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THE MONTHLY
MAGAZINE
FOR CATS AND
CAT OWNERS



ABBAS DONNA
C-E White Exotic Kitten
Breeder-Owner;
Linda Lopez

THE MOD PERSIAN IN A MINI-SKIRT

by Jane S. Martinke

THE EXOTIC SHORTHAIR, although one of the most beautiful of cats, combining glamor with practicality, is probably the least understood of all breeds, so that its unique advantages have not yet been fully appreciated.

Many think that the Exotic is a sort of mongrel. Nothing could be further from the truth. In our frame of reference, a mongrel cat is one which occurs by happenstance without plan or purpose. A hybrid is one which is bred toward a carefully preconceived ideal standard with deliberate intent and great care. The Exotic Shorthair is a cat whose perfection is realized through careful cross-breeding; thus, it is a hybrid—never a mongrel.

The Exotic standard (in every respect but two) is an exact duplicate of the standard for Persians: its bones are strong, thick and short-coupled; its head is immense with small round ears; its face is short and round with a short, broad, snub nose; its legs and tail are short; its eyes are large and round, set well apart and imparting a sweet expression to the face. The colors and eye colors follow those of the Persian exactly. The peke-faced type is not called for, however, and the fur, while having the texture of a Persian, is short, ideally no longer than that of an Abyssinian, and it should never "flow".

This cat is truly "Exotic" in appearance because of its conformation, yet it has all the practicality of the Domestic Shorthair for it is mat-free and requires only a modicum of grooming to look its best. In short, it is a "Mod Persian in a Mini-skirt".

THE WAY IT BEGAN

Now let us see how this remarkable cat came into being. For this we must take a trip back into the earlier days of the cat fancy. Originally allbreed judges of any association were, almost without exception, Persian breeders and the Persians were the elite of the cat shows, nearly always taking the top wins. In fact, there was even what might be considered an unwritten law that no Shorthair, not even the Siamese which were beginning to grow in popularity, would ever be considered for any win higher than Best Shorthair.

Because these judges whose first love was Persian were so conditioned

to considering that breed as the epitome of all feline beauty, they tended to equate a resemblance to the Persian in any breed with excellence of quality, and so, when the Domestic Shorthair classes came before them, they were prone to disregard the characteristics of this breed which make it distinctive and place their awards on the specimens which most nearly resembled Persians. When this thought was voiced in a recent conversation with a breeder-judge of many years' experience, she commented with some acerbity and more than a grain of truth that the Siamese which were put up for Best of Breed in those days looked like Persians too, and for the same reason.

It is not hard to see where all this led. If only the Domestic Shorthairs who looked like Persians were to be considered for wins by the judges, then, reasoned the breeders to themselves, one must breed that type of cat. The quickest and easiest way to do this was to program a little Persian into the bloodlines sub rosa.

JUST A PINCH OF PERSIAN

In the good old days of cookery, before the advent of our present convenience foods, and when chicken was still a luxury to be reserved only for very special occasions, one of the acid tests of a fine cook was how large a proportion of veal she could put in her chicken salad undetected. So it was with the Domestic Shorthair. There was the natural human tendency to overdo anything which has proved successful and to feel that if a little bit is good, a little more will be better. More and more Persian was introduced and then little by little the standards were altered subtly to conform to the cats being produced in order to win under these judges who considered the Persian the non-pareil of catdom. Remember that these were the bad old days when a little falsification on pedigrees was not viewed as too heinous a crime, especially if one didn't get caught at it.

However, the sins of the fathers are visited on the children and, although the practice of such flagrant disregard of ethics fell into disrepute and people began to depend more on selective breeding for their winning cats and to take pride in their achievements within a breed, the visible fruits of the breeding sins of those days arose to plague the present-day breeder, and many a perfectly ethical breeder of Domestic Shorthairs has been horrified and embarrassed to find a partially long-haired kitten in a litter from two supposedly purebred Domestic Shorthair parents. These were not mutations. They were the normal result of the

combination of past misdeeds and today's breeding methods. The cats which were considered most desirable were likely to be the ones with the greatest admixture of Persian and so attempts were made to "set" this look by inbreeding and linebreeding with these cats, giving ever greater opportunity for the recessive genes for Persian carried by these cats to combine and bring those latent characteristics to the fore again, sometimes even to the extent of a flowing tail on an otherwise short-haired cat or even of long fur. It reached the point where, instead of chicken salad with a little undetectable veal filler, we had obvious veal salad masquerading as chicken.

