

CAT FANCY

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The Bombay

It has a wild, pantherlike appearance, but this breed is warm, loving and highly attentive.

by Kathryn Segnar

IF A PICTURE is worth a thousand words, then a real cat must be worth ten thousand—especially if that cat is a Bombay. Even the best photo cannot compare with the experience of holding a Bombay in your arms, stroking its satiny fur and hearing the outrageous purr. This cat is a people cat, created for the lap as well as for our eyes and ears. Meeting a Bombay is an unforgettable experience, and owning one a rare privilege.

I admit I may be a little biased: I am the lucky owner of one of these elegant black cats. Since Dr. Devereaux came into my life, things just haven't been the same. His name is well-earned. He's my in-home therapist, always ready to offer a little comfort any time of day or night. He follows me from room to room, and as soon as I'm settled, climbs into my lap. If a lap is not available, he posts himself nearby, supervising my activities from a relaxed pose. At bedtime he makes his way under the covers and curls up next to me, and once he's comfortable, starts to purr loudly and suddenly, as if a switch had just been thrown and the volume set on high.

The Mini-Panther

Dr. Devereaux's lineage, like that of all Bombays, can be traced to the 1950s when Nikki Horner created the breed. She wanted a cat that resembled a small black leopard of India. In trying to come up with a name for the new breed, the city of Bombay came to mind. Horner knew of no breed linked to the country of India, and "Bombay" sounded like just the right name for her mini-panthers. "It just fell into place," she says.

Horner crossed a black American Shorthair with a Burmese and, after

several years of highly selective breeding, was able to develop a cat that had the look she wanted: totally black with huge, copper eyes and a short, shiny coat. Horner described her new breed as "the patent leather kids with the new penny eyes."

The Bombay was decidedly different from any other black cat. In 1976, the members of the Cat Fanciers' Association agreed and accepted the cat for championship competition. Since that time, The International Cat Association and the American Cat Fanciers' Association have also accepted the Bombay for competition. Today, two additional associations allow the Bombay to be shown in the "New Breed and Color" class.

The Bombay standards in CFA, TICA and ACFA are nearly identical, but the judges' interpretation of the standards is thought by many exhibitors to vary significantly. The written standards all agree that the Bombay is a moderate cat, medium in size, muscular in development, and neither cobby nor tubular. The head is rounded with wide-set, large eyes and a short, well-developed muzzle. It should have a visible nose-break, but "it should not present a 'pugged' or 'snubbed' look," each standard states.

The medium-size ears are set well apart, tilted slightly forward and rounded at the tips. These features combine for an open, sweet-faced expression. "The eyes always have a startled look, with the eyes wide open and very expressive," says breeder Sandra Sulloway of Sankachi Cattery.

The Bombay coat is supposed to be so short and so black that it is the only breed that places 55 percent of its total points on coat and color. One breeder says the coat is so slick that it almost seems like its painted

on the cat. Another describes the color as so black it gives back blue highlights.

The eye color varies from copper to gold, though most breeders agree that copper is preferable. "It's so copper, it's almost like a pumpkin," explains Judy Kovic of Fejuko Cattery. "It's almost a brown copper if the color is really good. But copper is hard to get because it's due to two different genes: one for color and one for intensity."

Although the Bombay's written standard is very similar to the Burmese standard, there appear to be two schools of thought as to just how close that physical similarity should be. Some breeders (such as the Bombay's originator, Nikki Horner) see the cat as a Burmese with black fur, but other breeders emphasize the differences. The Bombay, say those of the latter school, is a little longer cat than a Burmese. Its nose doesn't break as much. Its tail is a little longer and thinner, and it stands higher on its legs. But the two breeds are similar enough that one cat association,

TICA, recognizes and registers sable Bombays, the brown kittens that sometimes appear in black Bombay litters. TICA allows the sable Bombay to compete in the Burmese class.

Because of these two points of view, and depending on what part of the country you live in, the Bombay you see at a show may look a little different physically from Bombays elsewhere. But if you are looking for a pet Bombay, the differences should be of little concern. Although the dramatic beauty of this cat is in itself good reason to own one, it's the Bombay temperament that will make you grateful you chose this breed. And that special, people-loving temperament is something all Bombays have in common. ➔

Photo: Dorothy Hubby



The Bombay's eye color varies from gold to copper, the more intense the color, the better. This mischievous fellow is 1-year-old Beltonus Black Majician of Pantherra, owned by Joy A. Smith.



Is the Bombay a black Burmese or does it have physical characteristics all its own? Judges and breeders vary in their interpretation of the standard.

Photo: Richard Elkenburg/Courtesy: Fenton and Judy Kovic



To get a Bombay kitten, you may have to be put on a waiting list, but Fejuko's Brandy Alexander reminds us that a kitten is worth waiting for. Lexi was TICA's second best international kitten in the 1986-87 show season. He is owned by Fenton and Judy Kovic.

