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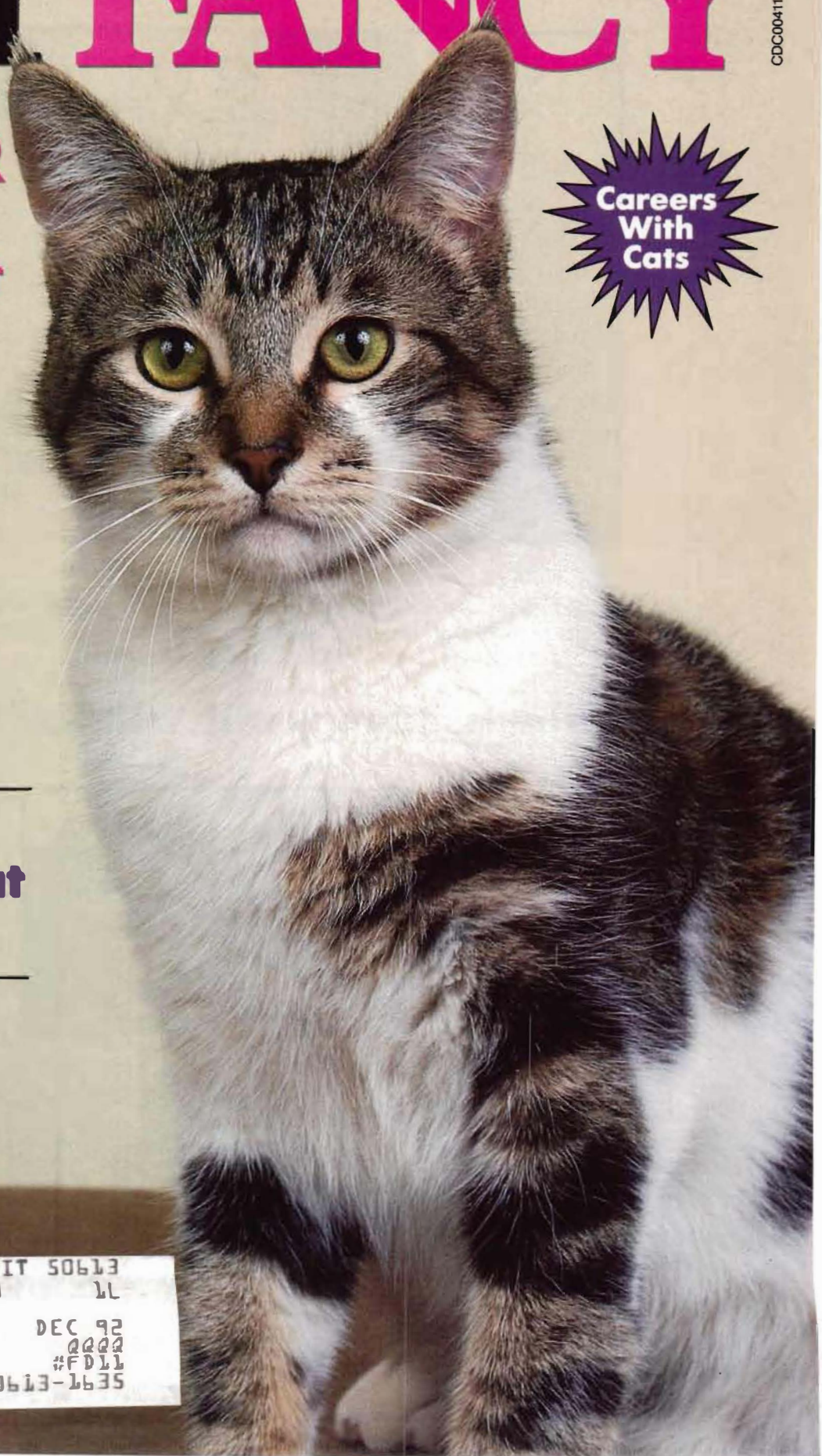
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The Russian Blue

*If you like the sweet, sensitive type,
this may be the cat for you.*

By Dorothy Holby

Our Russian Blue is a highly intelligent cat who is sensitive and shy, yet dignified and self-assured," says Marge Jackson of Nuance Cattery. "He is active, at times dashing from one room to another and gracefully banking off furniture. If he's alone, he will pretend he is being pursued. He likes to climb to the highest place in our home and observe his domain. His nature is inquisitive and extremely loving."

