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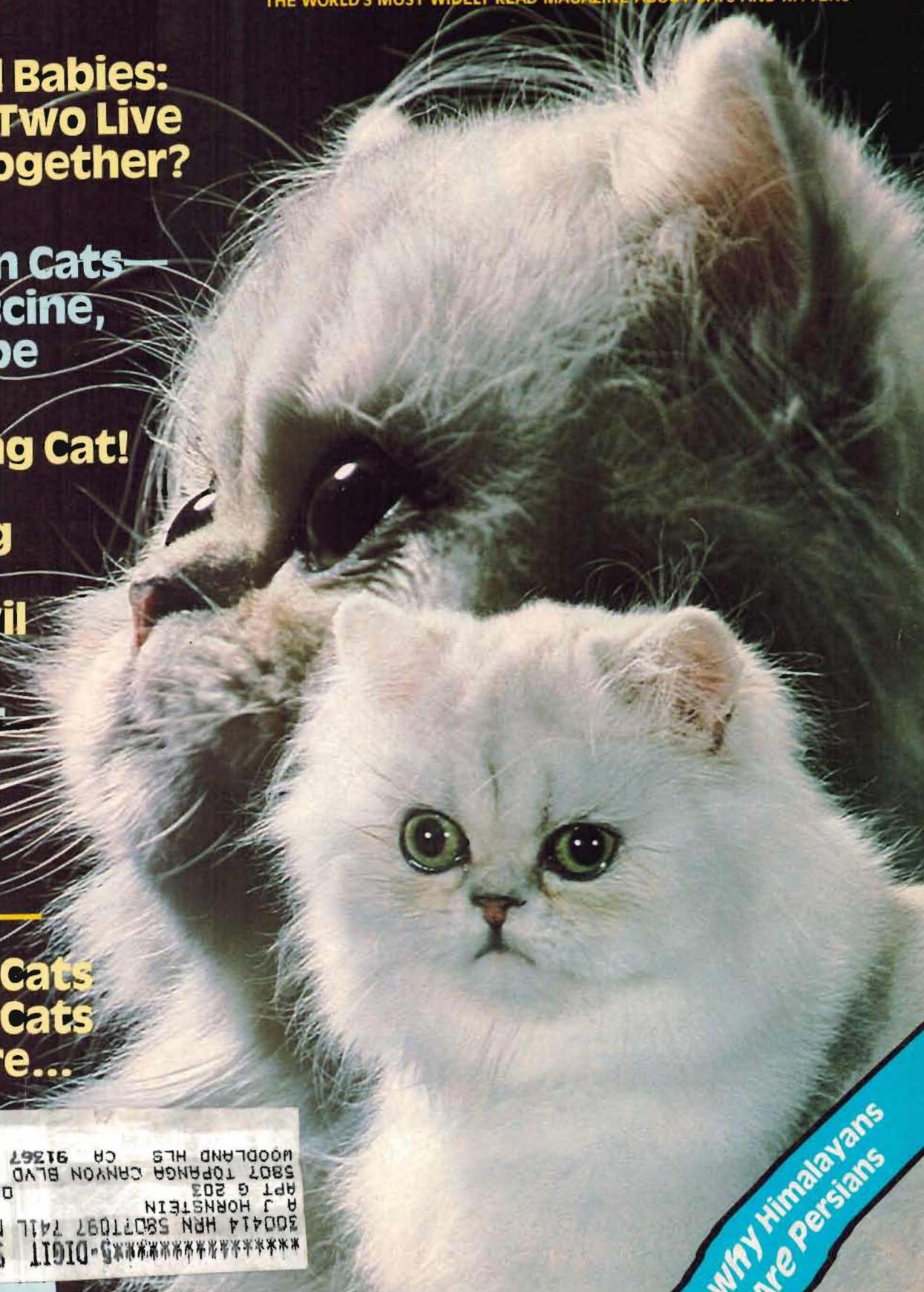
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Why Himalayans Are Persians

A past CFA president tells why the Himalayan was reclassified as a color variety of the Persian

by **Richard H. Gebhardt**

REGARDLESS of the color of a building, its architecture never changes. What does that statement have to do with pure-bred cats? Read it again after you've read this account of the origin and history of the Himalayan, and the connection should be clear.

