



# THE ULTIMATE TATEGOI CHALLENGE

**The Good, The Bad, The Unknown**  
**BY MIKE SNADEN**

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU KNEW THAT, HANDS DOWN,  
YOU COULD AT THE VERY LEAST EQUAL THE PERFORMANCE  
OF JAPANESE BREEDERS' RAISING TECHNIQUES?**

**M**ost people who keep Koi have a romantic, dreamy perspective of the hobby and, even more so, of Japan. As such, many people will often buy Koi, leave them in Japan for a year or, in some cases, many years, with great anticipation of visiting their Koi on an annual basis. But what would you do if you knew that, hands down, you could at the very least equal the performance of the Japanese breeders' raising techniques?

#### **The Challenge**

I have always looked at Koi dealers' "Grow & Show" competitions as being full of compromise. Compromise caused by the purchaser's keeping skills or water, and often compromised by the standard of the Koi on offer in the first place. Don't get me wrong, these competitions often offer an immense amount of fun and value for the money. But, what if the Koi offered up in the first place consisted of many high-end Tosai of varying prices, with a few very good Koi keepers targeted with such Koi? There are reasons for my motivation with this. First, although they often make the hobby more interesting, there are so many conflicting opinions within this hobby. One issue I have, in particular, is water hardness. I sit on one side of the fence, advocating that water be kept as soft as possible, and others fight this train of thought to the nail, pushing for hardness levels to be kept as high as possible. So, what better way to put this debate to bed than sell a whole bunch of Tosai, some to fantastic ponds, some to bad ponds and some to unknown ponds. Then, next year, we can compare all of these Koi and the conditions that have been used to raise them. This may seem interesting enough on its own, but the icing on the cake is that this challenge can also be used to help Koi hobbyists understand how a Koi's bloodline traits and individual strengths/weaknesses affect its future. As such, all of the Tosai sold this year, along with some I have chosen after the closing date, will be followed through to Nisai and featured in *Koi Nations* magazine

So, in addition to helping prove a point, I hope the overview of some of these Koi will help people understand how different types of Beni, different bodies, different Sashi, different Kiwa, etc., will affect a Koi's future. Many attributes of Koi can easily be overlooked, and many weaknesses also. It is my opinion that some of the Koi that were first to sell will turn out the weakest, and some of the Koi not given a second glance will turn out the best. This is partly because some of the most favoured Koi will have been snapped up by people whose ponds might not perform well, whereas other people may have bought a lesser Koi, but have better water for raising them. I also think that, in the case of the lower priced Koi, the best ones have all been sold. But, in the case of the expensive Koi, some of the best have been completely overlooked, not because of price, but simply dismissed because of not being so attractive, or balanced, etc. When it comes to high-end Tategoi, the differences can appear very subtle, yet these subtle differences can make a huge difference to the Koi's future. But, of course, time will tell.

#### **The Prize**

This challenge is more of a 'case study' than anything. But, in order to motivate people to participate and give it their best effort, you have to offer some kind of incentive. In this case, what I've chosen to do is split the Koi into two classes: The lower level includes Koi of up to £700/\$1,296 in value; the higher level is applied to any Koi over this price threshold. The most expensive of all these Koi (by quite a margin) was £2390/\$4,423. The judging for this challenge isn't based on which is the biggest Koi, or the one that would fare best in a Show. What we are looking for next spring is the Koi that breeders would consider their absolute best choice for the future. Or, another way to look at it... the most valuable as Nisai!

There will be one winner in the lower level category and two winners in the higher price level. The two winners in the higher level will get to choose one Koi (for free, of course) from all our Tategoi Tosai obtained next spring. The winner in the lower level will get to choose a Koi of up to £700/\$1,296. I wouldn't say the prizes led people to buy more Koi, with a few of the cheaper ones perhaps being an exception, but I think the prizes will encourage people to put a little more effort into raising them.

#### **Let the Games Begin**

When it comes to raising Tategoi, bloodlines play a key part in being able to "read" the Koi's future. But, aside **continued on page 55**



**4862 ) Momotaro Sanke**, 34cm/13.3in.  
This Koi should prove very robust, and a strong grower despite the moderately hard water of its owner.



