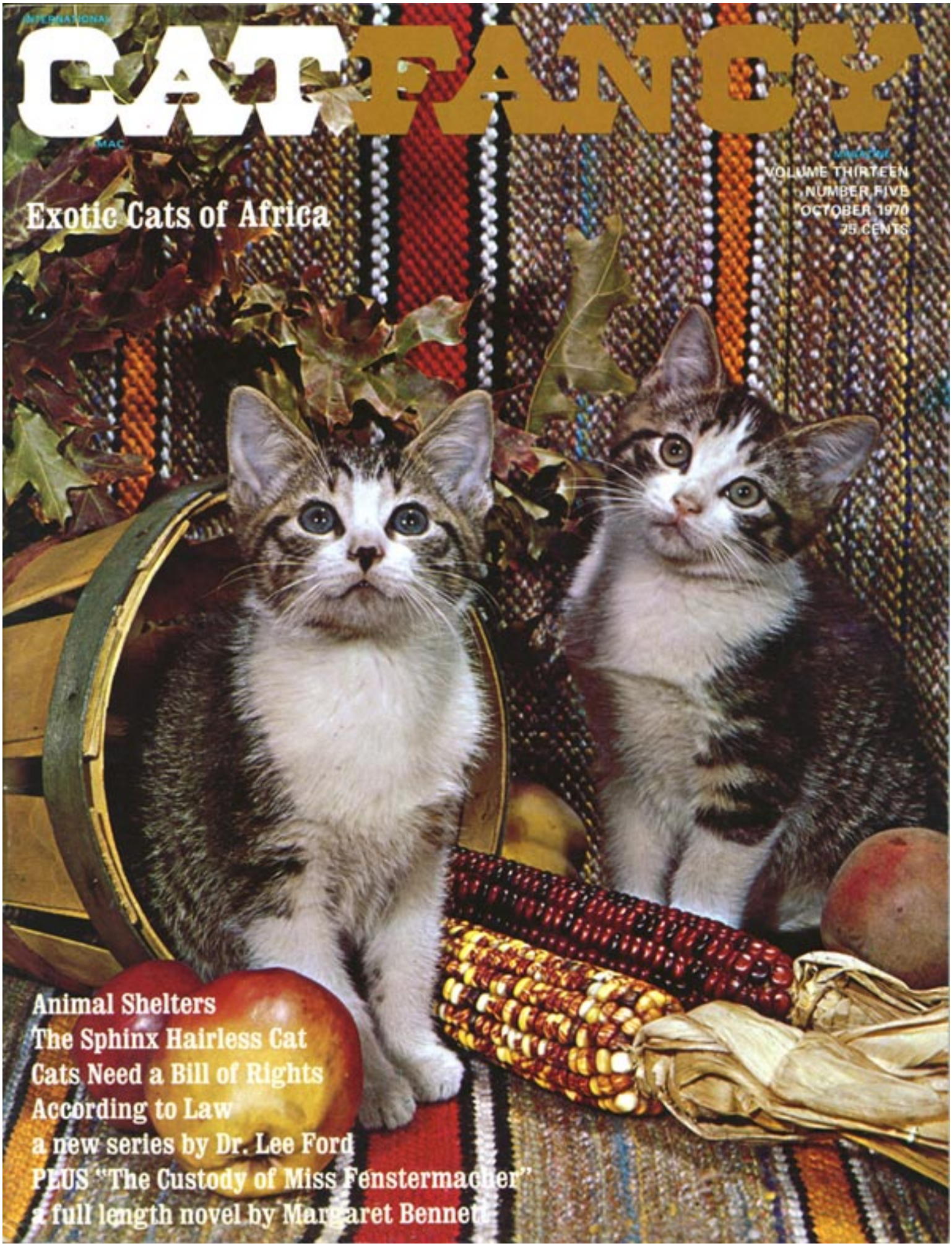
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The Sphinx Cat

by William D. Eisenman

I THINK THAT THE first time I ever saw a hairless cat, I became speechless. It was not the fact that I could not make a comment on what I saw, but a feeling that came over me similar, perhaps, to one that a person might feel upon meeting an extra-terrestrial traveler for the first time. I was simply unprepared for it. All that I could remember of that day was a wrinkled head, fantastic eyes, and a warmth of body and spirit. I was truly captivated by this creature.

