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**CATS WITH  
CURL APPEAL**





# THE A-TEAM

BY NANCY REYNOLDS KEISTER

20





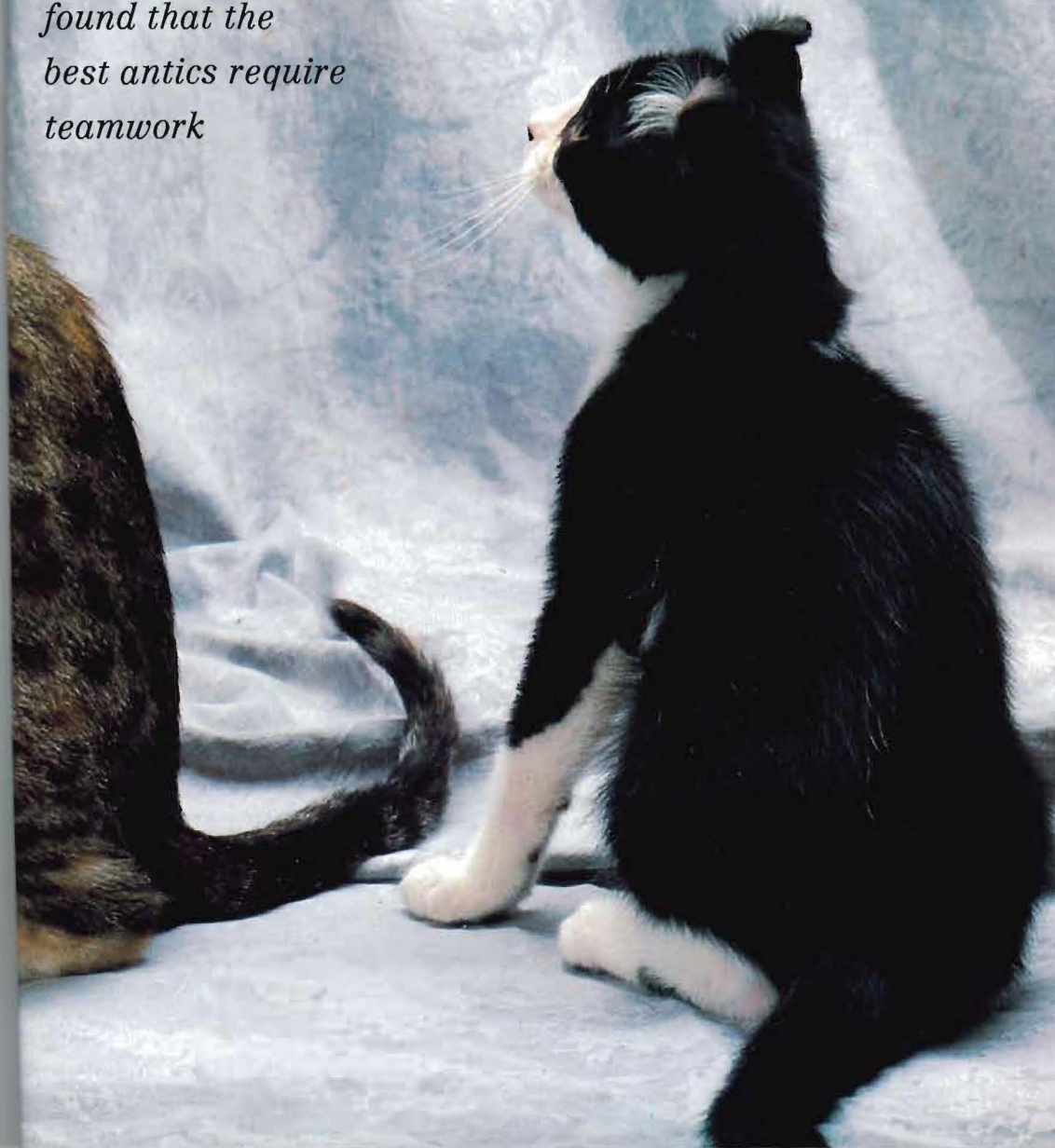
*Editor's note: In addition to being their biggest fan, Nancy Reynolds Keister is co-founder of the American Curl breed and secretary of the North American Curl Breed Club. The main force behind getting this breed established, Keister tells us about her experiences with a very new and very playful cat — the American Curl.*

