

# The Abyssinian

by Phil Maggitti

## Facts and Figures

- Recognized in all associations.
- New CFA registrations for 1989:  
—2,669.
- Rank in popularity for 1989:  
—2nd among shorthaired breeds,  
—3rd overall.

## Conformation

Some registries (CFA, TICA) describe the Abyssinian as a medium-sized cat, while others (ACA, ACFA) describe it as a medium to large one. Whatever its dimensions, the Aby is generally characterized as lithe, hard, muscular, and regal in appearance: a cat which "strikes a medium between the extremes of the cobby [type] and the svelte, lengthy types" (CFF).

The Aby's effulgent color, its handsome ticking, and its silky, dense, resilient coat are its most commanding features, accounting for 35 to 40 points in the various organizations' standards. The Abyssinian pattern, according to ACFA and TICA, "is genetically a form of agouti ticking" with even, contrasting bands of light and darker color producing "a translucent effect." Coat length in the Abyssinian should be medium, but long enough to accommodate four or six alternating bands of color (ACFA, TICA). Depending on the association, the Aby is recognized in Ruddy, Red (also called Sorrel), Blue, Fawn, Lilac, and Cream.

The Abyssinian's head is "a modified, slightly rounded wedge without flat planes" (CFA). Large, almond-shaped, expressive eyes—in gold, hazel, green, or copper, depending on the association—dominate the Abyssinian's face; and large, alert, moderately pointed ears, broad and cupped at the base, create the impression that the Aby is alert and listening.

The Abyssinian body, described as medium (ACFA), medium long (CFA, CFF, TICA), or rather long (ACA), should have a rounded rib cage with no evidence of flat sides, a slightly arched back, and a reasonably level flank with no tuck up.

## History

Several theories have been advanced to explain the origin of the Abyssinian cat. Abys are said to have descended from cats that were worshipped in Egypt more than 4,000 years ago. Abys are also said to have emerged from the jungles of North Africa, where a wild cat with a ticked coat that resembled a rabbit's once roamed. Abys have also been said to have been created by British cat fanciers from the "ticked tabby that inhabited their environs."

This last theory was advanced by Rosemonde S. Peltz in the 1972 *Cat Fanciers' Association Yearbook*. According to Peltz, "there is no doubt that the Abyssinian breed was made in England" by persons who "began with British Shorthairs, in most cases of unknown parentage, and gradually broke up tabby striping and eliminated white spotting and bars until they produced a cat with a uniformed ticked coat."

In support of her theory, Peltz maintained that "there is no record of any Abyssinian cat imported to England." In this she is contravened by *The Book of the Cat*, published in 1980, which reports, "It does seem that a cat called Zula was taken from Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) to Britain in the 1860s, at the end of the Abyssinian War, and this and possibly other imports were bred with similarly marked cats of partly unknown origin."

Though at odds with Peltz about importation records, *The Book of the Cat* seems to acknowledge that "similarly marked," that is, ticked cats did exist in England. What's more, each of the 12 Abyssinians registered in the *Stud Book* of the National Cat Club in England for 1900-1905 had one or both parents listed as unknown.

Abyssinian fancier Tord Svenson believes that "the cat invented the breeders," not vice versa, where the Aby is concerned. "The Abyssinian is a truly natural breed" says Svenson, pointing out that "recent genetic surveys have established the center of origin for this unique cat on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. When people have gone to Egypt looking for Abyssinians, they haven't found any because they are not there, and I don't think they ever were."

According to Svenson, "an Aby female very similar to the modern version was shown at the first significant cat show ever held—in the Crystal Palace in London, 1871." She placed third out of 160 entries.

