



On the other side of the table, Andrew judging Abyssinians at this year's Northampton Show.

cessful. The shed contains a number of promising show prospects, including two boars (from a Red boar out of a Roan sow) and two very young sows (by Coe out of a Roan sow).

Four Roan breeding sows are being used. As all Aby breeders will know, for various reasons Roans must not be bred together and Andrew almost always uses a Brindle boar to Roan sow cross due to the number of Brindle boars available for use compared with Roans, although he would be quite happy to use the cross the other way round if suitable Roan boars were available.

The Reds

Self Reds are a firm favourite with many Aby exhibitors and Judges. Derek Pike in particular produced a couple of outstanding boars excelling size shape and depth of coat, and possessing the richness of colour necessary to show these qualities off to full advantage. Although not seen as often as Brindles and Roans, the best Red Alys generally are more than capable of competing with the more common colours, often excelling on depth of coat and collar and having more prominent manes than their rivals.

Although Andrew has had Reds since 1985, he has yet to produce one of the quality of pigs such as Basil, Cram, Linford and Regis, although he has produced some very useful pigs. The leading Red boar at present is one of the best Reds produced to date, namely "Ovett II", aged just over a year. This pig's show career is in its early days, but he has done very well on each of the half dozen times he has been shown so

far, being unbeaten in strongly competed self classes at major stock shows.

The other two Red boars in use are "Red Pepper" (aged about 16 months, a grandson of Basil) and "Christie" (aged about 15 months, out of Coe). There are no Red breeding sows in use at the moment, although there are a couple of young sows being run on for breeding in the near future. Although there is nothing wrong in breeding Red to Red, Andrew usually breeds a Red to Brindle, and sometime Red to Roan (to produce strawberry Roans).

Of the younger Reds, the ones rated most highly by Andrew at present is a very young baby sow (by the Red Christie out of a Brindle sow) and a boar, grandson of Regis.

No Rosettes or Ridges!

This may come as a shock to many fanciers, but Andrew does not exclusively keep Alys. Housed in a "overflow" block positioned at the shed are two pairs of smooth Tortoiseshell and Whites, which had previously belonged to Andrew's youngest son Robert. Andrew has no serious ambitions with this breed, but has simply kept them on because he likes them ("and it keeps Avnet Allen happy!"). These few pigs are bred from stock obtained about six years ago from Andrew Pearson and the late great Jim Tenner. Surprisingly for someone keeping only a few of this breed, one of them is a "well showable" adult sow, cleanly patched with good lines and colour.

A surprise on a slightly larger scale is the presence of ten Self Chocolates in the shed. As mentioned previously the Sparkes household had kept Chocolates during their early years in the fancy. Recently, when undertaking judging engagements Andrew has increasingly found himself having to handle selfs in mixed duplicates. He decided that in fairness to self exhibitors he needed to perfect the very different handling techniques required to properly assess selfs as opposed to Abyssinians by having selfs in the shed to handle on a daily basis. The choice of colour was not difficult for him (despite coming under great pressure from certain fanciers to keep Blacks) Chocolates are his favourites. The pigs consist of a trio acquired from Evelynne van Vliet in March of this year, and two litters. The pigs are very decent and may well be shown later on. The breeding stock has good shape and broad heads with sound colour and bold eyes. Most promising of the babies is a very young boar about 4 weeks old, excelling eye and ear and with a good broad head. Andrew is keeping a close eye on this one's progress.

It is probably fair to say that this is, without much doubt, the leading stud of Abyssinians in the country and has been for quite a while. On the basis of our visit, it doesn't look as if this situation is going to change in the foreseeable future!

Readers may note two points. Firstly, Andrew has concentrated almost exclusively on the boars of the stud, as in the Abyssinian breed these constitute almost all the successful show pigs. Secondly, we have made specific comments about the features of any individual animal. We have not done so because this would involve mentioning the minor faults by which they can be distinguished, rather than concentrating on overall qualities which all the pigs possess.

Andrew rates the strengths of his stud in the initial impression an Aby makes to judge is all important and hopes that as the pigs go by more credence will be given to helpfully descriptive standard recently published by the club. Andrew will not keep any Aby over the age of five months unless he regards it as showable, and any boar kept over that age has to be regarded as a good show pig. To be regarded as "showable" any pig must have a good depth of coat, good shape and good collar mane. Minor rosette and ridge faults will be tolerated in breeding stock. Andrew never shows sows, except in under classes, save in the Aby CC Adult SS which classes specifically for adult sows scheduled.

At the end of each breeding season, Andrew reviews his stock to see if there are any recurring faults requiring eradication or any points needing improvement. On the whole he is happy with the show stock available to him at present and the youngsters being produced. If he feels any improvement has been made in this year in stock, it is collars and manes.

Andrew is justifiably proud of the reputation he has established with his stud of Abyssinians, and is keen to maintain, and even improve upon it and hopes he has helped to promote both the Abyssinian and the club. Over the past ten years his stud has won a total of 127 best in show awards. The wins of which Andrew is most proud are those at Aby CC stock shows and major championship shows. Also very prized is his record at Southern CC Adult SS over the past nine years, where he has won best Aby on every occasion, best self on 8 occasions and best in show on 11. These wins include runner up to BIS at the SCC 1987 Golden Jubilee show, and BIS at the 1992 Emerald Show. He is also particularly proud of having been champion Brindle exhibitor in the Aby CC points competition for each of the past nine years and is keen to make this ten!

He says that with all the success he has in the hobby all the more and is pleased to be associated with so many other successful exhibitors, many of whom are friends, and also believes that much of his travelling shows wouldn't have happened without support and friendship of Jackie. Guess he knows how many thousands of fans have been covered!

Just one major win has eluded him but the ultimate win for any fancier of BIS at Bradford Championship show. Need to say, he is hoping to remedy this omission at the earliest possible opportunity!