Effective February 20, 1984, the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) combined the Himalayan breed with the Persian breed as a color division. Having one major breed absorbed into another forced many breeders, judges and other cat fanciers to re-think their ideas about what constitutes a breed. Who decides?

To better understand the CFA's turnabout, we must go back to the beginning.

In 1930 there were reports of experimental crossings of Siamese and Persian-Angoras or just plain longhairs. A report on the final stage of this experiment was published in the *Journal of Heredity* in September, 1936. In May, 1933, Virginia Cobb joined Dr. Clyde Keeler, a geneticist from Harvard, in an attempt to breed Siamese with long hair. (Actually, this had been attempted earlier by a breeder on the Continent who used blue-eyed whites, thinking he would not lose eye color. The cross proved to be less compatible than using solid blacks or blues because the blue eye of the Siamese is genetically quite different from the blue eye of a white longhair. We know now that blue-eyed whites carry the deaf factor.)

While many claim Mrs. Cobb's intent was to produce a longhair with Siamese type, Siamese breeders around the world were not about to accept such an addition to the Siamese breed. Although I never discussed Mrs. Cobb's Persian/Siamese

work with her, I did see a photo of the one pointed kitten she produced. Statements were made that the kitten was more Siamese than Persian, but I'm not sure that is really true, since Persians were not as extreme then as they are today and the Siamese in vogue were apple-headed compared to the long, racy type we see today.

In 1950, Margaret Goforth, on this side of the Atlantic, and Brian Sterling-Webb, in England, began working with Siamese-Persian crosses. Their intent was to produce a Persian-type cat with Siamese coloration.

These were the successful pioneers, along with the Barretts in Canada and Mrs. Harding in England. We would be naive to think others did not make similar attempts that were abandoned when they learned that it was necessary to have two unrelated pairs and to keep all the progeny. In the early stages of a cat breeding experiment it is impossible to tell which kittens are carrying the desired genes for color and type. There are other variables as well. Which ones will be good breeders? Vaccines were not as sophisticated then as they are now. What if a disease got in and kittens carrying key characteristics died? Any loss could mean starting all over again.

Throughout this period we had "open registry" on all breeds. We had so few breeds and colors then that if a cat or kitten looked like any one of the breeds, it was so registered with only a sworn affidavit or a statement from a judge that the cat was a true representative of the breed to the best of his belief.

In 1946 there were only seven recognized breeds. The only Siamese colors were sealpoint and bluepoint. Persians and Angoras were one and

the same for registration, and only 15 color varieties of longhairs were approved for show. At that time, 60 to 70 percent of the show entries were Persians or longhairs. By 1960, half the show was still Persians and Siamese, and other shorthairs.

For years, the CFA—and I was very much a part of it—took the position that a breed was determined by what it was bred from, not by what it looked like. When the Himalayan was accepted as a breed in 1957, we required four generations of like breeding (only pointed longhair to pointed longhair). We were very strict in our rules and, as a consequence, we were lucky to have one or two Himalayan entries per show.

As time went on and other cat associations passed us by with Himalayan entries, we decided that since the Himalayan was a hybrid, it really didn't matter if it was in the fourth or first generation—it was no less a hybrid.

Once we opened the door, we began to see substantial Himalayan classes, and the breed improved. Breeding Himalayan to Himalayan, generation after generation, resulted in poor type and sparse coat. We began to see why Virginia Cobb stated that the "Himalayan should be recognized as a color of the longhair; otherwise in a short time the Himalayan will have the long nose and slanted eyes, etc., of a Siamese."

