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**SECTIONAL  
AWARDS ISSUE**  
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Photo—Stephen R. Prior



NOW THAT WE have discussed at some length the philosophy of the standards, including the advantages and disadvantages of their point counts, it would seem to be the time to examine in detail the individual standards to see whether they do or do not perform their function well—and we will start with the Russian Blue standard. Before plunging into it, however, there is one more point to be made about standards in general.

#### THEY SHOULD STAND ALONE

Each standard should be able to stand completely on its own feet. Since the purpose of any standard, if it is to be clear and useful, is to evoke in the mind's eye a complete picture of the ideal cat of the breed in question, it should be able to accomplish this on its own without the necessity to refer to other standards in order to make it comprehensible. A standard which says, for instance, that the ears are to be longer than those of a Persian but shorter than those of an American Shorthair forces the reader to consult three standards in order to understand one and serves to obfuscate the concept of the ear. Most experienced breeder-exhibitors and judges have so clear a knowledge of the breed with which they are engaged at the moment that they know almost by instinct what is right and what is wrong about an individual specimen of it and they are likely to consult the standard for it only to clarify a very fine point or to settle a dispute. The people who have most need to refer to the standards are the complete tyros or the comparative novices who do not yet know and understand the breed. Such people are likely to have even less knowledge of the other breeds with which they are not working. It is confusing to them indeed when they are forced to consult one or more other standards and study them in order to understand the one in which they are interested and, unless these other standards are well-worded, they are apt to know even less than before. If comparisons are to be made the examples used should be those with which the average person is familiar.

I have referred in an earlier article to the use of the wording "rat tail" to describe the proper contour of a Siamese tail and, while this wording is not part of the standard for the breed, it could be as most people from childhood onward know what the shape of a rat's tail is, even if the knowledge has been gained only through pictures, and the average person has seen many white mice and white rats in pet shops and elsewhere. On the other hand most novices know little about a Persian cat other than that it is very furry and

#### COMING TO TERMS—

## SOME RUSSIANS ARE BLUE —NOT RED OR WHITE

by Jane S. Martinke

the thought that an American Shorthair, which they must be conditioned not to think of as an "alley cat," would have a requirement for the shape, size and set of its ears would be incredible, even ludicrous. Therefore there is nothing constructive about the use of other breeds for comparative purposes.

#### MEASURING THE MOSCOVITE

Now let us go on with our Russian Blues. Since I cannot hope to examine in depth the varying standards used by the different associations, I shall for the purposes of this series of articles take the standards of CFA which are used at some time or other by most breeder-exhibitors.

The point count for Russian Blues is a comparatively simple one and not unduly fragmented. Head and Neck 20 points; Body Type 20; Eye Shape 5; Ears 5; Coat 20; Condition 5; Color 20; Eye Color 5. Breaking this down the total head type counts for 30 points, body type 20, coat 20, condition 5 and color 25 (coat and eye).

Here I find my first surprise. The 30 points for head type is realistic, for the Russian Blue head is distinctive and in every way different from any other breed. The rather high allotment of 20 points for coat is reasonable too since the coat of this breed is truly unique. You already know my strong feeling that condition should

not be included in any standard, but should rather be an over-all requirement for all breeds which is a prerequisite to any consideration for wins. When it is included in a standard 5 points seems a trivial concession to make to it. 20 points for color would seem to be proper since not only must the cat be a clear even shade but tipping must be present in profusion on the guard hairs. 5 points for eye color is what gives me pause. This seems to be such a very small amount when one considers that a Russian Blue which does not have clear vivid green eyes would be akin to a robin which does not have a red breast. Here would seem to be where the points presently allotted to condition could be used to great advantage.

We see that the standard describes the head thusly: Top of skull flat and long. The face is broad across the eyes due to wide eye-set and thick fur. From this we can reason that a round contour of the head between the ears would not be seemly. Wide eye-set implies that the nose would be broad, at least at the top. However, we are left to ponder whether the face merely *appears* to be broad across the eyes because of the thick fur or whether it might actually have broad bone structure which appears still broader because of the heavy fur, and there is really nothing here either

stated or implied to resolve the question. After thinking this over carefully, the scales would seem to come down on the possibility that the bone structure itself is wide, since it is stated that the eyes are wide-set and it is not stipulated that they are placed at the outer limit of the face.