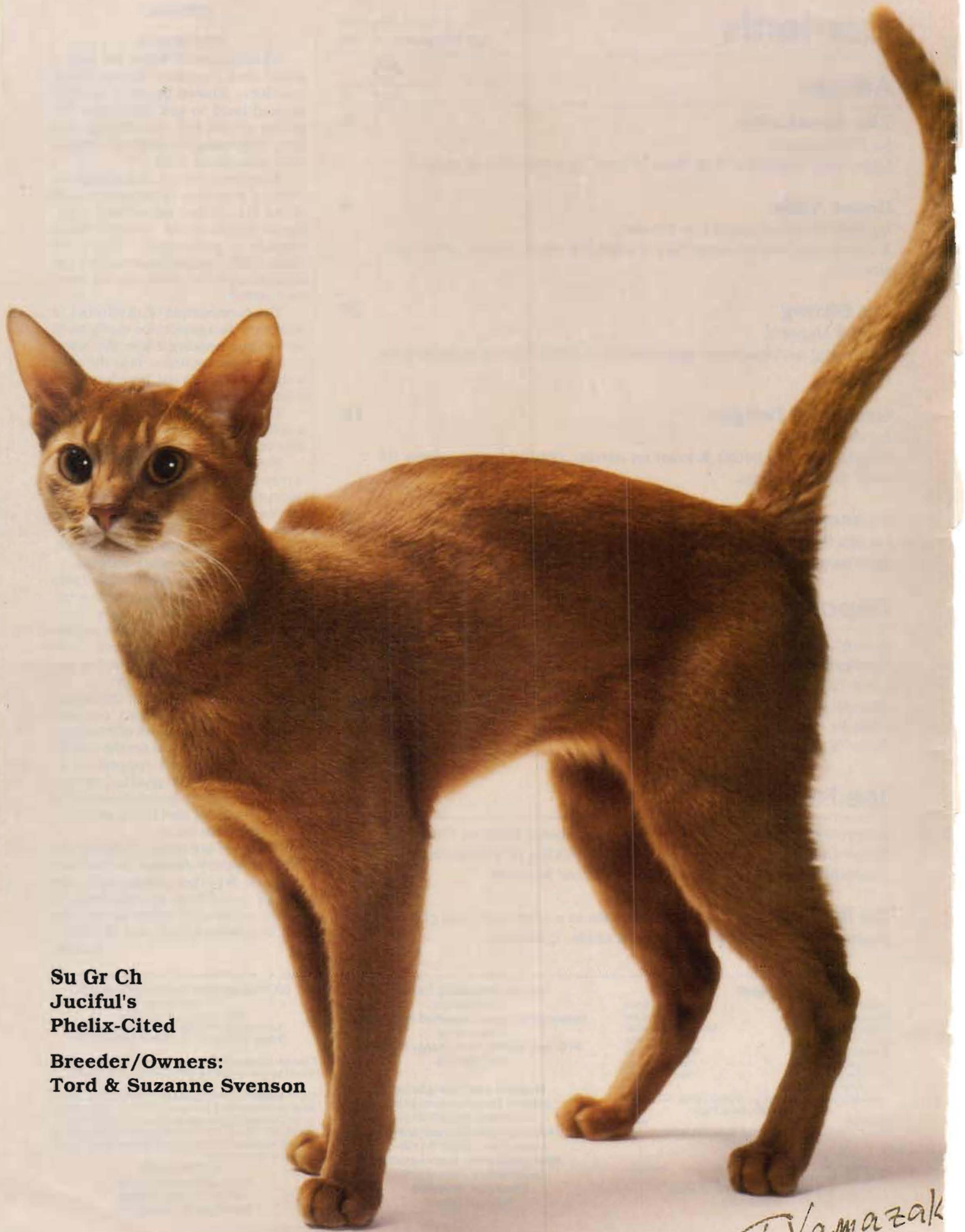
The Abyssinian came to North American England in the early 1900s. A male named Aluminum II and a female named Salt were exhibited at a show in Boston in 1909. There is no record of any other Abyssinians being imported until the mid-30s, and the first recorded Aby birth in this country took place in 1935.

"A period of intensive breeding" began in this country in the late '30s, wrote Peltz, but progress—as well as a source of imported cats—was interrupted by World War II. "At the end of the war," said Peltz, "only 12 or so Abyssinians were left in England." That the breed was able to rebound from this situation is a tribute to its appeal and to the dedication of its followers.

## Personality

"Abyssinians are genuine 'Lions of Love,'" says Tord Svenson (Juciful Cattery). "Do not get one of these cats if you want an entirely decorative, docile pet. Abys are fearless and outgoing, and they love people. They can survive with minimal companionship, but they positively bloom in an intense person-cat relationship. It's easy to fall in love with a splendid, little mountain lion of a cat that is quite willing to fall in love with you. If you want something wild, yet gentle and loving, something exciting, yet peaceful and serene, something unique, elegant, and beautiful, share the good times of your life with an Abyssinian." 🐾

For additional information see: *CATS* November 1986.



**Su Gr Ch  
Juciful's  
Phelix-Cited**

**Breeder/Owners:  
Tord & Suzanne Svenson**

*T. Yamazaki*