



Photo: Marika Lahti Photography

# *The American Curl*

An introductory thumbnail background of the American Curl Cat

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In June 1981, two hungry long-haired domestic cats, a black and a black and white, appeared in the courtyard of Grace and Joe Ruga in Lakewood, California.

These had funny curved ears. Those cats were the “Shulamith,” the ancestor of the curls, to be found in the pedigree of every authentic American curl, and her sister “Panda”.

Although ‘Shu’ was very protective of her sister, she disappeared after two weeks. “Shu” however, charmed the Ruga’s and was duly adopted into their home.

Six months later, “Shu” produced a litter of four kittens, and to the surprise of the Ruga’s two kitten out of the four, sported the same curvy ears as their mother.

This caused a bit of a sensation and brought about considerable attention in the world of cats. The genetic basis of that trait, which was still unknown at the time, began to be considered.

The systematic breeding of the cats began in 1983, with the desire to give these unique cats their own breed status, perhaps also with show rights.



Photo: Satu Hämäläinen

The renowned English cat geneticist Roy Robinson examined data from 81 litters, (383 kittens) and found it to be an autosomatically dominant trait.

This means that the trait is inherited when the gene that causes the trait is inherited from at least one parent, the trait will be seen in the progeny.

In December 1998, Robinson reported in the “Journal of Heredity” that he had not found any evidence of hereditary harmful defects in any of the crosses analysed to date. This knowledge guaranteed the route to a new and healthy breed - with an awesome character.

Likewise, well-known geneticist Solveig Pflueger also came to the same conclusion in her own research, that it is a dominant gene caused by a spontaneous mutation that does not have harmful properties.

The American curl was first introduced to the public at a CFA show in Palm Springs on October 23, 1983.

The first standard for the curl was written and it was agreed that domestic cats with a curl-like structure should be used for breeding. This was considered a necessity, because the whole breed is based on only one cat from which the unique ear-curling gene was derived.

The first curl-curl mating was done in January 1984. This combination gave birth to the first known homozygous curl named “Play it By Ear”, a black and white male with all of his resulting kittens, having curled ears.

Since then of course, matings have taken place between curl to curl, including





Photo: Satu Hämäläinen

homozygous matings, with absolutely no genetic problems having been identified.

The American Curl cat was ultimately accepted for registration in CFA in 1986, then successfully advanced to “Provisional Status” in 1991, followed ultimately by being granted full Championship status in 1993.

The first short-haired curl was born in the third litter from “Shulamith” and more of these were born from the offspring of “Shulamith”, so both hair lengths were accepted for the breed.

Due to the history of the breed, all colors and patterns, even masked ones, were accepted, (“Shulamith” having produced a masked kitten in her first litter).

The first American Curl was imported into

Finland in 2001, with FIFe providing the long - haired (ACL) and short - haired (ACS) curls with certificate rights from the beginning of 2003.

### **HOW AMERICAN CURLS SHOULD LOOK**

American curls are elegant in design. They are medium-sized cats, with balanced proportions being more important than size. Males are larger than females.

They are quite muscular and slender. The tail is the length of the body, so quite long. The eyes are quite large, bright and walnut-shaped.

The obvious hallmark of the breed is, of course, the curved ears. The tips of the show curls' ears curve softly straight back (90-180 degrees). No particular degree is preferred but both 90 and 180 degree ears are good in themselves.



Photo: Satu Hämäläinen

Straight-eared cats with only slightly curved earlobes can be used for breeding, but they are not show cats.

As pets, they are as lovely as their crooked relatives, for the character and other appearance are, of course, the same regardless of the curvature of the ears.

The earlobe of the curls is wrinkled and rather stiff (as in humans) at least 1/3 of the height, the tips of the ears are rounded and flexible.

Both the short and long hair variants have a fine silky coat and as little undercoat as possible, which makes the fur really very easy to care for.

All colors are allowed. The color of the eyes can be anything (blue, yellow, green or orange) except for the mask variations, i.e.

himalayan pattern, the color of the eyes should always be blue.

Long and short hair curls are so-called sister breeds and may be used in breeding together, ie. the same litter may have both long-haired and short-haired curls, with short-hairedness being the dominant trait in cats.

In FIFe, both hair lengths are judged separately in category II, divided into eleven different color groups; in CFA, you only get 1 point for coloring.

### **TEMPERAMENT**

By nature, American curls are curious and truly sociable cats, that attach easily to people and like to participate in all the activities of the home; not content to just follow the journey as observers. As well as meowing, some curls actively use body





Photo: Satu Hämäläinen

language differently from other breeds, often arching their backs playfully, and talking “with pumping heads”.

It is characteristic of the breed that these intelligent and balanced cats remain kitten-like throughout their lives and as such they are often referred to as the ‘Peter Pan’ of the cat world, (like the boy who never grew up).

Like many other elegantly crafted cats, curls are great jumpers, so the tops of cabinets and shelves will be explored. They may also, quite surprisingly, jump on their owner’s shoulder at any time from somewhere, unless they then announce their need for additional attention with their small voice.

Curls usually want to be at the center of everything, easily learn different tricks, and opening cupboards and doors is very easy

for them. For an agility hobby, curl makes a great partner.

They carry their toys and the owner’s belongings around. Curls are certainly not racists but highly adaptable, both to different situations and to humans or other animals. A cat or dog buddy is a good companion for the curl, few people alone are enough to meet all the social and activation needs of the curl.

#### **Editor:**

My own first experience with an American Curl was intriguing.. They have such an alert and curiously sweet expression to the face, and those ears were amazing to touch the first time. The base of the ear feels as if it had been ‘starched’ as it was stiff to the touch, but the curl backwards is softer. They are truly an attractive feline, created by a deity with an amazing sense of humour.