The Neck should be long and slender, but appearing short due to thick fur and high placement of front shoulder blades. Here I am somewhat at a loss to understand the necessity for the use of the word "front" as it would seem to me that most people automatically assume the shoulder blades to be behind the neck whether this is scientifically correct or not. Here there are niceties and refinements of this feature which are known to those familiar with the breed, especially old-timers, which could well be included in full in the standard to make it more intelligible and useful to the novice, but which are ignored and omitted entirely. These shoulder blades are placed higher than those of any other breed and, in a good specimen, are inescapably "different." Moreover, it is desirable that the blades be so close together that when the cat is sitting it is difficult to insert a finger between them. This is the reason that many experienced judges like to see a Russian Blue in a sitting position. Its unique conformation with the head flowing into the neck and the high shoulder blades produces almost a right angle "corner" as the back curves away from the shoulder blades.

These traits set the Russian Blue apart from other breeds, and any distinguishing characteristic of a breed which is not found in other breeds should be included prominently in its official description if it is to be as helpful as possible. Remember always that the standard is a description of an ideal, even idealized, specimen and it is to be taken for granted that not all cats appearing in the show ring will meet it in all respects as even the best cat of any breed falls short of perfection. To omit such a distinctive trait from the standard on the grounds that not every cat possesses it in full measure is to imply that there is no necessity for setting our sights on perfection.

#### "MEDIUM" IS NO MESSAGE

The Nose is to be medium in length. "Medium" always throws me a little. It presents no problems to the person past the novice stage, but what if one has never seen the Russian Blue? Would this be sufficiently descriptive then? It is never wise in a standard to state length in inches or weight in pounds since the individual cats will vary in overall size and a stated

amount of inches or pounds will not necessarily be in keeping with the size of all cats of the breed. Rather, these dimensions should be stated as relative proportions. How much, for instance, of the total length of the head from its top to the tip of the nose should consist of the nose itself?

The description of Chin states that the under-chin is level. Now I am really thrown for a loss for, to be honest, here I have not the vaguest idea of what this description is intended to convey. Is it meant to imply that, as with most breeds, the outer tip of the chin should be in a straight line with the end of the nose or is this intended to describe the line from the outer tip of the chin to the throat? This latter would seem to imply a rather abrupt break when the lower chinline meets the throat rather than flowing gently into it. This may well be one of those areas where the people actually working with the breed feel that "but everybody knows this" applies and so it conveys something to them which is not readily apparent to others. But a standard should be a word picture from which anyone familiar with the English language can visualize what is being described.

The Ears are to be rather large and wide at the base. Tips more pointed than rounded. The skin of the ears is thin and translucent, with very little inside furnishings. The outside of the ear is scantily covered with short, very fine hair, with leather showing through. Set far apart, as much on the side as on the top of the head. This is a description which could serve as a model for the wording of standards. I doubt that anyone reading this could fail to understand exactly what the ear of a Russian Blue should look like, its size, and its proper placement.

The Eyes are to be set wide apart, the aperture rounded in shape. This is succinct to the point of terseness, but it says everything that needs to be said on this question. One knows immediately from this description how the eyes should be.

The Body — — — but wait a minute, whoa, hold your horses and let us back up a little. The body already? But we can't possibly have finished with the head, can we? Something of immense importance is missing, the muzzle! We have not the faintest indication of the muzzle in relation to the rest of the face. Whether a novice or a judge, the person reading this is left to complete his mental picture of the Russian Blue head according to his own individual preference. If he likes he could assume that with broad cheeks the wide muzzle of the Persian with its very full whisker pads could be appropriate. Or he could feel that it should be squared off

and angular to be compatible with the ears which come down the side of the head. He might even feel that this is what the reference to a level under-chin mentioned earlier applies to. There might be a whisker break or there might not be. Nowhere here is there any authority to be cited for any particular shape of muzzle. Lacking a word picture one must fall back on one's imagination and artistic eye. What one comes up with may be the complete antithesis of what the good Russian Blue muzzle should be, but how can this be proven. For that matter, how can the expert Russian Blue breeder who knows what it should be prove his contention either?

