

Answers To Cancer

Cats

October 1997

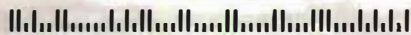


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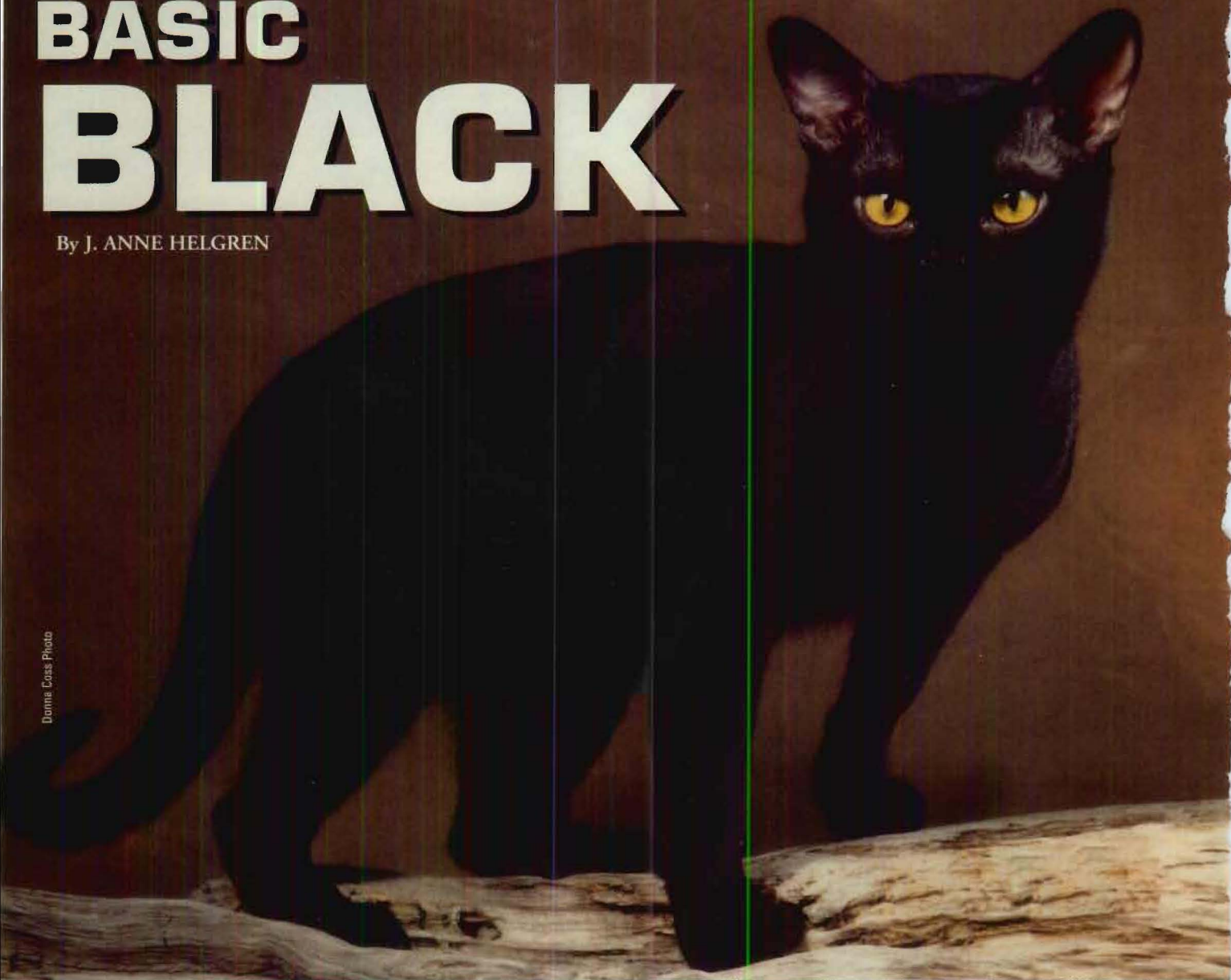
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BASIC BLACK

