

Cats magazine

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Breeder: Reaha Evans
Owner: Sharon Waugh

Sunny Daze Adam's Shadow of Sewbob
Black Smoke
Photo by: Rob Waugh

There have been many breeds developed in the United States, but only four carry the *Made-in-the-U.S.A.* label as part of their official designation. The most familiar of these is the American Shorthair, a naturally occurring breed and one of the oldest in the fancy. The others are the American Wirehair and the American Curl, both of which resulted from mutations; and the American Bobtail, which, as we shall see, is more difficult to categorize.

Since the Bobtail is the latest breed accepted for registration, it is fitting that we pick up its trail in Arizona, the last of the 48 contiguous states to join the Union. According to Bobtail fanciers, about 20 years ago John and Brenda Sanders of Clinton County, Iowa, spent part of their vacation at an Arizona motel near an Indian reservation. Between checking out the landscape and the turquoise jewelry, the Sanders noticed a tiny, Brown Spotted Tabby bobtailed kitten that had been dumped at the motel by an Indian child. The kitten's principal toys were several dogs living in the vicinity of the motel. He pestered these to distraction with the terrier-like truculence that all things small reserve for all things greater which they can intimidate.

The Sanders were impressed by the tyke's performance, and they were intrigued by the story that he was the product of a bobcat-domestic cat liaison. They asked the motel owner if they might take the diminutive road warrior home. The motel owner wasn't certain at first, but he began to fear for the dogs' mental stability. One day he told the Sanders, "The cat's yours."

Back at their farm in Clinton County, Iowa, John and Brenda Sanders had a Sealpoint Siamese female named Mishi. They hadn't planned to breed her to the Brown Spotted Tabby, bobtailed newcomer, whom they had named Yodie; but neither of the cats was altered, and before you could say "Isn't it time we had these guys fixed?" Mishi and Yodie had produced a litter of kittens. Some were Black, some were Tabby. A few had short tails like their father's, the rest had normal tails like their mother's.

The Sanders were able to find homes for most of the youngsters from this and the two or three subsequent litters that Yodie and Mishi would produce before being altered. The kittens which couldn't be placed were sent to live in the Sanders' barn, and this is where Mother Nature, through the auspices of a Creampoint male with white mittens and markings, re-enters the story.

When the Creampoint serenader bred one or two of Yodie and Mishi's offspring, all of whom carried a recessive gene for colorpoints inherited from their mother, several of the kittens from these breedings developed Siamese overtones on their faces, feet and tails. In addition, some of these pointed kittens sported white mittens and markings.

Just as sure as some pussycats don't have much of a tail, the combination of color points, blue eyes, white markings, and a shortened caudal appendage

inspired a few people to think about creating a new breed characterized by these components. In the early '70s Mindy Schultz, who lived near the Sanders, wrote a provisional standard for the American Bobtail, which was described as a pointed cat with a stubby tail, white mittens, and a white centered blaze on its face.

The Bobtail looked to be off and running, but it didn't run far. The Second Law of Thermodynamics, that solid-state nemesis of many a new breed, eventually cast a torpor over the Bobtail's progress. For the next 10 years the only significant growth the breed exhibited was in coat length, which evolved from plush to semilong as Himalayans were added to the Bobtail equation.

There is reason to suspect that another variable was added as well. Bobtail breeders Lisa Black and Reaha Evans report that some Bobtail lines produce rumpies—cats with no tails at all. In the feline genetic alphabet *rumpy* generally spells *M-a-n-x*; and it is instructive to note that some Manx, called *stumpies*, develop tails about one to four inches long, the prescribed length for the American Bobtail. What's more, the stumpy Manx's tail, like many Bobtails', is frequently bent to one side or curved like a fiddlehead.

To make a short tale longer, while it is possible that one of Yodie's parents was a bobcat, this possibility is not the kind you'd want to bet your last silver dollar on. The Indian child who dumped Yodie at the motel failed to leave a certified pedigree with the kitten. Furthermore, in most cases where documented wildcat-domestic cat crosses have been observed, first-generation (and many second-generation) males have been sterile.

It is more likely that Yodie's short tail was caused by a mutation. "The Manx locus seems to be very prone to mutations," explains Solveig Pflueger, Ph.D., M.D., and chairperson of the genetics committee in The International Cat Association. "Therefore, new mutations to taillessness occur with surprising degrees of frequency. It is not that unusual for a tailless cat to crop up in a litter of American Shorthairs or Abyssinians or Persians."

The important question about a breed is not where it's been, but where it's going. The Bobtail, at last, appears to be traveling headfirst in the right direction. This year TICA and ACFA accepted Bobtails for registration, which means that the cats can now be shown in new-breed-and-color classes. This exposure will no doubt attract new converts to the breed. The decision to include another native American breed, Maine Coon Cats, as allowable outcrosses for Bobtails—which now come in all colors instead of being restricted to pointeds—should introduce a healthy measure of hybrid vigor. And if Yodie's origins remain Arizona's secret, his offspring are, perhaps, all the more intriguing for their spotted and mysterious past.