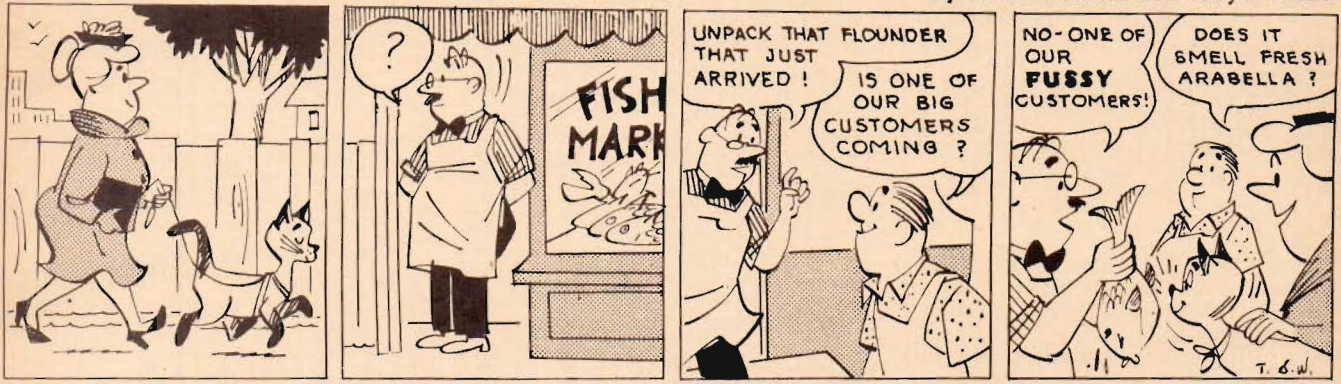
Here is where the knowledge of the expert breeder and the old-timer is indispensable. He knows that, although it is not so stated in the official standard, the Russian Blue head should resemble that of a cobra. Most people have seen pictures of cobra heads raised, perhaps to strike, perhaps in response to the piping of a snake charmer. They will have no difficulty in recognizing the proper shape, but this knowledge is not available to the novice. He is left to his own devices and he should not be. This is a serious omission from this standard.

The Body is to be fine-boned, long, lithe and graceful in outline and carriage. The Legs are to be long and fine boned. The Paws are small, slightly rounded, with five toes in front and four behind. The Tail is to be long, but in proportion to the body, tapering from a moderately thick base. Here again is an excellent and adequate piece of descriptive language. No one should experience any difficulty in interpreting it correctly. While it is not specifically stated, it would seem to be implicit in this wording that flaring ribs, drooping abdomens, broad hips, etc. have no place in the proper contours of this breed. While we are not told precisely what the width of the tip of the tail is to be, common-sense will tell us that if we start with a moderately thick base and taper, it cannot be overly wide at the tip. The paws, being *slightly* rounded, would mean that they are not completely round but would have at least a slight suggestion of the oval but more blunted than a pure oval. Since no mention is made of any difference in the length of the legs we would assume that the front legs and the back are to be of the same length and this would automatically mean a level back.

The Coat is short, dense, fine and plush. Double coat stands out from body due to density. It has a distinct soft and silky feel. In an earlier article I have discussed the question of the

(Continued on page 61)

by Frank Thomas and Lloyd White



## MARTINKE

Starts  
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Russian Blue coat as the old-timers believed it to be as contrasted with the present beliefs about it and I shall not go into that further at this time for we are here concerned with the standard itself and its interpretation. It would seem to me that there should be no great difficulty in working with this description as it now stands. Older people well know the meaning of "plush" and the younger ones presumably know how to consult a dictionary.

We come now to Condition. The good show specimen has good physical condition, is firm in muscle tone and alert. Well, isn't this true of every good show specimen, regardless of breed?

The Color is to be even bright blue throughout. Lighter or lavender shades of blue preferred. Guard hairs silver-tipped giving the cat a silvery sheen or lustrous appearance. Free from tabby markings. Nose Leather: slate gray. Paw Pads: lavender-pink or mauve. Eye Color: vivid green. There seems no room for misinterpretations of these descriptions. One would suspect that the more even the blue and the more silver tipping the better.

Withhold Awards: kinked or abnormal tail. Locket or button. Incorrect number of toes. Surely these provisions are redundant in their entirety. Since it is not stated affirmatively in the description of the tail that a kink or abnormality, visible or otherwise, is acceptable, it follows as the night the day that they are not to be tolerated and would be a physical deformity requiring the withholding of awards.


What need is there to state that awards must be withheld for a locket or button? The standard states with great clarity that the color is to be even bright blue throughout with the guard hairs silver-tipped. There is no shadow of license here for a locket or a button and so a cat possessing one or the other or both would automatically fail woefully of compliance with the standard. Incorrect number of toes? Again this would be a physical deformity which would be unacceptable. The judges should be given credit for commonsense. If they do not have enough of this invaluable commodity to exercise it properly in such matters by withholding awards for these serious faults, then they are going to "fudge" a little even with such clear stipulations and say, "but it was only a little locket," and so the admonitions would be wasted anyway. Why clutter up the standard with them?

Perhaps I should make one more observation before I close, this having to do with the breeding of these cats rather than the standard itself. Blue is a recessive and two like recessives bred together should breed true. Therefore silver-tipped blue is the *only* color which a pair of these cats can produce without raising eyebrows uncomfortably high.

Dear Russian Blue Breeders, I admire your breed and I admire even more the almost unbelievable progress you have made with it during the past few years. If I have raised your hackles with this analysis of your standard just remember, "the devil made me do it."

Next month? Sufficient unto the month is the evil thereof and who knows what the devil may have up his sleeve for me then.

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