By J. ANNE HELGREN



Donna Cass Photo

It's a spooky Halloween night. The wind-tossed trees rustle ominously as you hurry down the path to your house. Suddenly, a stalwart black cat slinks in front of you, a mini-

panther with captivating copper eyes and a coat so black it conjures thoughts of witches, bubbling caldrons and murmured incantations. But hey! It's OK because, being a

cat lover, you're immune to such superstitious feline folklore. Besides, that black cat crossing your path is a Bombay—not a sinister witch's familiar.

BOMBAY BEGINNINGS

The Bombay is an endearing breed: sweet, affectionate and agreeable to just about any suggestion from its human companion. Although not overly active, the Bombay enjoys playing with its preferred person and is known for its curiosity and intelligence. Fanciers claim the Bombay can win over even the most hateful ailurophobe with its combination of personality and sleek body style.

"My Bombay, Kirby, has a wonderfully sweet disposition," says fancier Paula Linn. "He's curious and constantly investigating everything. His favorite pastime is seeing what he can knock off the kitchen table. He thinks it's great fun when his human picks the things up for him."

The Bombay is a rare breed and ranks 30th out of 36 breeds according to Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) registration totals; only 91 were registered in 1996. However, it still has a dedicated

following of folks who treasure the breed's loving and playful personality. The Bombay also generally performs well in the show ring.

Although uncommon, this midnight cross between the Burmese and the black American Shorthair has been around for decades. In the late 1950s, Nikki Horner, a longtime exhibitor and breeder of American Shorthairs, Burmese, Exotics, Himalayans, Persians and Siamese, attempted to turn the Burmese into a cat of a different color. Her Shawnee cattery in Louisville, Ky., established in 1945, gained a reputation for producing outstanding felines. Although her cattery was rewarding, Horner wanted more. She decided to create a new breed.

However, her first attempt in 1958 was a disappointment. The kittens from those first litters, the product of crosses between non-pedigreed black domestic shorthairs and sable Burmese, were all black because the color black is dominant to the sable color of the Burmese. But the overall look didn't match Horner's master plan. The kittens looked more like poor-quality American Shorthairs than black Burmese. Their coats were too long, their eye color poor and their body type was "big and horsey."

She put the project on hold and devoted her energy to showing the established breeds she raised. Over the years, Horner's cattery produced more than 100 Grand Champions and chalked up over 500 Best-In-Show wins. During her cat fancy career, she bred many winning cats, including Cat Of The Year and Best Opposite Sex Cat Of The Year in 1960, 1961, 1963 and 1965.

Realizing she couldn't top that record, Horner returned to her dream of creating a new breed. Looking at the black American Shorthair and the sable Burmese, two of the types and colors she was currently breeding, she imagined a Burmese with a sleek black coat and snapping copper eyes. "Because it looked like the black leopard of India, I named it after the city of Bombay," Horner said in an interview before her death in 1995. "It just sort of fell into place."

She bred Shawnee Obsidian, a pedigreed black American Shorthair female, to GRC Shawnee Cassius Clay, one of her best sable Burmese males.

Between 1966 and 1972, Horner produced 27 Bombay litters (106 kittens total) and eventually achieved the ideal look she wanted—a breed with the body type and short polished coat of the Burmese, and the American's copper-colored eyes and black coat. She nicknamed her creation the "Patent-Leather Kids With The New-Penny Eyes."

Meanwhile, she became a Mother Hubbard of black kittens: She had so many she didn't know what to do! The kittens that weren't good breeding candidates needed homes, and because the breed wasn't recognized at the time, no one was willing to pay for the pet-quality Bombays. Therefore, family and friends (and friends of friends of friends) were recruited to provide homes for the little black cats.