Sometime later, while on a judging assignment, I heard comments about that "Sphinx Cat" in the show hail sitting on top of his cage, completely unruffled, unguarded, allowing anyone to touch him and meet him, trusting and liking one and all. After the show was over, in a restaurant near the show hail, I chanced to meet the owners of this amazing cat, Kees and Rita Tenhove, of Canada, who were just leaving. Blocking their exit as gracefully as possible, I introduced myself and made it quite clear that I had to have my own "Sphinx Cat." They told me that I had to wait, as they were far from plentiful. Finally in August of 1969, 1 got a male sphinx, and thus began one of the most interesting experiences of owning a cat I have ever had. But let us go back to the beginning. Where did it all start?

Early records have shown that hairless cats have shown up as mutations throughout the recorded history of the cat fancy. There are records of cats without hair called "Moonstones." They never became popular, and then, from time to time, other hairless felines came along. There is a section in an expensive book called The Lift, History and Magic of The Cat, in which it describes a cat called the "bald cat." It states that this breed of cat, without hair, has been resurrected by a Professor Etienne Letard of France. It further says that "bald" cats are not born completely bald. The kittens have very light hairs which are scarcely thickened by the growth of a slight down during the first two months. After the kittens are weaned, this inadequate fur falls away.

Photographs by Crescentia Allen

From then on they are completely smooth. Professor Letard then goes on to say that they are sensitive to cold, they are thin, unaesthetic and not much admired by cat-lovers. He claims that they are a flirtation for the specialist. He ends by stating that the mutation has been fixed, but the breeding of "bald" cats hardly seems to have a great future.

Professors have been known to be wrong, and in this case, Professor Letard is very wrong in his judgment and in some of his description of the "bald cat." They are no more sensitive to cold than any other shorthair cat; they are no thinner than any other cat; they are far from being unaesthetic, and they are very much admired by a great deal of catlovers.

Recently the ''hairless factor" appeared again in Canada in the breeding cats of a Mrs. Micalwaith of Toronto. Elizabeth, a black and white female furry cat, gave birth on January 31, 1966 to a litter of cats, some of which were hairless. A hairless male named Prune, from this litter, and Elizabeth were later owned by Mrs. Yania Bawa of Toronto. She bred Elizabeth with Prune and obtained more hairless kittens as well as furry carriers of the gene. The breeding of two hairless from these litters was rarely successful, as their lines were too close, and a lethal factor arose. This problem is now being worked on by Mr. and Mrs. Kees Tenhove of Canada, myself, and a few other breeders. At the present time we have found that the "Sphinx" is not a recessive gene, but breeding hairless to hairless, at this early point is too risky, due to the closeness of the lines.

We have introduced American Shorthair females to breed to the existing hairless males, we then breed the furry female offspring to other hairless males from other American Shorthair-Hairless breedings. We hope to eliminate the introduction of American Shorthairs when the breed is strong enough to stand on its own. Eventually also we hope to eliminate the furry carriers, and just breed Hairless to Hairless. This will take some time to do, perhaps years.

The "Sphinx" is perhaps one of the most affectionate and loving animals to own. They are almost completely trusting and overly friendly. Anyone not desiring an overly affectionate animal should stay away from the "Sphinx." They are extremely muscular and have a distinctive type. The "Sphinx," unlike other breeds of cats, sweats, or appears to secrete a substance which has a brown coloration. This can be removed by bathing (a washcloth and a mild soap suffice). Because of the lack of hair, normal follicular secretions may accumulate on the skin, and, along with ubiquitous skin surface bacteria, turn a brownish color. Although this may be more evident on white skin, it is present on the pigmented portion as well. When the "Sphinx" is stroked, at times, he may have an oily feel to his skin. Biopsy of the hairless cat showed that guard hairs were present, but secondary hair shaft growth had not occurred even though the follicles did possess a normal complement of sweat glands.

