

I wonder what is next?

Phalaenathe *Dendrobiums* have come a long way since the heady days of *Den. Lady Hamilton* in 1953. The hybridiser was then, and still is trying for lots of large round intensely coloured flowers arranged nicely along a strong inflorescence

It wasn't until 1961 when *Den Hickam Deb* (American Beauty x Lady Fay) came onto the scene that things really started to happen. Hickam Deb was responsible for such notables as James Dick and Kristen Ann, but one of the best by far was *Den. Bernadette* (Hickman Deb x Ultimatum) in 1987. I saw a photo of this orchid in an orchid publication displaying 22 magnificent flowers, not a bad effort compared with most of today's hybrids. Of course all of the above are dark purple dens, the bi-colours & whites didn't start in earnest until around 1959 with *Den. Tomie*, this and *Den. phalaenopsis* (Syn. *schroederanum*) appears to have been the building blocks for the bi-colours.

By 1976 we had *Den. Paradise Maid* and then in 1982 Autumn Show (Tomie x Paradise Maid). It was only three years later that the late David Littman started to register his efforts with *Den. Dalellen* (Lady Gem x Paradise Pearl). From then until very recently this line of breeding has been prominent on our show benches. But what next "all good things must come to an end". As with Mr. Littman, in the end his gene pool just ran out. The seed from the next generation was difficult to germinate. The plants were stubborn and hard to grow, producing nothing like the wonderful results of his heyday. A gene pool is a bit like a rubber band, you stretch it out too long and thin and it will break.

To get back on track we must first restore vigour into our plants. Of course it's no use having a vigorous spray orchid with only 5 or 6 flowers. So as well as a vigorous plant we need one that has lots of well arranged flowers with a good vibrant colour on a long strong raceme. So what's new I can hear you all saying - well nothing is. We have got to go back to basics.

For the past 6 years or so I have introduced *Den. phalaenopsis* "Clifton" into my bi-colour breeding program. The results so far have been very good. I crossed *Den. phalaenopsis* with a number of selected "Dals". By going back to the species seems to have paid dividends. There are a few Dals crossed with *Den. bigibbum* var. *Superbum* around the place that could be of value to the astute hybridiser.

Another line I find very exciting is the *Den. Kiyomi Beauty* and *Ekapol* range. I have been trying to produce a phalanantae shape in this beautiful contrasting dark red/white combination.

A *Dendrobium* called *Elegant Midnight* (Ram Mistra x Kristen Ann 1986) seem to be of value, the first generation seems to be lacking in shape but the colour and flower count is outstanding. I have also used an imported plant (Udom Sri x Chen Songuan) X (Michael Sado x Srisoomboon) this has also worked well, as well as introducing an entirely new gene pool into my stock. When you start hybridising you really know you are behind the eightball right from the start. From a seed pod containing 1 million seeds, *only* about 200 of these seeds are grown on to maturity. So it is really is a numbers game isn't it? You would have to be very very lucky to grow the best 4 or 5 orchids out of a million seeds when 99.08% of the seed go into the rubbish bin.

I have enclosed a story off the internet all about genetically modified orchids. One scientist in Singapore has introduced the genes from a firefly onto a white dendrobium and guess what - it glows in the dark. Of course this type of stuff is way out of the price range for this little black duck, but the mind boggles doesn't it. I would like to hear from others who pursue this fascinating pastime and see what they are getting up to. In closing just remember - before you dab on a bit of pollen; stop and think very hard what the results might be. There are thousands and thousands of also rans out there already.

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