**T**he kittens bounded out as soon as the door was opened, released from another boring night in the laundry room. Immediately they set to work on what they do best. This morning, their first challenge was a plant that had been potted (more than once) in

a woven wicker basket. From the kitchen, I heard the all-too-familiar thud. Nervously, I entered the room and found the fallen plant laying on its side, potting soil spilled on the carpet. Three innocent, wide-eyed faces looked down at me from their perch on the bookcase, so recently occupied by the plant. In soft purrs and chirps, they shared their observations, calculating the exact trajectory of the fall, remarking on the splatter pattern shown so nicely against the contrasting green of the carpet. Then they were off — a ball of crumpled paper the next target of their curiosity.

This scene is common around our home: American Curl kittens fulfilling their prime directive of seeking new ways of making interesting

*American Curl —  
this new breed has  
found that the  
best antics require  
teamwork*





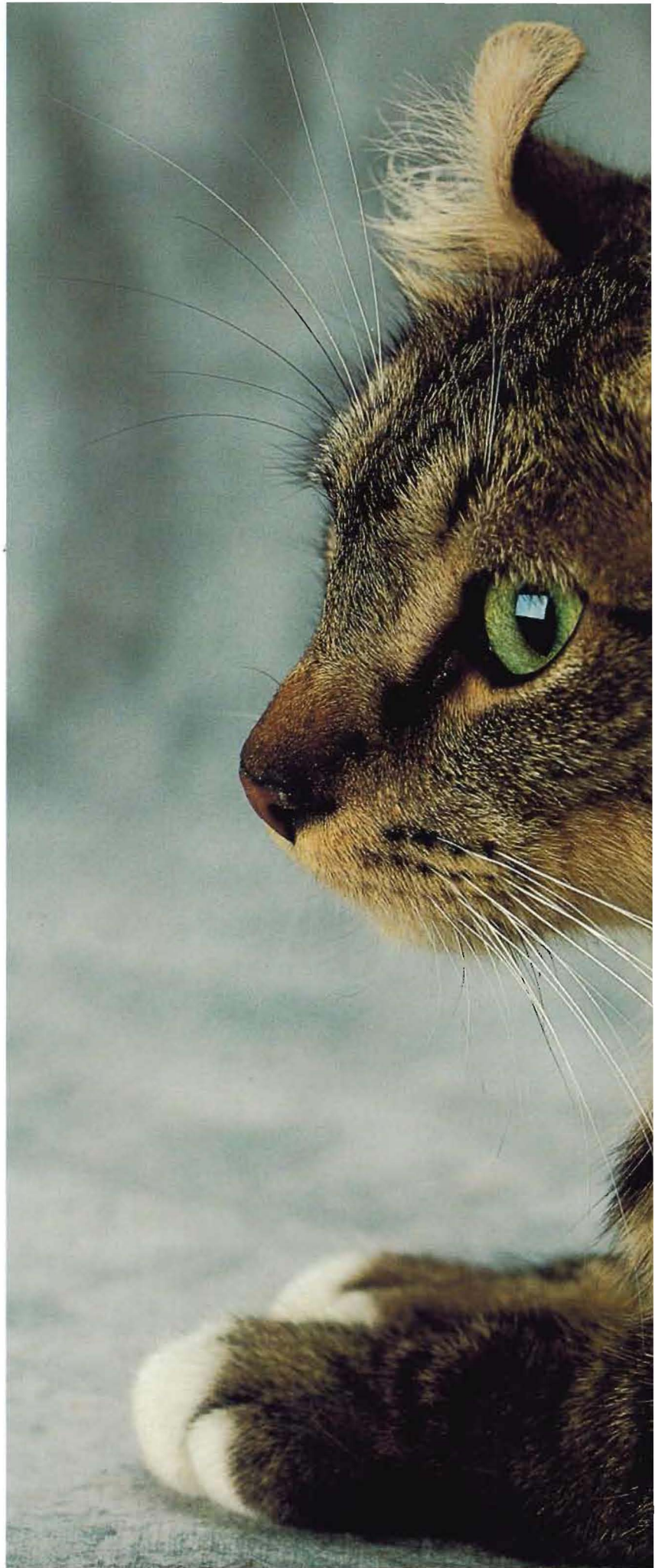
things happen, testing and then testing again according to their "Theory of Feline Relativity."