**4876 ) Momotaro Sanke**, 32cm/12.5in.  
This Koi is of very nice quality, but challenged slightly by its head shape. However, the owner of this Koi has of the best ponds of all, so I am still expecting a great result! He also owns Kohaku 5510, so you should see similarities in the owner's results.



**4879 ) Momotaro Sanke**, 33cm/13in.  
Amongst close friends, the owner of this Sanke joked that he was going to win this challenge without even being in the country! His state of the art computer automation and CCTV should help him with this. Expect great things!



**5171 ) Takigawa Kohaku**, arrived May at 26cm/10in, now 36cm/14in.



**5184 ) Takigawa Kohaku**, arrived Mat at 28cm/11in, sold at 32cm/12.5in, North East Koi Show Baby Champion at 35cm/13.7in.



**5204 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April 3rd at about 18cm/7in, sold at 28cm/11in in July.

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**5122 ) Matsue Kohaku**, 30cm/12in.  
I have high expectations for the growth of this Kohaku. My only concern is that the Beni will look a little soft as Nisai, due to a slight lack of ambient light. The owner also owns Kohaku 5184, which has the best Beni quality of all the Takigawa 'Hoshikin' lineage Kohaku. 5308 and 5353 also belong to this owner.



**5150 ) Matsue Kohaku**, 30cm/12in, 32cm/12.5in at BKKS National Show 2008, 'Baby Champion'.

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**5209 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 18cm/7in, sold in June at 28cm/11in.



**5213 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 16cm, sold in July at 28cm/11in.



**5221 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 18cm/7in, sold June at 28cm/11in.



**5223 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 18cm/7in, sold July at 28cm/11in.



**5229 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 18cm/7in, sold July at 29cm/11.4in.



**5269 ) Momotaro Sanke**, arrived April at 24cm/9.4in, sold June at 34cm/13.3in.



**5308 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 27cm/10.6in, sold in July at 29cm/11.4in.



**5329 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 26.5cm, sold in July at 30cm/12in.

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**5256 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived April at 18cm/7in, sold July at 28cm/11in.



**5262 ) Momotaro Sanke**, arrived April at 24cm/9.4in, sold June at 32cm/12.5in.

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**5353 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 26.5cm, sold in July at 30cm/12in.



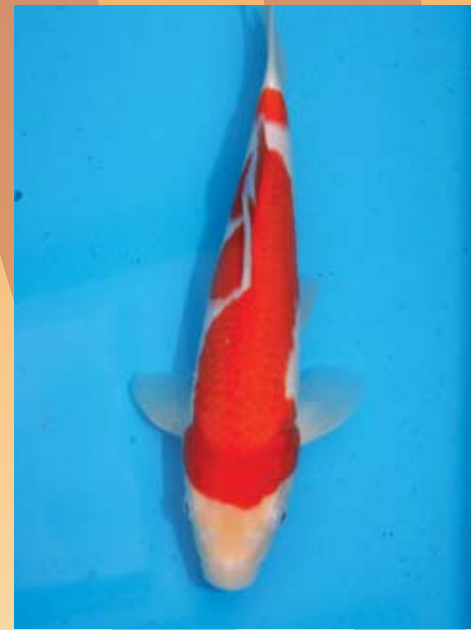
**5380 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 23cm/9in, sold in July at 26cm/10in



**5384 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 24cm/9.4in, sold in July at 27cm/10.6in.



**5399 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 25cm/9.8in, sold in July at 28cm/11in.



**5429 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 30cm, sold in July at 32cm/12.5in.



**5510 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 28cm/11in, sold in July at 30cm/12in. Despite being one of the cheaper Koi, the owner's outstanding pond/water and raising techniques should see this Koi emerge as one of the best ones!



**5837 ) Matsue**, arrived in early June at about 30cm/12in, now 33cm/13in. Strengths: Beni quality and pattern. Weaknesses: Soft Beni and slightly deep Sashi are a risky combination. Although the colour is robust, this combination can lead to secondary Hi. Not sold.



**5841 ) Matsue**, arrived early June at about 30cm/12in, now 35cm/13.7in. Strengths: Beni and pattern. Weaknesses: Kiwa is slightly too tight. This colour and Kiwa combination (with this particular bloodline ) is somewhat delicate. If carefully raised through to Nisai, it will become much more robust then. Left with us for growing

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**5474 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived in July at 27.5cm/10.8in, sold in July at 30cm/12in. Although this one was inexpensive, the owner's pond is particularly good, so I hope to see extremely good results with this one, and 5229, which he also owns.