ON OVERLEAF: This handsome Bombay, known to his friends as "Magic," is grand champion Road to Fame's Instant Replay. Magic has three generations of nationally winning cats in his pedigree and was CFA's 7th Best Cat in the nation in the 1985-86 show season. His breeders are Herb and Suzanne Zwecker, and his owners are Larry and Karen Bullard.

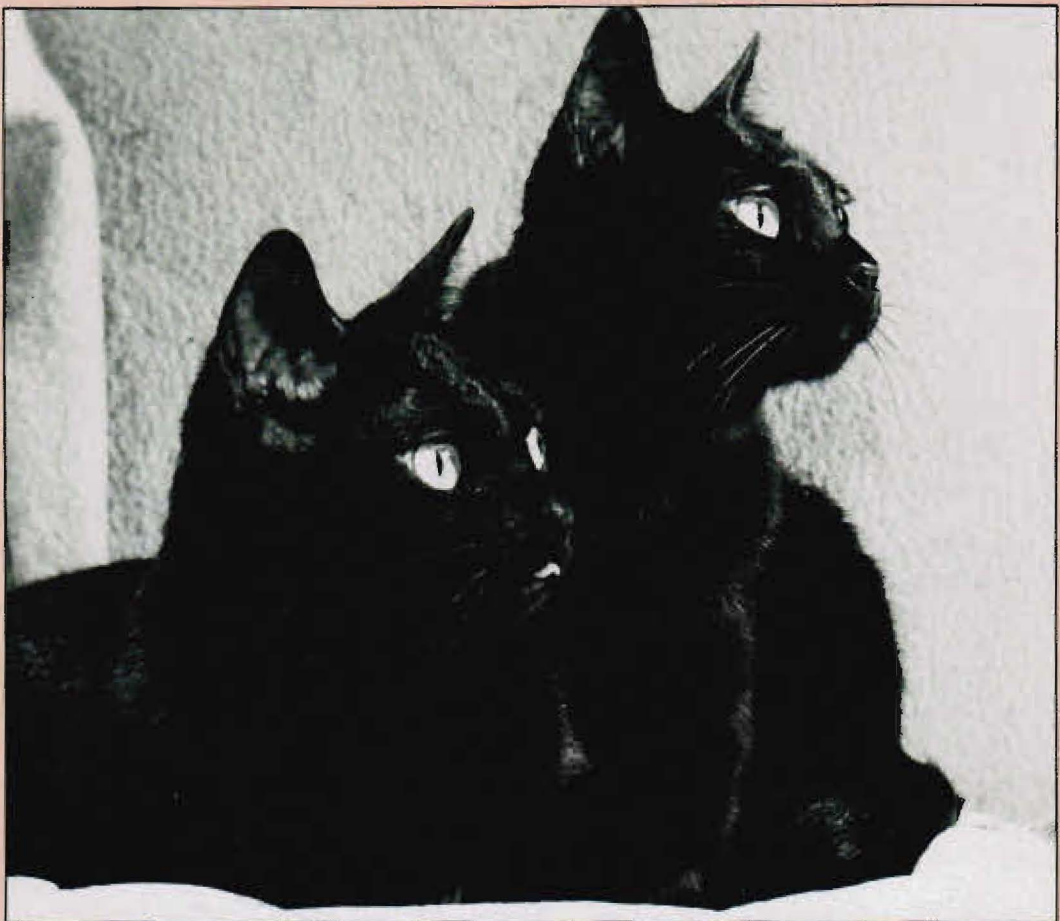


Photo: Dorothy Hobby

"Anyone can pick them up and they purr," says one Bombay breeder. This affectionate pair are mother and daughter. On the right is 4-year-old Pantherra Little Girl Black, and on the left is her daughter, Pantherra Black Dahlia. Both are owned by Joy A. Smith.



The Bombay is a hardy, muscular cat, possessing what is called "hybrid vigor." ACFA triple grand champion Lanninglane's Harley is no exception. He is owned by Geneva Lanning.



Photo: Bev Dixon

If you're going to have one Bombay, you might as well have five. This family, owned by Bev Dixon, teamed up in an effort to rid the kitchen of a pesky moth.



Photo: Dale Tjebkose / Courtesy: Geneva Lanning

Bombays like to be where the action is, which is wherever their people are. Their loyalty and affection makes them ideal companions.

Active and Friendly

"Bombays are very intelligent and affectionate," says Herb Zwecker of Road to Fame Cattery. "They love to be around people. They have a way of getting their own way. They're not as active as Siamese or Abyssinians, but not as calm as Persians."

"Anyone can pick them up and they purr," says Kathleen Von Ruff, Merlynkatz Cattery. "When people come to visit, other breeds might run and hide, but these guys seem to say, 'Wow. Great. Pet me.'"

"Anytime we sit down, we have at least three on our laps," says Geneva Lanning, Lanninglane Cattery.

"They're active, inquisitive and want to be right with you and into everything," says Nikki Horner, Shawnee Cattery. "I often say that mine have been into everything except my ceiling fans."

