



# weekend food

## Deep fried little piggies

### REVIEW BY

Dan Stock

### PICTURES

Andy Drewitt

### GYPSY & PIG

391 Little Lonsdale St,  
city

### FOOD

Japanese tonkatsu

### HOURS

Lunch, Mon-Fri;  
dinner, Tue-Sat

### CHEF

Ken Higuchi

### BOOKINGS

Yes

### TIME BETWEEN ORDERING AND EATING

Eight minutes

### PERFECT FOR

A solo midweek fast  
feed; a fried feast with  
friends

### DESTINATION DISH

Tonkatsu kurobuta  
loin set

### NOISE FACTOR

Unobtrusive

REVIEWS ARE  
UNANNOUNCED AND PAID  
FOR BY WEEKEND.  
RESTAURANTS ARE NOT  
REVIEWED IN THE FIRST  
MONTH OF OPENING

**K**UROBUTA (literally black pig) is the most highly prized pork in Japan. The menu at Gypsy & Pig announces its dedication to the meat of the Berkshire on its opening page.

This ancient breed of pig is lauded for its delicate sweet flavour and deep rich marbling, which renders it juicy and tender.

A restaurant devoted to tonkatsu (breaded fried pork) using the best in the world? This curiously named 20-seater bolthole sounds like my kind of place.

### FOOD

The fairly brief menu includes the famed meat in many guises — most of them fried. The eye fillet, loin and a “hamburger” steak are offered tonkatsu style. The loin (pictured, \$20), is a generous portion of meat covered in panko crumbs that provide a light crunch to the tender sweet meat. Though deep fried it’s not oily, and is served simply with a lemon quarter and a pile of crunchy shredded cabbage, as tradition dictates.

While I’m happy with such simplicity, it’s possibly too mono-dimensional for some, but this is easily rectified by adding a teishoku set (\$7) consisting of a wonderful miso, some rice and pickled veg. If fried pork maketh you smile, this maketh a happy meal.

The crispy belly (\$19) wasn’t particularly crispy, but did showcase the delightful properties of kurobuta fat: now you see it, now you don’t. Dissolving in an instant, it leaves a viscous and delicious calling card (that has your cardiologist’s number writ large). It’s served with some veg, but no one is coming here for veg.

But they do come for the Scotch egg (\$8.50), and with very good reason. The egg, its vibrant orange yolk perfectly cooked to a wiggly set, is encased in a lightly spiced mince, which is in turn covered in more panko crumbs. The lot is then fried. The two halves sit on (more) shredded cabbage, a squiggle of mayo and a smear of thick tonkatsu sauce (a Worcestershire-type sauce). It’s another smile-maker.

The stuffed chicken wing (\$4.50) is a dexterously prepared Russian doll of a bite, the meaty wing (you guessed it: crumbed, fried) concealing a sweetly fragrant pork/chive gyoza. It’s like a Kinder Surprise for adults — what’s not to like?

The converse should be true for the oven-baked

potato gratin (\$16), an incongruous inclusion to the menu (which also includes a bagna cauda entree and a prosciutto and shaved parmesan salad, so I guess that’s the gypsy part of the name taken care of). But he who sneers, sheds tears.

A bubbling, creamy mess of potato and broccoli florets, studded with wonderful thick smoky pancetta, is covered in cheese baked to a crunch. The addition of cod roe to the sauce is inspired: salty, creamy and cheesy, it celebrates calories in a glorious way.

### DRINKS

All this fried perkiness needs beer to wash it down, and Asahi is on tap (\$8/\$11) to come to the rescue. Sapporo is the only other Japanese beer offered in a stock standard range (Crown, Stella, Corona etc.)

Better to go with the range of cold sake, or shochu (a Japanese spirit) cocktails for a more authentic tippie. There are five whites and five reds by the glass, a surprisingly well chosen selection of big names (Petaluma, Shaw & Smith, Devil’s Lair).

### SERVICE

Two waitresses work the floor with fair efficiency, and there’s no faulting their endearing sweetness. But really, delivering every dish we ordered at once?

That’s not efficient, that’s really annoying, especially given the small amount of personal space you’re allocated seated at the kitchen counter.

### X-FACTOR

For a one man (and a helper) operation, the kitchen moves with skill and precision and provides a touch of theatre when seated at the counter.

There are a few booths at the back for tables of four, but this is

an intimate affair that effectively and alluringly channels a Tokyo tonkatsu bar. In case you didn’t quite get the message from the menu, there are myriad pieces of porcine porcelain taking up pride of place around the space.

### BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Lovingly reared prized pork doesn’t come cheap — and nor should it — but it doesn’t come close to the heights charged for other such coveted ingredients, wagyu and the like.

For less than \$30 the tonkatsu set is a fairly substantial meal, but once you add in a Scotch egg and a beer you’re not walking out with change from \$50.

### VERDICT

While there is lots (and I mean lots) to like about crumbed and fried pork, for a little space so myopically dedicated it would be good to see that focus extended with more authentic booze to create a better complete package. Then this specialist really would be special.