Since this cat is relatively new to the Cat Fancy, we are breeding for a cat that is strong, healthy, distinctive and that will breed all these characteristics to their offspring.

Unfortunately, it has been shown that the hairless cat is not the answer for the allergic cat-lover. The dander present on the cat may produce allergic reactions.

PROPOSED STANDARD
SPHINX (HAIRLESS CAT)

General: A Sphinx is to be absolutely rejected, regardless of its type, if it appears in any way sickly. It must be robust and entirely healthy. This is to apply even if it is obvious that the animal has just recovered from transient ill health. The animal shall have no guard hairs, no undercoat, and no whiskers.

POINT SCORE

Face	5
Ears	3
Whiskers	2
Paws	4
Testicles	3
Tail *(hair)*	3
Back of Body	3
Complexion	5
Sacking	2
Head	20
Eyeset	5
Eye Color	5
Earset	5
Chest	10
The central body section	10
Legs	10
Tail	5

Face: It shall be covered with a fine plush pile. On the face, the pile shall be very close, formed of short, erect, closely packed hairs. It shall look like velvet and feel like moss.

Ears: The back of the ears shall be similar to that of a Rex, the hair being slightly longer, lying close, and less compact than the mask, but plush around the lobes.

Placement of Mask and Ear Plush: The mask plush shall be heaviest around the nose and side of the mouth. It shall distinctly break above the nose and thin toward the top or inner ear lobe where it again becomes plush. The thinning shall be less where the mask connects with the lower ear lobe.

Whiskers: No whiskers. The face should be carefully examined to make sure the occasional whiskers haven't been cut. Whiskerpores are present though vacant of hair.

Paws: The paws shall be covered with a fine down, longer than the facial hair but shorter in effect than the ear hair. It shall not extend above the "wrist" or "ankle."

Testicles: The testicles shall be encased in fine long hair (the longest on the cat's body) fairly closely packed.

Tail(*hair*)**:** The tail shall be free of hair, except for the tip which carries fine, flat-lying hair occupying about an inch of the tail's extremity.

Back of the Body: The back of the body shall be covered with a microscopic hair of the same order as that found on the mask. These tiny hairs can be seen by carefully examining the surface. They are loose, that is, subject to removal by vigorous rubbing when mature; however, they are always present to some degree. The finer, the more invisible, the softer and the more even the distribution, the finer the example. Their absence will suggest shaving and lead to disqualification of the cat.

Complexion: In solids, the complexion shall be uniform across the outer surfaces of the body and graded lighter over the inside parts. The breast points and umbilical area are the only acceptable white spots on a solid, along

with the area on the head where the ears were folded when still fetal.

A parti-color must have symmetrical markings to obtain all points.

Sacking: The skin shall be taut in an adult freeing all the body of wrinkles except the head. Kittens look lost as if in a sweater far too large for them. When crouching, "folds" hang about the wrists and ankles and far out from inside the back legs across the lower back.

The Head: In the adult cat, the only place carrying wrinkle patterns. The head must suggest a snake head (5 points). This characteristic is residual in a normally positioned animal and is intensified by rubbing the chin to cause the animal to stretch its neck. When hissing the characteristic is extreme. The head must not be round or wedge-shaped. When the ears are drawn back the head shape from the eyes back is an oblong (3 points). Across the back of the head where the ears are set, the skull shall have a flattish top (2 points) curved more at the edges where it meets the ears. The center plate of the skull between the eyes shall be flat with a center ridge (3 points). There must be a slight break before the nosebreak, and the nose, due to the mask, should appear to taper slightly (2 points). In the face plane the eyes should tend to have a vertical inset. The face shall appear to sweep around the cheeks and break forward for the snout, which is short in relation to the rest of the head. It shall taper slightly back in the horizontal and vertical plane (3 points). The jowls must not sag. The chin is to be square, not pointed, to give a firm appearance (2 points).

