

A GUY'S GUIDE TO LOVING CATS

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OCTOBER 1999

CAT FANCY

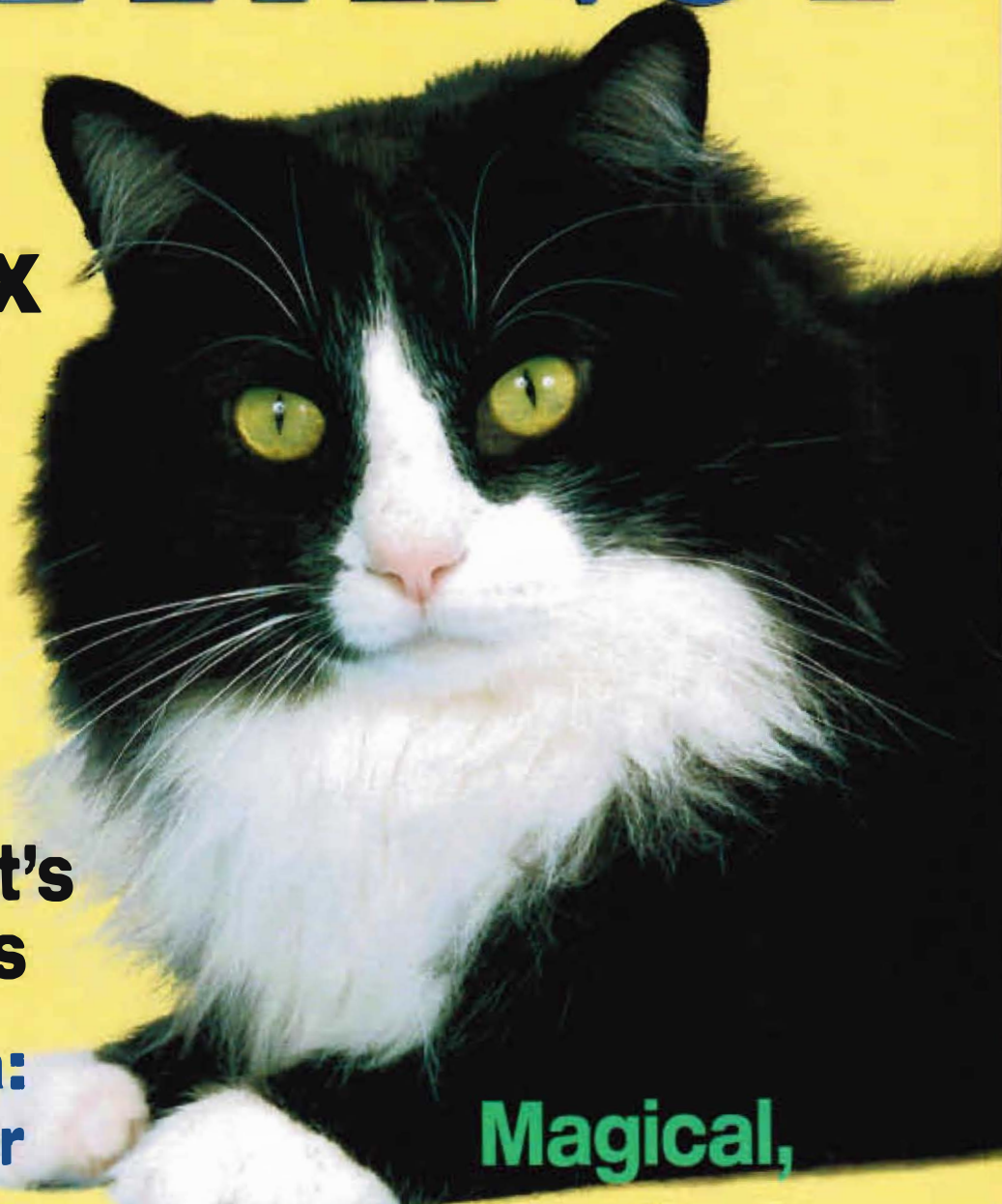
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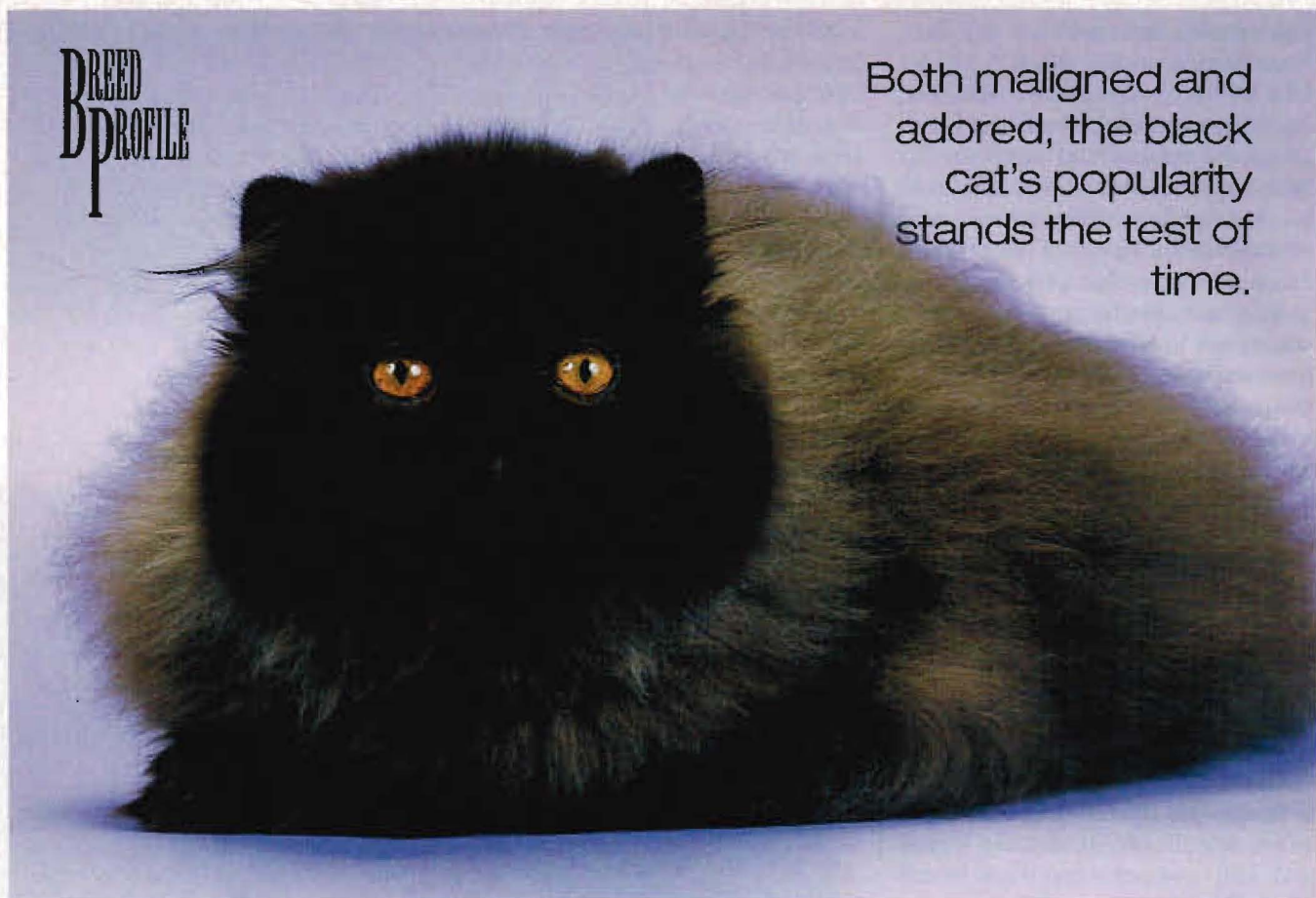