**5505 ) Yamatoya Kohaku**, arrived and sold in July at 26cm/10in, but collected in August at 32cm/12.5in.

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**5850 ) Matsue**, arrived early June at 33cm/13in, now 39cm/15.3in. Strengths: body and size advantage over its siblings. Weakness: I would prefer a little more refinement in the Kiwa, but in this instance, I think it will slowly fill some of the scales and become more attractive as Nisai.



**5860 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early June at 26-27cm/10-10.6in, now 34cm/13.3in/13.3in. Strengths: Sashi and Kiwa are ideal. Weaknesses: Beni is a little too red. But, with this Kiwa and Sashi, it should prove robust. However, this kind of Beni can be hard to keep looking attractive long-term.



**5881 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early June at 26-27cm/10-10.6in, now 33cm/13in. Both 5881 and 5894 didn't sell. These will both become amongst the top of all of the Koi. But, although similar in quality, as Nisai onwards, 5894 should become much better. This one is an extremely good prospect!

**5894 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early June at 26cm/10in, now 33cm/13in.

**5874 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early June at 26-27cm/10-10.6in, now 33cm/13in.



**5928 ) Takeda**, arrived early June, at 26cm/10in, now 36cm/14in. The breeder of 5928 and 5936 uses a lot of colour food to raise his Tosai. As such, the Beni appears a little too red right now. 5928 has some weakness in the Teri, and would really be better off in a mudpond. It will need careful raising. 5936 is a little weak in

its Kiwa. Maruzome Kiwa that looks slightly exaggerated can be prone to falling apart. Hopefully, as Nisai, these will both be okay. Both reside here, but 5936 was never offered for sale (sentimental reasons).

**5936 ) Takeda**, arrived early June, at 26cm/10in, now 37cm/14.5in.

**5954 ) Takigawa**, arrived April, at 24cm/9.4in, now 39cm/15.3in. This Koi was never offered for sale. I bought it in March, just for fun. It should prove to be very robust in all areas, and get big easily. I have high hopes for it.

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**5904 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early June at 26-27cm/10-10.6in, now 33cm/13in. Although this Koi will be very robust, its Beni needs extremely good water. It won't disappear, but given the softness of the Beni, and soft Kiwa, it is possible that as Nisai, this one won't be such high quality. Not sold.

**5916 ) Yamatoya**, arrived July 1st at 32cm/12.5in, now 35cm/13.7in. This one didn't sell. It is very likely that this one, along with 5894, will be well into the top 10 as Nisai! This Koi should prove to be very robust in all areas (Kiwa, Sashi, Beni, etc). It is also very likely to get big easily.

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**5967 ) Takigawa**, arrived early June at 29cm/11.4in, now 36cm/14in. This was from a new parent set. I am not overly keen on the bloodline, as I don't favour red Beni so much. This Koi should prove robust, and I think that some of the Kiwa will fill and improve. Sold, but staying with us.

**5975 ) Takigawa**, arrived early June at 32cm/12.5in, now 38cm/15in. Not in the best of condition at the time of photographing, but should grow very strongly to Nisai. The Beni may be hard to keep looking good long term, but this is a first breeding, so somewhat unknown. Sold, but staying with us.



**5986 ) Takigawa**, arrived early June at 27cm/10.6in, now 35cm/13.7in. This is from the same parent set as 5967 & 5975, but has inherited the Beni from its male parents (Matsue ). In fact, this Beni will actually probably fair better than any of the Matsue-bred Koi themselves! My only concern is that the body isn't as long in



relation to the head as I would like it to be. This may hamper its growth a little perhaps? Sold, but staying with us.

**5993 ) Takigawa**, arrived early June at 28cm/11in, now 35cm/13.7in. This one wasn't sold, so we are keeping it as a comparison. Although I am not keen on



this Beni type, I am still expecting good things of this Koi.

**6001 ) Momotaro**, arrived in April at 23cm/9in, now 39cm/15.3in. This Sanke should prove near indestructible with the Beni type, Kiwa, and Sashi that it has. Sold, but residing with us until Nisai.