THE DOUBLE STANDARD

With the growing popularity of the various Shorthair breeds through the years, judges had greater opportunity to become familiar with them and to recognize their great beauty. Inevitably judging became more sophisticated and Shorthairs began to take their proper place in the top wins. Another problem, however, was now created. These more knowledgeable judges who realized that a Persian is a Persian and a Domestic Shorthair is a Domestic Shorthair (and never the twain should meet with object matrimony and the patter of little Domestic Shorthair feet) also knew something else. Just as there is no such thing as a slight touch of pregnancy, there is no such thing as a slight touch of hybridization if a breed is to be considered a true natural breed. Any amount of another breed introduced into the bloodlines makes a cat a hybrid and, except in the deliberately created breeds, such hybridizing is anathema. Selective crossing of two or more breeds may produce a magnificently beautiful cat, but this cat must then be considered a breed of its own, never as a specimen of any one of the parent breeds. Of course it was easier to obtain the desired appearance by hybridizing, but the result was not and could not be a true Domestic Shorthair. The little bit of seasoning which had been originally added, not to impart its own flavor, but rather to enhance the good flavor of the soup, had been overdone to the point where it threatened to ruin the whole pot. The deviations became more and more noticeable.

Many people not completely familiar with Domestic Shorthairs assume that a broad thick tail is an indication of Persian when found on a so-called Domestic. This is not necessarily so, because the true Domestic in superb health and in winter coat often sports a broad thick tail provided by nature for the protection of this sturdy hunting

EXOTIC SHORTHAIR
Wash drawing by Irene
Powell from a series of
cat stationery studies.



breed in cold weather. A tail on which the fur droops and flows downward, however, is always indicative of cross-breeding. Another unmistakable sign of Persian ancestry somewhere is copper eyes or the type of blue-green eyes peculiar to the Silver Persians, as neither of these colors occur normally in the Domestic Shorthair. Other giveaways are legs which are too short, hips that are too broad, too short a space between shoulders and hips—in addition to the more obvious Persian-type head and face.

Through all the years there were always idealists who loved the Domestic Shorthair, the true one, with their whole hearts and souls and who would not allow its integrity to be compromised by hybridizing merely for the sake of wins under judges unfamiliar with the breed. Thus, genuine Domestic Shorthairs with no admixture of Persian were also being bred and shown and, more often than not, going down to the hybridized cats. Many judges of courage quietly refused to grant wins to the cats which were, to their trained eyes, hybrids. Others, of equal integrity but not so alert to the signs of hybridism, continued to the despair and discouragement of the breeders working with the true Domestic Shorthairs, to give the wins to the cats most nearly resembling Persians.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

With cats of two wholly different types being shown in one class the

situation became unhealthy for the breed. Some solution had to be found, but how? There seemed to be two possible courses. One, it would be possible simply to bring the standard still closer to that of the Persian and to discard the true Domestic Shorthair entirely. But this would penalize those breeders who had kept the bloodlines uncontaminated, while favoring those who were benefiting from long ago (we assume) introduction of unacknowledged Persian. Nor is this a wise procedure with any breed, for the standard should be an ideal toward which the cats are bred and to change this ideal concept to match the cats in being can be only a step backward.

The second possible solution would require that all so-called Domestics with obvious Persian characteristics be mandatorily disqualified. But these hybrid cats are superb, wholesome, esthetically satisfying to the eye, and it was too much to ask that they be thrown into the discard. That would also seem to point the finger of suspicion of fraud at innocent breeders whose only sin was working with the bloodlines which had come down to them in this form from the more carefree days of breeding.

(To be continued)

In next month's CATS, Mrs. Martinke discusses one Association's solution to this problem. She will also cover the Exotic as a pet, and means of breeding the Exotic.