

# CATFANCY

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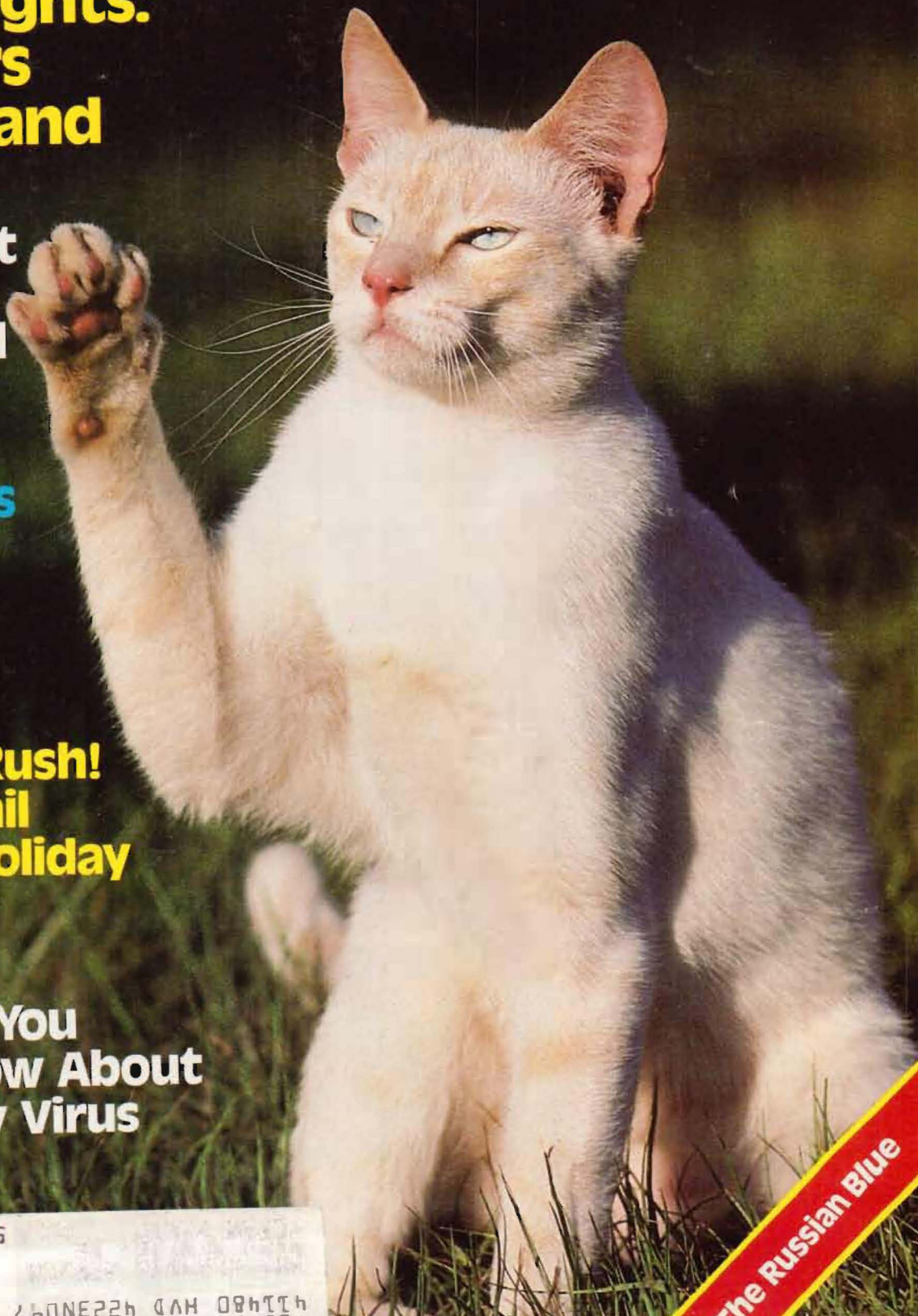
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**The Russian Blue**

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# The Cats of Wynterwynd

*Despite its small size, Wynterwynd produces ravishing Russian Blues.*

by Dorothy Holby

**I**T IS ALWAYS gratifying to meet a breeder who cares more about the health of her cats than the number of kittens that can be sold. When Annette Wilson started breeding Russian Blues at Wynterwynd Cattery 12 years ago, she was determined to breed for quality rather than quantity, and was strongly opposed to overcrowding in her cattery.