It has been said that the domestic cat is the result of a mutated wild species that never grows out of its kitten-type behavior. This adaption possibly enabled him to occupy a new ecological niche: the human household. If this is indeed the case, then the American Curl carries the process one step further. Even the most mature American Curl will pursue a string deftly employed by his or her human companion. Rather than seeking solitude, they often pile together in a box; late arrivers simply taking their position delicately on top of the heap, much to the chagrin of the lowest occupant who must struggle out. They delight in perching on a shoulder, and love to pat and nuzzle their owner's face, remaining curious and affectionate throughout their lives. Not overtly "talkative," they nevertheless possess a full repertoire of chirps, trills and assorted meows by which they make their needs known.

The American Curl is one of the newest breeds recognized by the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA). Their most distinguishing characteristic is their ears, which curve back from their face, in essence turning the ear backwards and fanning out the profuse interior hair, or "furnishings," as it is called in the cat fancy. A lucky quirk of nature, the genetic mutation that causes the ears to curl has been observed in other non-related domestic American cats. However, true American Curls must trace their lineage back to the founding feline of this modern breed.

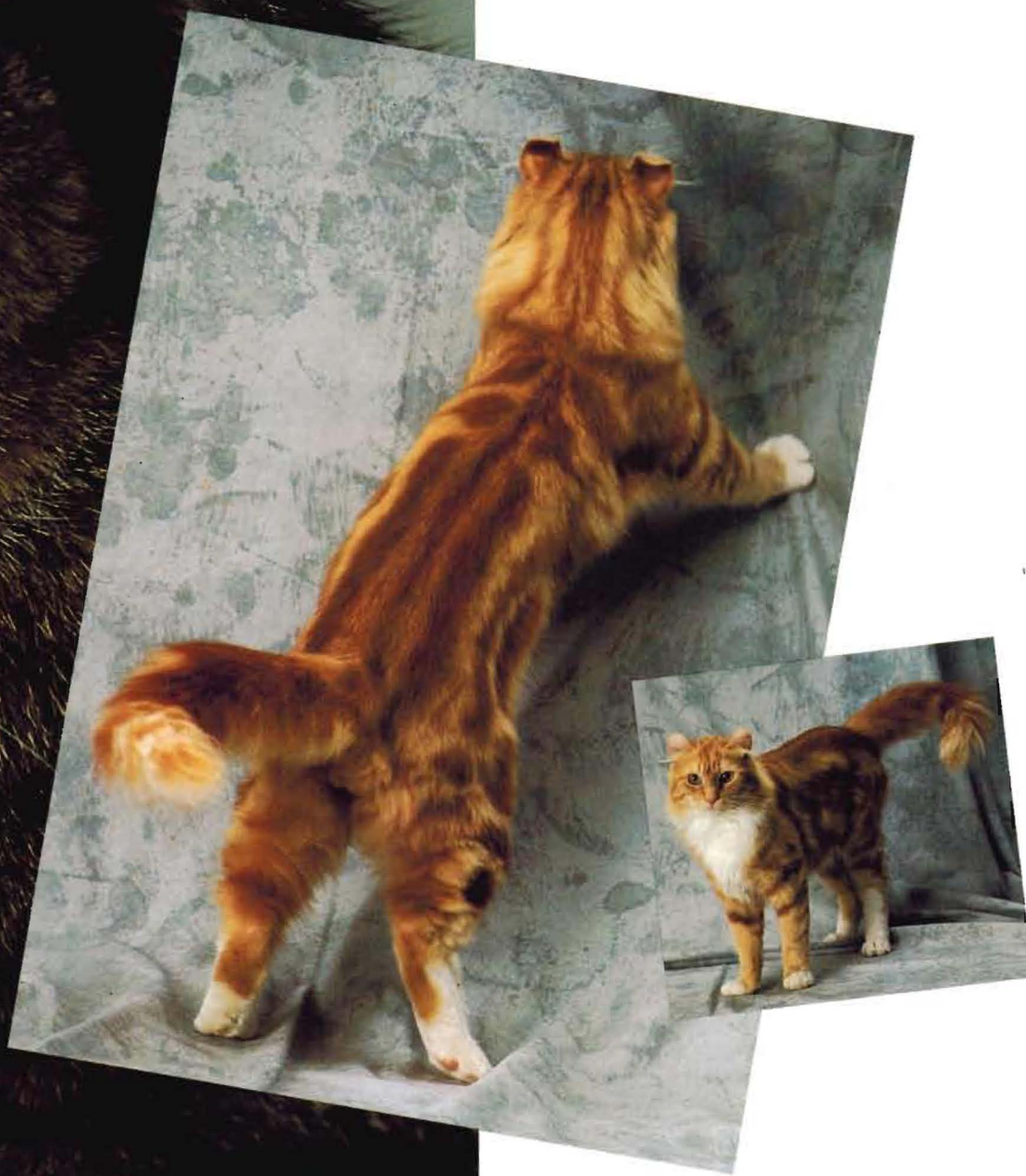
Shulamith, a long-haired silky black cat, was discovered in June of 1981 when she "adopted" Joe and Grace Ruga of Lakewood, Calif. The Rugas thought her curled ears were

