

# Cats

1988 MAGAZINE  
NOVEMBER \$2.59



ER349 68KXMYER1232+CLUJ+  
MYERS, CLAUDIA J 9107  
2324 S 35TH ST  
OMAHA NE 68105



# THE RUSSIAN BLUE

BY PHIL MAGGITI

In statistics there are four kinds of data: nominal, by which items are named or categorized; ordinal, which identifies one member of a group as larger than, smaller than, or equal to another; interval, in which the distance between all consecutive points on a scale is the same; and ratio, which boasts an absolute zero and which therefore enables us to say that four is twice as large as two. To discuss the origins of cat breeds, however, we need a fifth classification, which we shall call *it-is-believed-that* data; for accounts of the genesis of many breeds begin with this construction.

It is believed, for example, that the Russian Blue originated in or about the city of Arkhangelsk, a port on the White Sea located within shivering distance (about 150 miles) of the Arctic Circle. It is further believed that sailors may have brought Russian Blues to western Europe in the 1860s. But to believe that the Tsar of Russia or Elizabeth I or Queen Victoria of England owned Russian Blues is to embrace the unbelievable. This according to cat fancier Ingeborg Urcia, who wrote a brief history of the Russian Blue several years ago. There is "absolutely no factual evidence" to support these claims, said Urcia, who reported that "there is still some dispute as to whether the Russian Blue really came from that country, although evidence does point to a northern origin."

Other writers—like Frances Simpson, British author of *Cats and All About Them*, published in 1903—have raised additional questions about the blue angels from Arkhangelsk. "The best authorities," wrote Simpson, "seem to agree in believing that they (Russian Blues) are not a distinct breed, and therefore they are now classed at our shows amongst the short-haired English varieties." (Russians were classified in this fashion until 1912, when they were transferred to the foreign blue class.)

Opinions about their derivation and patrimony notwithstanding, Russian Blues had appeared on the show bench in England as early as 1875; and though we cannot say with ratio-data certainty that the breed originated near Arkhangelsk, records indicate that most of the known early members of the breed—which was called by a variety of names, including Archangel and Maltese—did come from Russia.

While this pre-glasnost feline ambassador sported the right kind of origin—exotic—and the right kind of suit for the times—blue—it never melted the ice in the cat fancy the way blue longhaired cats or blue British Shorthairs did in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These latter cats so dominated their breeds that many people spoke of them as though they *were* the breed. Thus the regal-sounding British Blue designation was born, an august way of describing what was actually one color class among many in the British Shorthair pantheon. Thus, too, the Colorbred Blue Persian—which must document at least three and preferably five generations of nothing-but-blue

ancestors—came to personify the Persian breed for many years.

It is believed that the first Russian Blues to reach this country arrived circa 1900. Mrs. Clinton Locke of Chicago, who was also one of the first breeders to import Siamese to the United States, purchased a cat named Lockhaven Royal Blue around that time. She obtained this cat from a British fancier with the wonderfully Monty Python-ish name of Towleron Flansholm. Another turn-of-the-century Chicago cat breeder, Mrs. Frederick Monroe, has been identified as the owner of a blue-and-white Russian Blue, which is something of an anomaly since modern-day Russians are available in blue genes only.