Judith and John Kethley of Bluegenes Cattery agree with Marge's description of the breed's sensitive nature. "If you have friends who don't like cats, Russian Blues know to leave those people alone," reports Judy. "These cats will sleep on your feet, not on your face."

Several years ago the Kethleys were looking for a quiet, shorthaired breed of cat with no major health problems and whose standard did not call for any extreme physical traits. The Russian Blue was the perfect choice for them.

Lucky Cats

I had heard that Russian Blues are very lucky cats, and now I know why. Their wonderful natures have attracted a number of sensible, dedicated breeders who, like the Kethleys and Marge Jackson, are more concerned with the health of their cats than with anything else.

This breed is a superb example of a cat that is healthy *and* beautiful. Several American breeders had a hand in perfecting the Russian Blue, but as its name implies, it originated elsewhere. Fanciers of the breed have not been able to trace its exact origin, but

they believe it started in the Russian port of Archangel Isle located on the White Sea. Supposedly sailors transported blue cats from the area to western Europe in the 1860s.

The Russian Blue is a natural breed. Man did not create this hardy cat; Mother Nature outfitted the Russian with its unique, dense coat to protect its body from the extremely cold temperatures of its native land.

Throughout its history, the Russian Blue has been known by a variety of names, including Archangel, Spanish Blue, Maltese and Foreign Blue. The latter name originated because the cat's slender body resembled another foreign breed, the Siamese. In the United States, however, cat lovers always have called the breed the Russian Blue.

Around the turn of the century in England, Russian Blues (then called Foreign Blues) began competing in cat shows. At that time, all shorthaired blue cats competed in one class regardless of body type. Because the round-headed British cats won virtually all the awards, interest in the finer-boned types, such as the Foreign Blue, began to diminish. The breed regained some popularity in 1912, however, when members of the British cat fancy established a separate class for Foreign Blues.

During World War II, feeding and breeding pedigreed cats was difficult, and the Russian Blue nearly became extinct. After the war, when breeding stock was scarce, breeders tried to increase the gene pool for the breed by mating Russians with other cats. Unfortunately, the kittens that resulted from the matings lacked the

plush coat of the Russian-Blue original. The combination of a Siamese and a Russian cat, however, created the Dunloe line, which helped re-establish the Russian Blue in England.

The Russian Blue in America

Three important lines of cats helped shape the Russian Blue in this country. The first was the British Dunloe line. A pair of imported cats, Dunloe Jan and Dunloe Blue Silk, contributed the full, plush coat found on today's Russians, says Diana Doernberg of Velva Cattery. She has bred Russian Blues since the mid-1960s.

Another important contribution to the breed came from Sweden. Dorothy Lech of Three Crown Cattery imported several fine Russian Blues whose head type and emerald-green eye color were of inestimable value in developing the Russian Blue in America.

As with the Dunloe line, the third line came from England. Peg Calkins of Felinest Cattery worked with a line of cats whose most significant contribution was the pale coat color and silver tipping for which the breed is now known. This English stock also carried refined boning. Peg's most famous cat was Grand Champion Felinest Silver Dollar. In her article "Gone Blue," which appeared in the *1973 Cat Fanciers' Association Yearbook*, Diana Doernberg stated that Silver Dollar may have been the first cat who was a combination of the three most important lines.

Like No Other Blue Cat

Because of its history, the Russian—

RUSSIAN BLUE

continued

Blue resembles no other blue cat. The Russian is shorthaired, firmly muscled and finely boned. Unlike the stockier blue breeds, such as the Chartreux, the blue British Shorthair and the blue American Shorthair, the Russian's slender body type falls into the category known as foreign.

The color of the fur is an even, solid, silver-gray blue. The tone may vary from dark blue to light, almost lavender blue. "Each hair is tipped with silver, especially around the head, neck and chest," wrote Ingeborg Urcia in her book *This Is the Russian Blue*. "This tipping adds a silvery shine to every movement of the cat."

