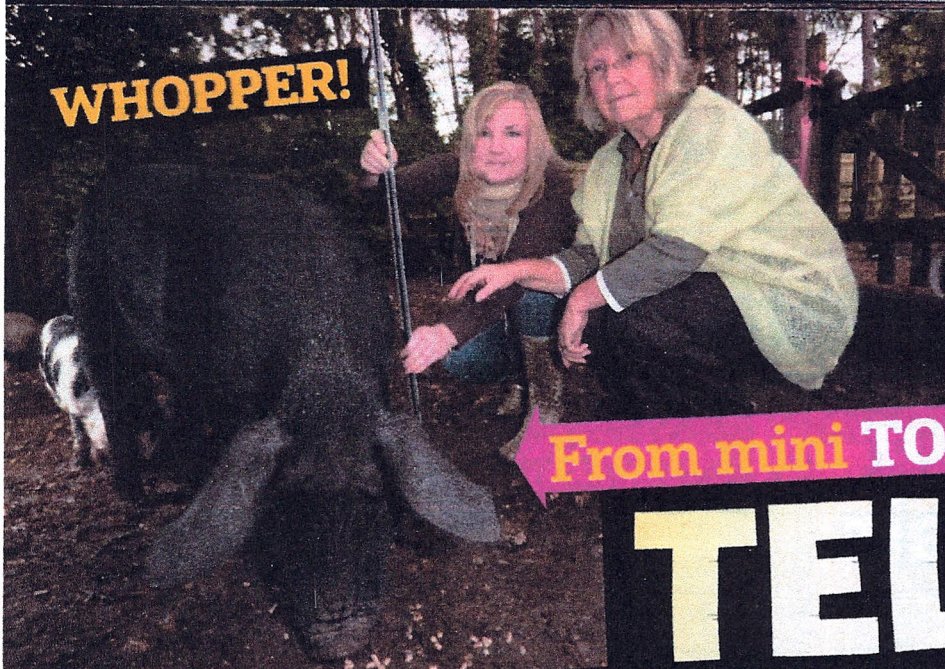


WHOPPER!



Pigwig was once smaller than our dog, Tinks

From mini TO MONSTER

TELLING PORKIES...

When Emma bought a micro-pig, she was in for a big surprise!

Stroking my new pet as he curled up on my lap, I couldn't help smiling. 'He's so adorable,' I cooed to my mum, Margaret, 65. 'Told you he wouldn't be any trouble. He's like a little dog!' But instead of 'woof', this little fella got your attention with an 'oink' - as he was a micro-pig! I'd been obsessed with pigs since I was little. I was so besotted that, at seven, I persuaded Mum and my dad, Rod, 67, to get me one. I named him Wilbur after the pig in *Charlotte's Web*.

Living in Ringwood, in the New Forest, our four-bedroom house had a big garden. But, at 2ft tall, Wilbur quickly made his mark. 'He's got out again and is pinching apples from the neighbour's tree!' sighed Dad. 'And he's dug up my lawn.' When he died three years later, I was heartbroken and spent years pestering my parents for another. 'I'm sorry, love, but they're just

too big for the house,' Mum said. Animal mad, I made do with dogs, guinea pigs and a parrot, but I never gave up hope of having another pig. Then, in July 2009, Dad spotted an advert in a magazine... 'Have you ever heard of a micro-pig?' he asked. 'What are they?' asked Mum. 'They're small pigs that don't grow any bigger than 16in tall,' he explained. 'That's tiny, considering the average pig is over 3ft tall.' 'That's perfect for the house,' I squealed. 'Please can we get one?' Seeing pictures of the petite porkers, all three of us fell in love.

I contacted a breeder and, a few days later, she delivered an eight-week-old piglet. He was barely bigger than a baby chick. 'He should only grow to 14in,' she said as I handed over £450. 'Hello, Pigwig!' I grinned, cuddling him as my boyfriend, Chris Marsh, 27, a support worker, rolled his eyes. Pigwig quickly settled in. He had a dog basket in the conservatory to sleep in and we blocked his entrance to the rest of the house with a baby gate. During the day, he charged about in his pen while I ran

my dressmaking business in my workshop in the garden. 'Someone's got a healthy appetite,' I laughed, as he pigged out on meals of pignuts and veg. By four months, Pigwig was 14in tall. 'Aww, he's all grown up now,' I cooed as he snuggled up on my knee in front of the telly. Always affectionate, he loved being carried around like a baby. 'Are you putting on weight?' I sighed when he was eight months old. 'Feels like you've eaten a few too many pignuts!' Putting him down, he looked a little taller. But he couldn't be... 'Does Pigwig look like he's grown?' I asked Dad. He got out a tape measure. 'He's 16in - two inches more than we expected,' he said. 'Maybe he's just a bit porky!'