*Continued on page 24*





Judges view American Curls' ears from all angles. The side view of Ears-R-Us Edithanne (left), a 2-year-old female, shows the gentle flip of the ear; the rear and front views of Ears-R-Us Winchester Curliethedral (center and lower right), a 14-month-old male, show the ears' structure. (Also note Winchester's beautiful tabby markings.)





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interesting, but when she gave birth to a litter of four kittens — two having the curled ears — they knew that Shulamith, the cat which had just happened upon their doorstep, was extraordinary.

Coming from domestic stock, Shulamith possessed a number of characteristics in addition to her unusual ears that continue to be the focus of the breed today. The CFA standard calls for a well-balanced, intermediate-sized cat weighing up to 10 pounds at maturity. The body should be semi-foreign in type, with a coat that is silky and soft, but not close-lying. The standard calls for a minimal undercoat in both the long-hair and shorthair divisions of the breed. All Curls should have a tail that is as long as the body, and full and plumed with long hairs. Other important features are large walnut-shaped eyes set on a slight angle, and a face that has gentle curving contours.

There is no pedigreed breed that has the exact qualities found in a Curl outcross, so any breeding stock other than American Curl must be non-pedigreed domestic cat that closely fulfills the requirements of the Curl breed standard with the exception of the curled ears. January 1, 2010 has been set as a closing date for inclusion of outcross lines, which will continue to provide sufficient genetic diversity for optimum health.

I became involved with the breed while making a delivery to the home of the Rugas' sister, Esther Brimlow. Brimlow had adopted one of Shulamith's kittens and named her Mercedes. One look at Mercedes and I was hooked — and determined to have a curly eared kitten of my own. When Mercedes had a litter, I became the proud owner of Princess Leah and her brother, Master Luke.



American Curl kittens are born looking like any other baby cat, but between one and seven days of age, the ears of those kittens that carry the Curl gene begin to get firmer, and start to plump up and curve back. Light-colored ears show a definite pinkness, and all Curl kitten ears are warm to the touch. Kittens with straight ears exhibit none of these changes. Kittens need only one parent with the Curl gene to develop curly ears. It is also possible for the kitten to get the gene from both parents, which ensures all offspring of possessing the trait. Straight-eared cats from Curl litters that fit the standard are very valuable in a planned breeding program and also make outstanding pets.

CFA accepted the Curl as a Provisional Breed at the CFA Semi-Annual meeting in Dallas, February 1991. The progress the breed has made has been almost miraculous, considering the rigorous steps necessary to achieve CFA acceptance. Breeders across the United States, and in Europe and Japan, are now working with American Curls and there's a good chance you might see one if you attend a cat show. You will find them in a variety of patterns and colors such as colorpoints, whites, van patterns, calicoes, spotted tabbies and even silver classic tabbies.

Whether at a show or in the home of a breeder, you'll find the American Curl to be sweet and accommodating, seeking nothing more than your total devotion and love. And soon you will see how easy it is to become captivated by the whimsical antics of the American Curl. ■

For more information about this delightful and unusual breed, you can write to Nancy Reynolds Keister at:

Nancy Reynolds Keister  
1270 Albion Lane  
Medford, Ore. 97501

*For information on an American Curl breeder, see the advertisement on page 29.*

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