**6031 ) Takeda Sanke**, arrived in April at 25cm/9.8in, now 40cm/15.7in.



**6043 ) Takeda Showa**, arrived in April at 25cm/9.8in, now 39cm/15.3in. Showa are an interesting animal. This one may look lacking in pattern, but my hope is that the Sumi will come up in the right places, and give it the balance it needs. Here at present, but being collected very soon.



**6047. ) Takeda Showa**, arrived in April at 25cm/9.8in, now 40cm/15.7in.

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**6013 ) Momotaro**, arrived in April at 24cm/9.4in, now 42cm/16.5in. Potentially the biggest in the challenge. Sold, but residing here until Nisai. It is up to me to keep the stocking levels low enough to see this Koi thrive to its best potential. Weakness in the Teri around the lateral area of the tail tube, but is characteristic of the 'Mako' bloodline, and strengthens as the Koi grows.



**6019 ) Momotaro**, arrived in April at 23cm/9in, now 37cm/14.5in. Not given a second glance. Bought in January at around 19cm/7.4in, but was dismissed for its quality. However, I hope for this one to be of extremely high quality as Nisai, and big! Removed from sale, and kept for this challenge.

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**6054 ) Takeda Showa**, arrived in June at 28cm/11in, now 33cm/13in.



**6069 ) Takeda Showa**, arrived in June at 26cm/10in, now 33cm/13in. This customer's Kohaku is one of the cheaper ones, and will be residing here. The Beni is nice, but the Sashi is slightly uneven, and coupled with the soft Beni, can sometimes be a problem with secondary Hi. Harder water would help keep this at bay a little.



**6077 ) Takeda (Ya-San) Showa**, arrived in June at 25cm/9.8in, now 32.5cm/12.7in. This Showa is of outstanding quality, and will hopefully be stable against secondary Hi, or weak Teri, both of which are all too common problems in Showa. She is sold, but staying here.



**6091 ) Omosako Shiro Utsuri**, arrived in June at 28cm/11in, now 34.5cm/13.5in. I've always been a bit strange, haven't I? A Shiro Utsuri mixed in with a bunch of Go-Sanke??? Well, a Go-Sanke it isn't, but in terms of growth and quality, it should prove an interesting comparison. This Koi has never been offered for sale.



**6096 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early July at 26cm/10in, now 29.5cm/11.6in.



**6111 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early July at 26cm/10in, now 31cm/12.2in.



**6114 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early July at 28cm/11in, now 31cm/12.2in.

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**6104 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early July at about 28cm/11in, now 32cm/12.5in. I bought 6104 and 6143 as males, but am not unsure if this is the case, so will grow these as comparisons. If they turn out to be female, they will be extremely good. Time will tell?



**6143 ) Yamatoya**, arrived early July at 28cm/11in, now 34cm/13.3in.

*continued from page 43* from this, it is also extremely important to understand the raising techniques of the breeder, primarily so that you can make an informed judgement on what his "better" Koi should look like. The other thing that will prove useful with this article is that you should be able to see similarities between Koi, despite their differing bloodlines. What I mean by this is how a certain Koi's body type will affect its growth, and how certain Beni, Sashi and Kiwa combinations work, or fail. You see, some Beni types can be prone to secondary Hi, but the Kiwa and Sashi of the Koi will often dictate the likelihood of this happening.

As stated before, one of the key issues this series will highlight is the difference that various water types have on raising Koi. As such, I have encouraged as many people as possible to take their Koi away and "do their best." That said, a number of them will remain here for the duration. We have raised a lot of them up until the end of August, but it will only be around 15 that will stay here. Also, we have 11 Koi that haven't been sold. We are keeping them for comparative reasons. Two of these are Kohaku that have never been offered for sale, and one is a Shiro Utsuri (also not offered for sale), but the others are all Koi that we decided to keep after the July 31st closing date. In other words, we chose from those that didn't sell.

The average size of the Tosai when our challenge started was around 27cm/10.6in. The biggest was around 33cm/13in, with the smallest being around 24cm/9.5in. The breeders of the various Koi are Matsue, Momotaro, Omosako, Takeda, Takigawa and Yamatoya. There is no particular reason for this selection; these are simply the breeders that these Koi happen to be from.

I hope this series will prove useful to you when the next installments

are published over the coming months. What will be even more interesting is that, even after our Tategoi Challenge is concluded next spring, *Koi Nations* magazine will continue to follow a number of these Koi over a much longer term! 🍀



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