But as the weeks went by Pigwig kept growing - and growing... 'Jeez!' I exclaimed, sweating, well, like a pig, as I tried to pick him up. And a sneaky suspicion started forming. *Maybe Pigwig wasn't a micro-pig after all...* I grabbed the tape measure, and gasped. He was 20in tall! 'Looks like we might have a big problem on our hands,' Dad sighed. 'Oink!' Pigwig snorted. As he expanded, so did

his sense of mischief. One morning, we discovered he'd charged down the baby gate and gone on the rampage. There was mess everywhere! 'He'll have to sleep outside if it carries on,' grumbled Dad. Then, one night, I was woken by a loud crash downstairs. 'What the hell...?' I cried as I raced downstairs, with my parents in hot pursuit. Pigwig had pulled the radiator off the wall! 'That's it,' fumed Dad. 'He's out!' 'I don't think he can be a house pet any more,' soothed Mum. I couldn't argue. We had to face facts - our micro-pig was a monster! *It looked like someone had been telling porkies...*

We rang the breeder to complain. She claimed she was conned when she bought them, but gave us a full refund. Although Pigwig wasn't what we expected, we've decided to keep him. We wouldn't swap him for the world. He's now 2ft 4in and a whopping 9st - and still growing! Dad's built him a full-size pen outside and we've found him a mate, a smaller Kune Kune pig called Percy. They're as happy as pigs in muck! However big Pigwig gets, I'll always love him, but there'll be no more cuddles on my knee from now on!

Emma Smith, 26, Ringwood, Hampshire

Real 51 people



TINY

Pigwig once had loads of room in his bed...



GROWING

... but he soon grew out of it!



HUGE!

Now he dwarfs Percy!

Photos: Solent News

in Little Pig Farm advertisements. In August, the Advertising Standards Agency ruled that Jane should not continue making the height claims as she had not been able to provide proof. The ruling followed a complaint from members of the British Kune Kune Pig Society.

Jane now claims her pigs grow to 'knee height or below – between 18" and 24"'. She freely admits that she has given compensation or new piglets to various customers who found their pets outgrew the predicted height. This, she says, was due to bad foundation stock bought in from another breeder – animals which have since been removed from the breeding programme.

Jane says potential customers are vetted for suitability and she does a Google Earth search on premises to determine whether or not the pig will have access to the outdoors. "At the end of the day, the interests of the pig comes first," says Jane. "If I don't like the people, they don't get a pig. I have to be able to sleep at night."



Micro pigs have proved hugely popular

WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?

Plenty of people have been perfectly happy with their micro pigs, but there are exceptions ...

CASE STUDY

Holly Burns,
Salisbury, Wilts

Holly lives with her partner Kisha and Moonpig – a one-year-old, 80kg gilt which was expected to reach knee-height, but just carried on growing. Kisha's mum found a farm shop in Hampshire selling what were described as micro piglets and bought one as a gift.

Holly and Kisha's experiences of keeping a 'house pig' could make you think twice before doing the same.

Holly's message to potential pig owners is clear: 'Please, please, please think seriously about what you are letting yourself in for before making a decision based on its tiny cute appearance. Micro pigs are not part-time pets - they are high maintenance and demanding.' It quickly emerged that, even though Moonpig was small compared to a

'normal' size pig, she could be just as destructive. "Pigs naturally root and forage for food, rub their snouts everywhere, and chew things, so it's unfair to scold them for behaving in a way that just comes from their natural instinct," she says.

Moonpig's instinct told her to turn a new carpet into a threadbare one, and it wasn't long until she found the parquet flooring beneath and set about tearing that up, too. Shoes have been destroyed, central heating pipes chewed, and the once-neat lawn has been completely turned over, leaving not a blade of grass.

Meanwhile, Holly's cats have moved upstairs because Moonpig has taken to charging at them if they venture into any of the downstairs rooms.

"Although I have grown fond of her, I would happily see her go and live on a smallholding with other pigs, where she could explore and forage in a natural environment," Holly admits.



Moonpig rips up the parquet flooring

Micro pigs are not part-time pets - they are high maintenance and demanding

CASE STUDY

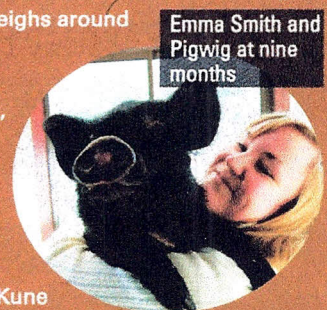
Margaret Smith,
Ringwood, Hampshire

Margaret was one of Little Pig Farm's first customers. She bought Pigwig – now a year old – for her daughter Emma, who had previously had a pot bellied pig as a pet.

"When we saw these micro pigs advertised, which were guaranteed to stay really small, we decided to buy one," she explains. "We were told he wouldn't grow much bigger than our Lhaso Apso dog (the breed standard says males should be 10" at the shoulder), but he is now 26" high, 40" long, and weighs around nine stone!"

Pigwig sleeps indoors at night, in the Smiths' sun lounge, but spends the day outside in a third-of-an-acre paddock with a Kune Kune friend. "We never

intended to have him in the house, but he was just so cute and I didn't mind when he was really small," Margaret says. "But, by the time he got to about eight months' old, he was getting quite big and strong. We used to have a child gate on the sun lounge to keep him in, but he broke through that, and we had to install a proper stable door. He also had the radiator off the wall!" Margaret went back to Little Pig Farm and was refunded £400 of the £450 she paid. "The money went towards paying for some of the repairs!" she laughs.



Emma Smith and Pigwig at nine months

NEXT PAGE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON MICRO PIGS