In the 1964 *CFA Yearbook*, Mrs. Goforth wrote, "The 'longhair Siamese' type of cat is not only incorrect in the Himalayan, but is also an offense to the Siamese breeder." She goes on to say, "I have been a Siamese breeder for 25 years, and I am keenly aware that long hair on a Siamese is the last thing a breeder would want." →

THE HIMALAYAN

continued

Mrs. Goforth's opinion was not shared by all of her peers. Siamese breeders are perhaps responsible for more crosses and experimental breeds than any other group of breeders—but that's another article!

(For a little extra trivia, the Balinese we enjoy today is the result of the early groundwork done with Persian-Siamese crosses. The shorthaired pointed kittens went as pets and to many pet dealers. In some cases they were represented as "parentage unknown;" others were given "pedigrees." Later, longhaired kittens did surface in Siamese litters, not because a rare miracle took place, but rather because what's put in eventually comes out.)

The Himalayan was accepted as a breed, was permitted to win champion titles, and yet was allowed to be crossed with Persians. Himalayan breeders were quick to demand breed recognition, but after 30 years, they still feel the need to go back to the Persian. I would bet there is not a single Himalayan pedigree today that would qualify if the CFA Board were to insist on three generations of only pointed cats to establish eligibility for show entry.

My first stand on the Himalayan issue was the result of a lot of soul searching and extensive study of the whole picture. I recall debating the issue of CFA's position on breeds with Mr. Sterling-Webb during a train ride from Birmingham, England, to London in 1964. I must have appeared very arrogant in my youth, and to think I would take on such a superior person makes me chuckle today. Mr. Sterling-Webb and I became very good friends, and now, years later, I understand what he was saying during that train ride.

Sometimes a comparison is the best way to put a problem in perspective. I finalized my thinking on favoring Himalayans as a division of Persians by looking back at the acceptance process of the bi-color Persian.

A New Jersey breeder of red and tabby Persians was also interested in calico "Domestic Shorthairs." (The "Domestic Shorthair" was later renamed the American Shorthair.) While the Domestic Shorthair standard stated that any evidence of hybridization would disqualify it, the most attractive Domestic Shorthair

entries were those that had some Persian blood. The cross gave a special look and class to the cats. Judges selected them over the long, fine-boned, tight-coated cats. Even today the American Shorthair bears a wide-eyed, chunky look quite different from ordinary shorthaired cats.

This particular breeder, as a result of crossing her red tabbies to her calicos, came up with longish-coated kittens—coats very similar to those of the Somali and Balinese. With open registration, those kittens were registered as what they appeared to be: longhairs. Their type was not particularly good, but no experimental breedings produce top-quality cats in the early generations. Other breeders liked the old-fashioned picture card cats and began breeding them into their Persians. This resulted in the acceptance of the calico Persian, but only the calico. The problem was that the males of those litters were bi-colors. Calico is sex-linked; only females can be calico. (Please, no letters from the owners of the extremely rare calico males.)

Mrs. Jean Rose and I, along with Mrs. Elsie Hydon, took a firm stand against the bi-colors. Many years had been spent in breeding solid color Persians, free of any white spots or lockets. We would have no more of these cross-breeds coming in! This purist act of mine persisted for 15 years, until the issue once again came before the CFA Board.

As an alternative, it was suggested that the calico become a breed on its own; then they could have the bi-

color male counterparts. Had this been done in the beginning, it might have worked, but after 15 years of crossing back and forth, creating a new breed would have also created a witch-hunt. Mrs. Rose and I realized that we could not erase the breeding that had been done over such a long period of time. It was insane to recognize the female of a sex-linked color and not the male. Our two votes put through the acceptance of the bi-color.

Despite dire warnings from breeders that I would soon be seeing white lockets on my solid Persians, bi-colors have not ruined the Persian breed, and neither will the Himalayan. There is no need to fear colorpoints appearing in Persian pedigrees any more than bi-colors. It is far better to have confidence that the pedigree is factual.

Errors that have been made in classifying cats were rooted in loose thinking. The associations should never have allowed any breed to have championship status so long as it had to be hybridized.