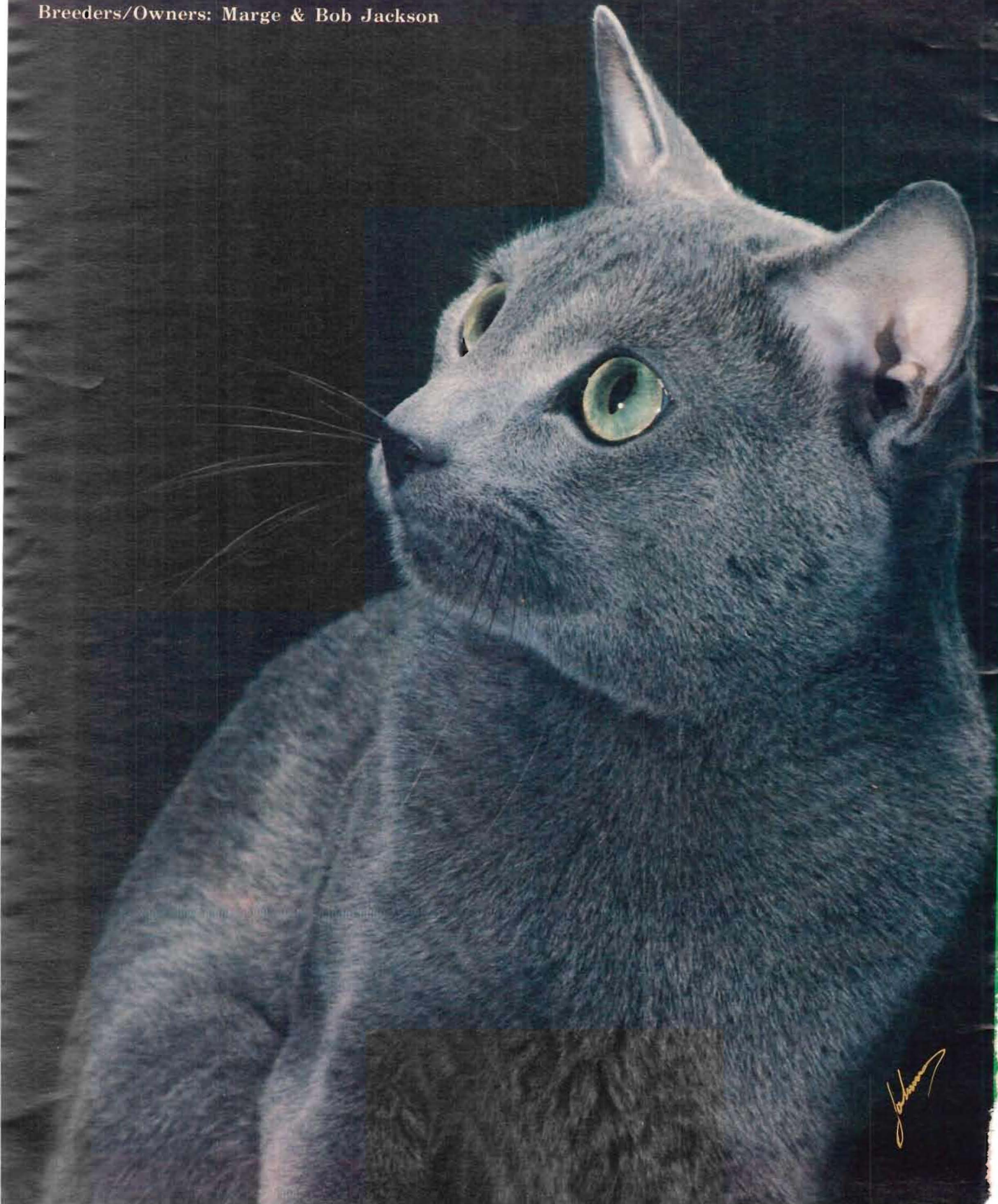
Despite the early sniffing and sniping of the purists who contended that Russian Blues were not a legitimate breed, these lithe, double-coated charmers with the vivid green eyes continued to thrive—if not thoroughly prosper—until the beginning of World War II. Prosperity being severely rationed at that juncture, many catteries disappeared and so (nearly) did a number of breeds, the Russian Blue among them. Consequently, post-war discussions of ethnic purity became academic as breeders scrambled to make whatever judicious compromises they could in order to insure the survival of their chosen breeds. As a result, Bluepoint Siamese were crossed with Russian Blues in England in an effort to resuscitate the latter. And breeders in Scandinavia, working independent of English influence, used the same technique to establish the Russian Blue in their country, too.

Meanwhile, the Russian Blue was reintroduced to the colonies when C.A. Commaire of the great state of Texas imported two Russian Blues from England in 1947. The breed's subsequent acceptance by U.S. registries made it one of the half dozen varieties of cats that could be seen at shows as the present century passed the fifty-yard line. (The other breeds were the Persian, Siamese, Abyssinian, American Shorthair, and Manx.)

Until the mid-60s, when the Korat gained championship status, the Russian was the only all-blue breed in the cat fancy. These one-flavor contestants were joined on the show bench by another true blue type, the Chartreux, in the present decade. If anyone should stop you on the street and say "Your money or the difference between the Russian Blue, Korat, and Chartreux," here's what you reply: The Chartreux is the one with gold or copper eyes and the baked-potato-on-toothpicks body. The Russian Blue is the one that looks as if it has Siamese ancestors: long and fine-boned, with a modified wedge-shaped head. The Korat has the largest eyes, a middle-of-the-road torso, and—if you look closely—front legs that are slightly shorter than its back legs.

Then, while your inquisitor is busy being impressed, you can make your escape.

Gr Ch Nuance's Smiling Aristocrat  
Breeders/Owners: Marge & Bob Jackson



*Jackson*