But would she be able to produce outstanding kittens with no more than five breeding cats? Would the percentage of show-quality kittens outweigh those of pet quality?

Amazing as it may seem, even though Wynterwynd has never maintained more than five breeding cats at any one time, Annette Wilson's Rus-

sian Blues have won several national and regional awards over the years. Only three females and two males are currently being used in Annette's breeding program.

So what's the secret of her success?

"Common sense," she says. "If a queen doesn't produce top breeding or show-quality kittens in two litters [with males from separate bloodlines], she is spayed and placed in a good home. When it comes to my two males, I know the bloodlines and the offspring have proven to be quite predictable. I also have to admit that I've been very lucky."

Annette is as selective as she can possibly be in deciding which cats should be bred, even though Russian Blues are generally strong and healthy. A large gene pool prevents inbreeding from becoming a problem.

Wynterwynd does little advertising,

since Annette usually has a list of prospective buyers waiting for her Russian Blue kittens. When it comes to selling those of pet quality at 12 to 14 weeks of age, several questions must be answered to her satisfaction before the kittens are sold. For example, she asks a prospective pet owner why he or she wants a purebred cat. Other questions include: Why do you want a Russian Blue? Do you plan to declaw the kitten? If your previous cat died, what was the cause of death? Do you have other cats? Do you let them go outdoors unattended? How many children do you have and what are their ages?

Show-quality kittens or kittens going to breeders aren't sold until they are 4 to 5 months old. If possible, →

*Annette Wilson began breeding Russian Blues 12 years ago, after entering one in a cat show.*

*A proud mother nurses her week-old kittens.*



Photos: Dorothy Holby

## RUSSIAN BLUE

continued

Annette visits the prospective buyer. In any case, a number of references are required. Her retired breeding cats are altered and, depending on their age, health and how well they get along in the cattery, are either kept or placed in qualified homes.

### Care and Feeding

The two whole males live in walk-in cages and are let out one at a time while the cattery is being cleaned. The cages can easily be torn down completely for scrubbing and disinfecting, which Annette does weekly. The nursery is on the first floor of the house, and the females have their choice of spots when they are not nursing kittens. Some prefer the downstairs cattery; others would rather be in the nursery or elsewhere in the house.

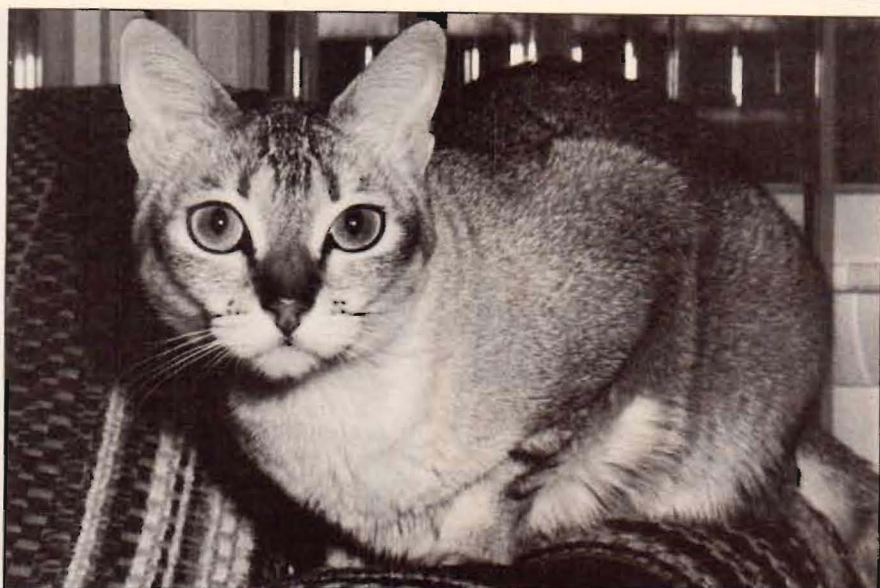
The cats are fed twice a day—dry Science Diet in the morning and dry mixed with canned in the evening. Cats are fed in cages, so that each one can get the proper amount of food. Until they are 10 weeks old, dry Science Diet is always available to the kittens.