Today, there is no question in my mind that the Himalayan is indeed a Persian. Only color and point-restricted pattern were introduced. Himalayans have enjoyed incredible success at the shows and have reached a level of quality that should keep any Persian breeder from fearing a colorpoint in the pedigree.

The Persian breed began as the most popular of all breeds, and it remains so to this day. The 15 colors of 1946 have expanded to more than 50 varieties with the addition of the Himalayan division. 🐾



Photo: Robert Pearcy

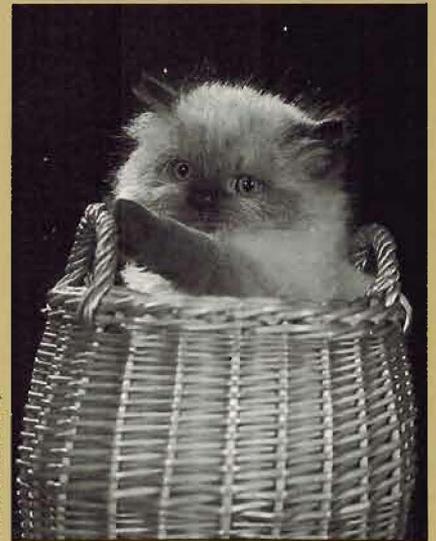
Calico Persians were originally a by-product of trying to breed cuter "Domestic" (now American) Shorthairs. Today they are great favorites. Because of its unique beauty, a good calico is hard to beat.

Photo: Tony Francis



Sealpoint Himalayans are strikingly beautiful because they combine the dark colorpoint pattern, complete with blue eyes, with the long hair and stocky body of the Persian.