The cat should have no white on its body, nor should it show any stripes or tabby markings. Young kittens may have rings around their tails, but these markings often fade with maturity.

The Russian's double coat is one of its most striking features. John Kethley says the distinctive coat looks double because the guard (outer) hairs and the awn hairs (the fur closest to the cat's body) are the same length. This causes the fur to be dense and to stand out from the body at a 45-degree angle, giving the cat a very plush look.

The Russian Blue should give a balanced impression, with all its features in harmony. This is not a cat of extremes. Its head is a smooth, medium wedge, neither long and tapering nor short and massive. The muzzle is blunt and part of the overall wedge. Long and flat in profile, the top of the skull gently descends to a point slightly above the eyes, then continues at a slight downward angle in a straight line to the tip of the nose. The Russian's noble nose has a smooth line, with no break or stop.

The eye color is brilliant emerald green. The eyes are rounded and set wide, making the cat's face broad at that point. Large and wide at the base, the ears have tips that are more pointed than rounded. The skin of the ears is thin and translucent, and shows through the scant hair covering the ears, both inside and out. The ears are set far apart and are as much on the side as on the top of the head.

Although the Russian Blue's neck is long and slender, it appears short because of the cat's thick fur and high

shoulder blades. The tail is tapering and long but thick at the base.

Perhaps the Russian's most memorable feature is its smile. The next time you attend a cat show, look closely at a Russian Blue. You probably will notice that the cat seems to smile. "Only Russian Blues themselves know the reason for their smiles!" says Judy Kethley.

A Subtle Personality

The Russian Blue has a reputation for being reluctant to make new friends and for being comfortable only with members of its family. After meeting various members of the breed, however, I believe that if you approach softly and don't try to overpower a Blue, the cat will accept you in time.

Recently I visited the Kethleys and met their 8-month-old Russian Blue kitten, Bluegenes Maurice. A happy-go-lucky individual, he was not afraid of anything. Neither my presence nor the flash on my camera deterred him from trying to catch my peacock feather or pull down my backdrops.

When I first visited Annette Wilson's Wynterwynd Cattery, one of her female Russians was reluctant to be photographed. At the next visit, I did not bring out the camera immediately; instead I sat on the floor and talked to the cat for a while. Soon she relaxed and let me take as many pictures as I wanted. When I dropped off the photos a few days later, the same Russian Blue greeted me at the door.

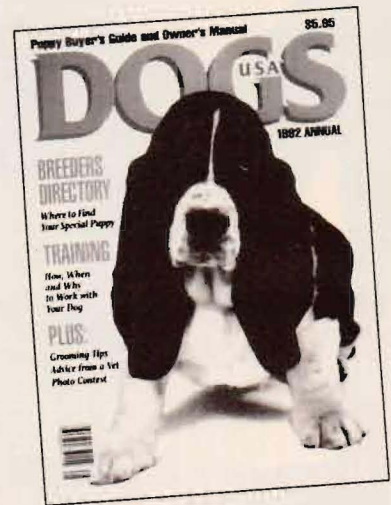
"The Russian has a subtle personality," Annette says. "At first it may be wary of strangers, but once it has adjusted to new people and surroundings, it will turn out to be a delightfully quiet cat with a loving disposition."

Judy Kethley describes her Russian Blues as quiet, gentle and scrupulously clean cats. A career person looking for a pet to fit his or her busy lifestyle will find that the Russian Blue is the perfect apartment cat. As long as it receives its share of daily attention from its favorite human, the cat will be a contented, undemanding companion.

If you prefer the shy, sensitive type, consider a Russian Blue. As the breed's loyal fanciers will tell you, you won't regret your decision. ☺

Dorothy Holby is a contributing photographer to CAT FANCY who has been photographing and writing about cats for 11 years. She enjoys covering all the cat breeds, but her favorite cats are her seven mixed-breeds at home.

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Is Bluegenes Maurice, an 8-month-old male, smiling? Russian Blue owners believe that their cats do smile and that only the cats know the reason why.



As kittens, Russian Blues are inquisitive, playful and active. Fortunately for their owners, the cats never outgrow these qualities.



ON OVERLEAF:
Grand Champion
Samovar's Kyra
displays the
quiet nature
of her
breed.