After achieving the look she wanted, Horner's troubles weren't over. Her previous success in the show ring with recognized breeds didn't assure the success of her creation. Burmese breeders wanted nothing to do with Horner's cats, and she had trouble finding people who were interested in breeding and exhibiting her Bombays. Most wanted to wait until the breed was recognized to buy one, and without the support of breeders and fanciers, recognition would be a long time coming. "It really was

a Catch-22," said Horner. "It took a long time. I never really realized how much work I'd have to do. If I had, I wouldn't have done it. But now I'm glad I did."

ON THE SHOW SCENE

Finally, in 1970 at CFA's annual board meeting, the breed was accepted for registration. Advancing from registration to provisional status meant that at least one breed club must be formed and at least 100 examples of the breed must be registered. These conditions were met in 1974.

Before it could be accepted for CFA championship status, the breed had to be shown in the provisional (nonchampionship) class. Exhibitors still had to pay a fee to enter their Bombays, but the cats couldn't compete for prizes. They were merely on display for exhibitors and visitors, and handled by the judges. However, this exposure helped spread the word about the Bombay, so breeders exhibited in the provisional class as often as possible. The Bombay achieved CFA championship status on May 1, 1976. Other associations quickly followed CFA's lead, and most had accepted the Bombay by 1980.

By then, however, Horner had lost interest in breeding and showing and took a break for a number of years. At that point, other breeders took on the Bombay challenge. Patricia Taylor, Sandy Sulloway, Johanna Kachler, Sharon Knight and Herb and Suzanne Zwecker, to name a few, brought the Bombay into the cat fancy limelight.

At first it was rough going for these intrepid Bombay pioneers because the cat fancy seemed singularly unimpressed with the Bombay. One Bombay breeder notes, "The Bombay was a joke in the cat fancy until we bred some good ones that took top national wins. When we came out with our first one, a CFA all-breed judge said we shouldn't waste our time, the breed was awful, hopeless, irredeemable..."

The Zweckers were instrumental in bringing the Bombay some of the respect it deserved. They started over with fresh stock and bred a non-pedigreed black domestic shorthair male to one of their sable Burmese females. In due time they produced a breakthrough cat for the breed—Road To Fame's Luv It Black. He was CFA's Second Best Cat and Best Shorthair in 1985. Although Horner eventually returned to showing and breeding Bombays, the Zweckers and the other dedicated breeders made the Bombay what it is today.

PLAYFUL PERSONALITY

Most Bombay owners are more impressed with the breed's delightful personality than its show prospects, and that's just as it should be. The Bombay strikes a nice balance between the even-tempered, laid-back personality of the American Shorthair and the playful, talkative, super-smart Burmese. They're extremely people-oriented and very devoted to their chosen humans (compliments of the Burmese influence), but won't drive you crazy with a constant dialogue (compliments of the American Shorthair). But they'll get their feelings across when they have something to say.

"My Bombay, Black Ice, is quiet, gentle and sweet—until she wants something," says Bombay owner Fred Boulka. "Then look out! She climbs my leg with her sharp little claws, yowling

BOMBAY BASICS

Breeder Nikki Horner's original idea for the Bombay was a copper-eyed, black cat resembling the Burmese. Although technically a hybrid of the American Shorthair and the Burmese, the Bombay gets most of its features from the Burmese. In fact, Bombay and Burmese standards are very similar. For both, the head is pleasingly round, and the face is full with considerable breadth between the eyes. Both breeds have expressive eyes and sweet expressions prized by fanciers.

The ideal Bombay is medium-size with good muscular development, and it's deceptively heavy for its size. Female Bombays weigh 6 to 8 pounds, while males weigh in at 8 to 10 pounds. However, where the Burmese is compact in appearance, the Bombay is "neither compact nor rangy" by standard. Bombays generally have slightly longer bodies and tails than their Burmese relatives. Like the Burmese, the Bombay has an indentation above the bridge of the nose. For the Burmese this is called a "break," but in the Bombay standard this is called a "moderate stop." Because of the subtle differences in the standards, opinions differ about standard interpretation.

