

# FRISKIES® *Buffet*®

**CAT CLUB NEWS®**

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# RUSSIAN BLUE

## TRUE PRODUCT OF NATURE

**I**magine a cold, silent, frozen province in Northern Russia. On the edge of a clearing, standing serenely and nobly against the stark background, stands a magnificent blue cat. His coat—double in thickness against the bitter winds—changes from indigo to slate as he begins to move cautiously in the snowy expanse. Suddenly, he senses a presence. Wary of the stranger approaching, he hesitates a moment before silently disappearing into the chill, protective darkness of the dense woods.

The Russian Blue that existed in nature centuries ago is the same cat who occupies hundreds of American households today. Unlike other feline contemporaries, the breed never has been hybridized.

Viking ships brought these beautiful cats from Russia to England and Sweden in the 1800s. After a brief breeder scuffle—which temporarily resulted in a division into two types of Blues, British Blues and Foreign Blues—the single designation Russian Blue was officially reinstated in 1939. At about the same time, this hearty survivor of some of the harshest winters on earth appeared in America and stole the affections of a small, but devoted population of breeders and owners.

"Russian Blues still fall toward the bottom half of the breed list in terms of numbers," explains Judith Kethley, secretary of the Russian Blue Breed Council. "For one thing, litter size is small compared to other breeds, usually three or four kittens. Also, the public just isn't familiar with this breed as it is with others. Russians are often

confused with other 'blues' (simply a color designation within other breeds)."

Perhaps the biggest reason the breed isn't in high demand is what would be referred to by teens as a "bad rep."

Their normally sweet disposition can disappear fast in the tense, noisy, hectic environment of the show arena.

Potential owners who visit cat shows often witness temper tantrums when Russian Blues are handled by judges.

"These cats are one-person, one-family pets," says Kethley. "Let's face it. They can be downright mean and nasty when judges handle them, which leads to a general misunderstanding about their real nature. At home in familiar surroundings and with their owners, they're sweet as pie."

Well-known breeder and judge Donna Fuller concurs. "These cats are wonderfully devoted, intelligent cats. They're perfect as apartment cats because they don't require a lot of care. They don't get into mischief, even when left alone all day by working owners. While they love attention and playtime, they're not 'busy.' They don't have to check everything that moves."

Quiet and individualistic, Russian Blues "talk" only when they have something to say—in a silvery, bell-like voice.

Because of an exceptionally strong gene pool, the breed is among the heartiest of cats. Rarely does the new owner find himself with a sickly or unhealthy

kitten. When Russian Blues are under the weather, they tend strongly toward treatable illnesses.

Kethley reports that females are supermoms who will as readily nurture a kitten from another litter as those from their own.

"I once had two mothers, each with her own litter. I peeked into their room to find one mother wandering around looking rather forlorn while the second mommy looked happy as a clam as she cuddled *both* litters."

The truest physical criterion for Russian Blues is the texture and appearance of the blue double coat. Short, thick, and very dense, the fur can shimmer like sealskin when standing up. Ideally, the coat should be so thick that it's difficult to see the skin, which should also be blue in color.

The body is long and graceful, ending with a tapered tail.

Despite their thick coat, Russian Blues don't shed like other breeds. Grooming consists of little more than a good "scratching" to stroke out the loose hair.

One of the most sensitive breeds, Russian Blues are highly attuned to the moods and emotions of the household, and will act with appropriate diplomacy. If Mom and Jimmy are clearing the air over the curfew hour, kitty will stay out of the fray. But if Aunt Irene is feeling a little lonely, her Blue will instinctively offer companionship.

Fuller, who has bred several champions at her Tsar Blu Cattery in Foster City, California, sums up the breed. "Cool, collected and looking totally in control, the typical Russian Blue appears to on-lookers to be saying, 'Yes, go ahead and admire me. But keep your distance until I know you.'"