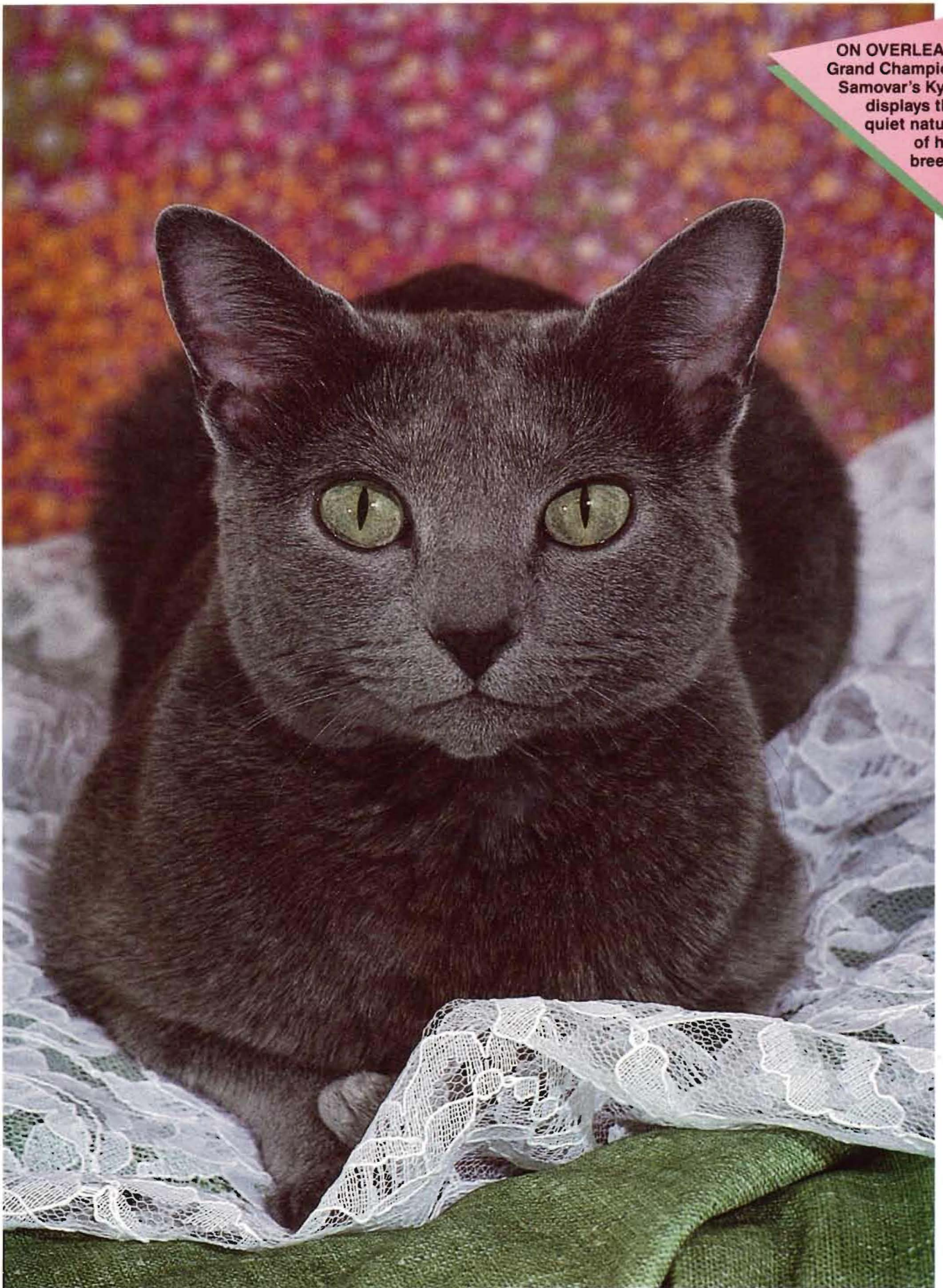


Photo: Sally Klein Barnett

Russian Blues such as Shilling, owned by the Humphrey family of Colton, Oregon, are famous for their dense, plush fur and their beautiful eyes.