Inoculations are given at 8, 10 and 12 weeks of age. The adult cats are given annual boosters unless they are being exposed to other cats at shows, in which case they are vaccinated every six months. Annette has her adult cats tested for FeLV, but only the spays and males receive the inoculations.

### Blue-Ribbon Beginning

It's always interesting to discover how people get started breeding cats and why they choose the breeds they do. Annette's introduction to Russian Blues was at a cat show in Ohio. She was looking for a middle-of-the-road cat, one whose disposition was between that of the calm Persian and that of the active and vocal Siamese. Cats with a foreign body type appealed to her, and when she saw the Russian Blues, with their fine boning and plush double coats of shimmering blue, she was anxious to find out more about the breed.

Ed Rindfleisch sold Annette her first Russian Blue and encouraged her to enter the kitten in a show in Toronto. When the kitten, Rindy's Haven Sergei, made two finals, An-



*While living briefly in Singapore, the Wilsons rescued Poonchkie from a pound and brought her home to live with them in Illinois.*

nette realized that this was the beginning of a most intriguing new interest for her. After 12 years, she still loves showing her cats. Beyond winning ribbons, which, needless to say, all exhibitors dearly love, Annette finds pleasure in the friends she has made because of her involvement in the cat fancy. Other Russian Blue breeders were quite helpful to her when she started out, and she says that the majority of them are dedicated to the improvement of the breed.

Not only does Annette belong to various cat clubs (she's editor of *The Russian Blue Fanciers' newsletter*), but she also is frequently called upon to act as clerk at many of the Cat Fanciers' Association shows. And she accomplishes all this despite working full time for an insurance company!

### Singapore Cats

A few years ago, Annette's husband, Robert, was given a two-year assignment in Singapore by his company. Annette went along after arranging with friends and relatives to care for their four cats during their absence. Once they were settled in Singapore, they found that they missed having cats around the house. A visit to the local humane society soon solved that problem: Two delightful cats, Poonchkie and Sandy, became grateful residents at the Wilsons'.

When Robert and Annette brought the cats back home with them, they discovered that the two would have some trouble becoming acclimated to the weather in Illinois. They spent

much of their first year and a half hovering over heating ducts to keep warm! Their coats, which then were thin and short, have since grown longer and a great deal thicker.

Since the Wilsons have so few cats, I had to ask whether or not Wynterwynd ever manages to show a profit.

"It's a very expensive hobby" was Annette's answer. She said she attends from 25 to 30 cat shows a year, and since many of them are held out of state, it is easy to see that even breaking even at the year's end is virtually impossible.

Annette thinks it is unlikely that Russian Blues will become more popular. It seems that although Russian Blues tend to be devoted to their owners and are lovable, quiet cats at home, they're apt to be shy in the show ring. As a result, the public seldom has the opportunity to see the Russian Blues at their best.

When I held a Russian Blue while visiting Annette and listened to its loud purring, it was hard to imagine that such a sweet cat might not be as relaxed when facing a show judge. Annette said that problems are less likely if breeders begin showing their kittens at an early age. This way, by the time they're adults, they will have become accustomed to the sounds, smells and excitement of cat shows.

After having observed the soft-spoken and immaculate Russian Blue on its own turf, I can strongly recommend it to people who are looking for a devoted companion as well as a cat that's beautiful to behold. 🐾