you feel good inside! This is an extremely attractive and refined koi, with an absolutely beautiful pattern. The shiroji (white area) is excellent, and the sumi quality is of an incredibly rare and hard to find level. For a Shiro Utsuri to win this prize, it has to be outstanding... and this one was!



Prize: Senior Champion
Variety: Shiro Utsuri Size: 65cm
Owner: Mr Razif Abdullah (Malaysia)

38TH ALL JAPAN SHOW

Senior Champion (male)

Nowadays, Sanke tend to have sumi that is very unrefined, and scattered. Not this one. The sumi placement, quality, and refinement are outstanding with this koi. The Kohaku pattern is also very good, with excellent kiwa, and nice tight sashi. The body is also excellent for a male koi.



Prize: Senior Champion (male)
Variety: Sanke Size: 70cm
Owner: Mr Hiroaki Okano

Adult Champion

This Kohaku is absolutely stunning, and has an incredibly beautiful and balanced pattern. The skin is wonderful, as is the beni quality, and body. The sashi is very slightly tighter in some places than I would like, but otherwise fine. The kiwa is pretty much ideal. This is the kind of koi that I would love to watch grow to jumbo. But, remember that for this to happen, will take several years, and potentially, several mishaps along the way. I think that if she is placed in the mud pond for the next couple of seasons, her teri will improve greatly. Conditioning a koi for a show can sometimes see a compromise in this department, where the tips of one or two scales can appear to lose colour pigment.



Prize: Adult Champion
Variety: Kohaku Size: 55cm
Owner: Mr Shinji Okada

Young Champion

Showa are incredibly hard to produce, and prone to so many genetic faults. This one has a good Kohaku pattern, and very nicely placed sumi. With Showa, sumi quality is everything, and as such, it can only be fairly judged by the sumi that falls on the white ground. As such, this koi seems to have excellent sumi. The head of this koi is wonderful, with great length in front of the eyes, with a lovely wide mouth that is made for eating! If this koi has the right genes from its parents, then koi with these kind of qualities will usually get very big. You could argue that being Showa, this koi is a little lacking in sumi on the head. But, remember that sumi will develop at the rear end of the koi, and down towards the lateral line first, and then works its way forwards and upwards. The head and shoulder area will finish last. A koi with a very front/back balanced pattern when small, will often end up front heavy when big. But, the balance of this one is such that when it grows up, the balance will become excellent.



Prize: Young Champion
Variety: Showa Size: 40cm
Owner: Mr Eisaku Kato

38TH ALL JAPAN SHOW

Baby Champion

This Kohaku is blessed with an excellent patter, generally wonderful kiwa, and consistent sashi. The head is one that is enviably good, with wonderful length and width, with a long nose. Unfortunately, koi that are as attractive as this when small, usually turn out male. But, even if this one is male, I am sure it will become very beautiful when it grows up.



Prize: Baby Champion
Variety: Kohaku Size: 20cm
Owner: Mr Tadashi Koguchi