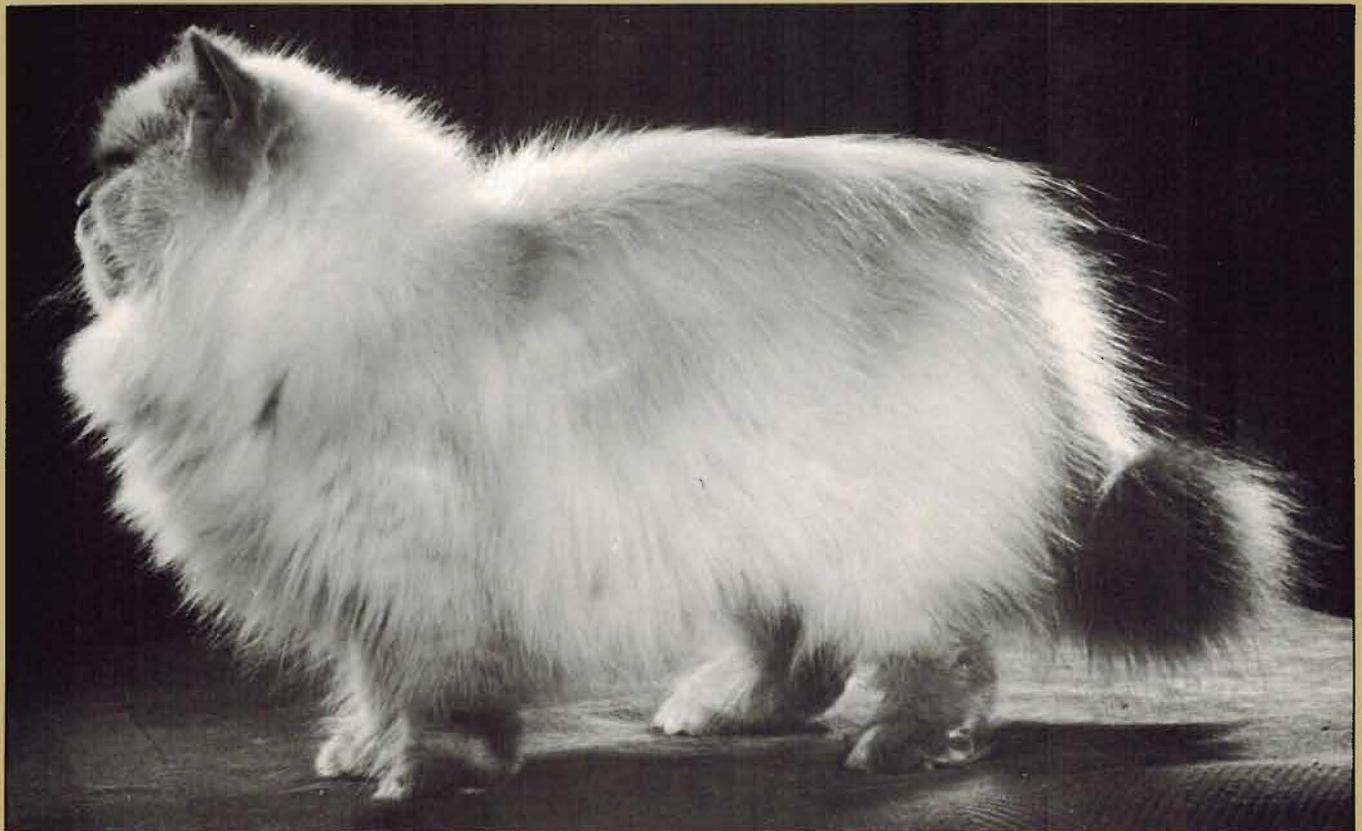
Photo: Robert Pearcy



Persians have been used heavily in the breeding of Himalayans to retain the wide-set ears, wide-set eyes and deep nose-break.

Remember when Grand Champion Quiksilver's Cascade, bluepoint Himalayan female, owned by Will Thompson, was one of the best? Today she would be shown as a Persian.

Photo: Hans Borskow



ON OVERLEAF: All colors of Persians are slow to mature. Although all kittens are adorable, it will be a long time before it will be clear whether or not these kittens have show potential.

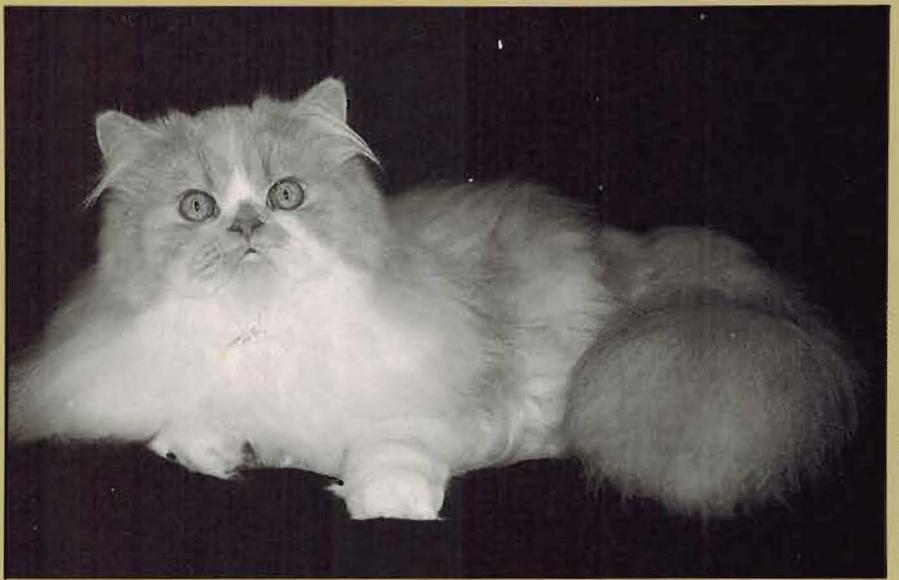


Photo: Dorothy Holby

Bi-color males appear in the same litters as calico females, but calico females were accepted for show 15 years before the bi-color males.