Bombays are clever cats. They figure out how to open drawers and storm doors. Many retrieve and do tricks. They can be leash-trained and enjoy going for walks outdoors.

How much they "talk" is a little unpredictable. "It varies with the individual cat," explains Lucia Pozzi of Midinite Cattery. "I've had some that chit-chat all the time. They're very quick to let you know what they want. They're not the strong, silent type at all."

"Lucy's a real talker," says Bev Dixon about one of the six Bombays she owns. "Macavity talks when he wants to talk. The rest do that, too, except Kinky. She rarely talks. And Esmeralda squeaks."

The Bombay is an excellent traveler. "Lucy reclines in her kennel and gives me a look like, 'Home, James,'" says Dixon. "It's like she owns the car and you're the chauffeur." While all Bombays may not transmit this same high-class message, breeders and owners generally agree that, with just a little training, Bombays travel very well.

Bombays also adapt comfortably to other animals in the household. "I've sold a number of kittens to people who have dogs and other cats," says Lucia Pozzi. "The next thing I'll hear from the people is that the first thing the kittens adjusted to were the dogs. The last thing they adjusted to were the other cats."

Judy Kovic sold one of her kittens to a family that has Dobermans. "The cat ran with the Dobies like she was one of them," Kovic says.

Adapting to other cats can be a little more challenging. "They like to be in charge—to be top cat," explains Bev Dixon. Her Bombays were raised with three other cats, two that they easily accepted. "But they won't accept Bruno, the third cat," Dixon says. "They pick on him."

"Bombays will tend to be the dominant cat just because they get there first," says Wendy Klamm, Kats 'n' Klamms Cattery. "They're always first to the food bowl, first to get affection. They assert their dominance by their presence. They seem to know they're wonderful."

One breeder points out that adequate space in the home is important for a Bombay, as it is with almost any breed. "You can't have a houseful and not expect them to fight," the breeder says. "You cannot crowd them. They have to have their space."

As Bombays age, they stay active. "They don't slow down much," says Lucia Pozzi. "They mature, but they don't change a great deal. They're cute as kittens, but as they get older, they get better." Pozzi's 10-year-old Bombay has a recurring bladder infection, but despite the illness, the cat still leaps up on the refrigerator, and attacks and plays with feathers.

A Wash 'n' Wear Coat

If you decide you want to show a Bombay, this breed is one of the easiest to exhibit. The main advantage is the Bombay's easy-care coat. Where most breeds shed in the spring, resulting in a blotchy coat, the Bombay's coat quality is constant. "They have an advantage over other breeds," says Herb Zwecker. "They're in coat year-round. We bathe ours before each show and the coats are so sleek. But diet, handling and how the cats have been bred genetically are also important."

The Bombay is a hardy, sturdy cat, possessing what is called "hybrid vigor." This means that the cat is thought to be stronger physically as a result of its outcrossed heritage than it would be if its heritage consisted solely of one breed. The cat is very heavy for its size. Picking up a kitten is like picking up a lump of lead. "I call them 'my little power packs,'" says Pozzi. "They can revolve in your arms without using their claws. They're very strong." A veterinarian

that Pozzi takes her cats to said he had never encountered a cat so strong—and at the time he was examining a female. "The muscularity is phenomenal," Pozzi says.

Finding a Kitten

If you are interested in buying a Bombay, contact several breeders about kitten availability, and if you can, visit the catteries. Learn how the kittens have been raised and what vaccinations they have been given. Be sure to get a health guarantee.

Don't be surprised if you end up on a waiting list. Just be patient. If a breeder is not able to supply you with a kitten within a reasonable time period, he or she will usually refer you to another breeder that is known to have kittens available.

If you want a Bombay primarily for a pet, you may want to consider getting a sable Bombay. These cats are the lovely color of a Burmese, but possess the hybrid vigor and temperament characteristic of the Bombay.

Prices will vary, depending on the area of the country and the quality of the kitten. Pet-quality kittens range from \$175 to \$300 each; breeder- and show-quality kittens cost \$300 and up, again depending on the quality of the cat.

If you buy a Bombay with the intention of starting a cattery, don't be surprised if you change your mind. When Bev Dixon got her first Bombay, Chercon's Little Lucy, that's what she had in mind. But soon after the kittens were born, those plans changed. She sold one kitten, but could not bring herself to part with the others. She also realized she would never be able to sell any other kittens that came her way.

Now Dixon is the proud owner of six full-grown, altered Bombays that she considers part of her family. "Bombays like to be where the action is, which is wherever you are," she says. "When you eat, they're with you. When you sleep, it's like 24-hour nursing coverage: They all take shifts."

"Every Bombay is different. Each has its own personality, its own quirks. But all are very good companions. Bombays are not just any cat." 🐾

For more information about Bombays, contact: Suzanne Zwecker, Secretary, International Bombay Society, 5782 Dalton Dr., Canandaigua, NY 14425.