The most noticeable difference between the Burmese and the Bombay is coat color.

In a show Bombay, the coat must be black to the roots, the nose leather and paw pads black. Eyes should be deep gold or copper. Green eyes are cause for disqualification. In the sable Burmese, the coat color is a rich warm brown that shades almost imperceptibly to a slightly lighter hue on the underparts.

Coat texture is important in the show-quality Bombay as well. The Bombay's fine, short, satin-like coat has a shimmering "patent leather" sheen that invites caressing. The coat feels soft and satiny to the touch. "You can almost see your reflection in their coats," says breeder Herb Zwecker.

Bombays tend to develop slowly and don't gain their full eye color and glossy coat until they're over 4 months old. Until then, they resemble ordinary black domestic shorthairs. If you're planning to buy a Bombay for show, it's wise to wait until the kitten is older. Breeders usually hang on to their kittens for at least four months anyway because it's hard to judge show prospects at a younger age.

Because the Bombay gene pool is small, breeders outcross to Burmese and American Shorthairs to keep the pool healthy. Thiamine deficiency, heart disease and cranial deformities resulting from the



Jane Howard Photo

change of the head shape are among the genetic problems shared by the Bombay and the contemporary Burmese.

Over the last 20 years a difference of opinion has developed among Burmese breeders as to the favored conformation. One group prefers the "European Burmese" that possesses a longer, narrower muzzle with a less pronounced nose break. The other group favors the "contemporary" Burmese—shorter, broader muzzle, pronounced nose break and a broader, rounder head shape. This difference of opinion has affected the Bombay as well. Some Bombay breeders prefer the longer muzzle and want to avoid the skull conformation of the extreme Burmese. Other breeders prefer the shorter muzzle and the pronounced nose break. In today's CFA show rings, the contemporary Bombay seems to be taking more wins.

at the top of her lungs! Needless to say, she usually gets what she wants."

"They have almost the same personality as the Burmese," says breeder Suzanne Zwecker, who also is President of the International Bombay Society (see "Source"). "They're easy going, but they're still playful and very affectionate."

Bombays crave your constant attention, and they'll follow you everywhere to get it. For that reason, the Bombay isn't for everyone. In fact, one buyer returned a Bombay to Horner, saying, "I wanted a pet, not a shadow."

"My husband cannot sit in his recliner without Kirby jumping in for a nap also," says fancier Paula Linn. "Anyone who gets a Bombay will have a very special, loving companion."

A RARE BREED

If this breed is so special, why are they still so rare after almost 40 years? Well, Bombays breed easily enough, but very few of the subsequent kittens are considered show quality. In order to maintain the head and body type, the Bombay must be crossed back to the sable Burmese; Bombay to Bombay crosses tend to produce kittens with poor head and coat types. Some breeders also cross back to the black American Shorthair to make the breed healthier and to avoid genetic problems.

The necessary crossings make it difficult to balance all of the desirable Bombay features. When a Sable Burmese is bred to a black American Shorthair, all of the offspring will be black but still carry the recessive sable gene. If both parents carry the sable gene, about 25 percent of the Bombay kittens will be born sable brown. Because the standard calls for black color only, these kittens can't be registered as Burmese or Bombay in the CFA.

However, in The International Cat Association (TICA), sable Bombays can be registered and shown as Burmese.

Body type presents another complication. Crossing back to the American Shorthair often produces kittens with an American Shorthair body type, rather than the preferred Burmese style. The nose is often too long and the body not "cobby" (compact) enough. The American Shorthair influence also thickens the coat of the offspring.

All in all, these difficulties can be discouraging to a would-be breeder, which may account for the rarity of Bombays and Bombay breeders. "But the bottom line is, I'd rather see quality than quantity," says Herb Zwecker.

SOURCE

The International Bombay Society, Dept. CM, 5782 Dalton Dr., Farmington, NY 14425.