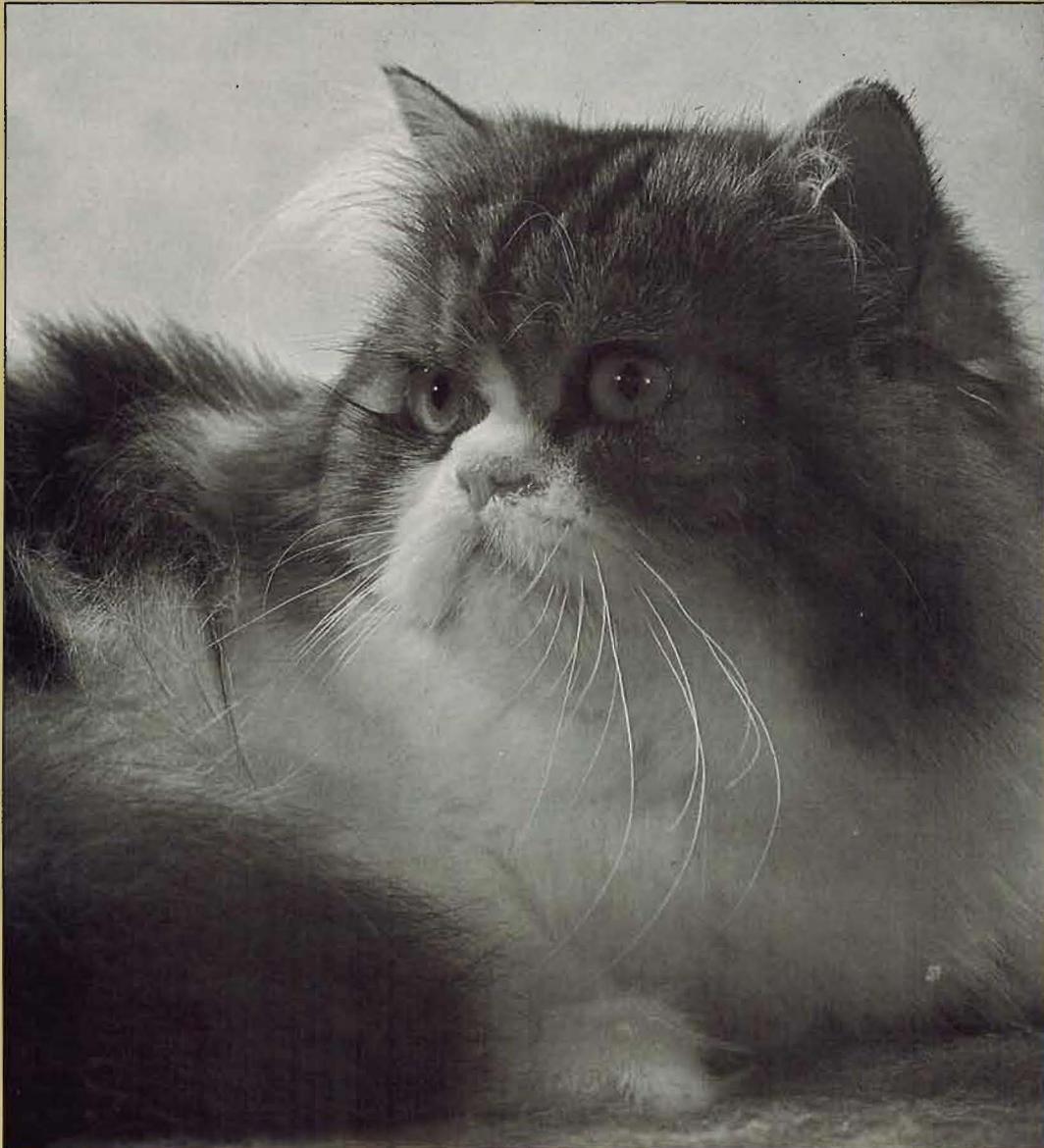


Photo: Robert Pearcy

This brown tabby and white Persian shows the influence of bi-color breeding. The inverted "V" blaze on the face is particularly desirable.