A round head or a horse head (one too narrow, too long and too deep) destroys the snakehead characteristic and shall be considered a severe fault costing the animal 5 points. The rest of the head may still conform to the description given, however, the snake suggestion ensures proper proportions between the parts.

Eyeset: The eyeset shall be in the vertical plane, and round with a slight slant which is accented when the eyes are closed. The eyeline shall, when extended, meet the ear just inside the fleshy lobe.

Eye Color: Golden; the deeper, the richer, the better. There is to be no green around the pupil.

Earset: The earset shall be large having a wide base, and the ear sweep shall break at the lobes before connecting with the head.

The Rest of the Body: The rest of the body shall generally appear fine-boned but powerful. A big-boned or fragile appearance is a fault. No animal shall appear clumsy. The body wanted is of the finest natural type available. Selective inbreeding that extends the fineness into fragileness, hence compromising the health of the cat, shall be utterly rejected.

Chest: Short, barrel-chested, a Burmese-type chest but appearing smaller due to the lack of hair. The shoulder flanges are to be thick and powerful. The viable presence of the shoulder blades produces, when the animal is sitting erect, a hump. When held in an elongated position, the chest breadth shall be slightly wider than the hips. The front should suggest a Boston Bull Terrier, a point more pronounced in kittens which are bowlegged.

The Central Body Section: Sleek, powerful, tubular, no flatulence anywhere, rather, tight knit muscles. The body tends to suggest a fetal, pristine or elemental state. Kittens, due to a floating rib cage anchored with cartilage and therefore flexible, tend to be potbellied, but this characteristic recedes with age until full maturity when the final sleek conformation becomes absolute.

Legs: The front legs are to be long and fine-boned, finishing in small round paws. The back legs are to be slightly longer, firm with soled haunches. Due to the shape of the flank and lack of hair, the back legs appear to curve in slightly under the cat, which is a residual element of its kitten stage. When sitting barrel-chested, the cat will become slightly bowlegged, but not markedly so, and have wider hips. In the females a "pear" effect appears, but not an exaggerated one. When standing, the body is uniform, higher on the back legs with a slight tuck. The body must feel heavy, muscular, and well balanced with no sense of the fragile.

Tail: The tail should be long, thin and hard, and when turned back often reaches the shoulder blade. The only place on the cat where hard skin is acceptable is the tail, especially around the base. Absolutely no kinks are permitted.

General Remarks: Kittens shall be judged against the adult standards except that their ears appear larger, and they are covered with a very fine short hair similar to that at the points, (mask, ears, paws, testicles and tail tip). It should not feel rough, but soft as suede and uniform. When adult, the hair restricts to the points.

Sphinx cats come in all colors. Solids may carry a small, pink neck locket. Some allowance must be made for scratchmarks and injection points. The scar tissue that may be formed is paler. Moles are also generally present and shall not be considered a fault. Birthmarks shall cost the animal points, depending upon how severe.

The Sphinx cat must be alert, eager and curious. It should not be withdrawn or timid.

The Sphinx may now be registered and shown in CFA provisional classes.

Although this bio was not part of the original article, I thought it might be a good inclusion about the author. This is from the 1972, CFA Yearbook's Judges Section:

Mr. William D. Eisenman
East Orange, NJ
Cattery name: Feli-Pharm, Star Trek. Have been judging since 1968.
Breeds specializing in now: American Shorthair and Siamese.
Member: Garden State Cat Club, Morris and Essex Cat Club
and National Siamese Cat Club.