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Both maligned and adored, the black cat's popularity stands the test of time.



MICHAEL JUSTICE

Black Beauties

By Carolyn Osier

Throughout most of their association with man, cats — black, white, tabby or tortoiseshell — have been valued for their service.

Though there are no written records, it is assumed as man began to engage in agriculture, stores of grain attracted rodents, which became prey for the cat.

In ancient Egyptian times, the value of a cat that could catch rats was codified and strictly enforced. If accidentally or unintentionally killed, a practicing feline ratter was worth a mound of grain as tall as the cat held up by its tail. Kittens were often promised to owners as soon as they were born and when a cat died, family members shaved their eyebrows in mourning. Affluent cat owners formally mummified and buried their compan-

ions. Among powerful Egyptian deities was Bastet, a cat-headed goddess who represented the sun's life-giving warmth.

Despite laws forbidding export of these exceptional guardians of the granaries, enterprising traders smuggled domestic cats into other Mediterranean countries. As the Roman Empire conquered Egypt and other kingdoms, advancing armies brought the indispensable cat. Soon even the isolated and backward British Isles valued the ratting cat as equal to a foal, a calf or a pig.

No distinction was made regarding color, although most cats depicted in early art were tabbies, probably because the tabby pattern inherited from the cat's wild ancestors is dominant over all other color and patterns. At some point in feline evolution, a mutation occurred

allowing the cat to hide its tabby pattern, giving us the first solid-colored cats. Man began to record the existence of black, white and even gray-blue varieties.

The Roman Empire eventually succumbed to internal divisions, leaving in its wake a powerful new entity, the Christian church. The cat often fell victim to the church's passion to stamp out pagan religions. Idolatrous worship was condemned.

The church believed certain individuals, usually women, were servants of the devil who often appeared in the form of a black cat. Witches were suspected of assuming the feline form to escape detection or perform gruesome acts. During the Middle Ages (600-1300 A.D.), witch hunts were common and black cats were often tortured and burned.

Special Tear-Out Section

Because all cats carry a tabby pattern in their genes, it is sometimes possible to see faint tabby markings when a black cat is in full sunlight.



The
Bombay
comes in
patent
leather black
with copper
penny eyes.



MARK MCCULLOUGH



CLICK THE PHOTO CONNECTION

Many owners of black cats
mention the hypnotic power
of their eyes.



CLICK THE PHOTO CONNECTION

Both purebreds and
domestics come in
long-haired and
short-haired versions
of basic black.

The Bombay

Of all breeds, only the Bombay comes only in black. It is the creation of successful Burmese, Persian and American Shorthair breeder Nikki Harner, of Louisville, Ky., who was determined to create a "mini-panther" in her Shownee Cattery. She experimented with crosses between black domestic shorthairs for color and sable Burmese to give the muscular panther effect, but gave up after a half dozen breedings produced nothing worthy of the name Bamboay. Unlike the black leopard of India, her experimental kittens had dull, woolly coats.

Eight years later, in 1966, she tried again, this time using pedigreed American Shorthairs and Burmese. Careful selection produced the desired traits of muscular body, short glistening coat and copper eyes. The breed was recognized for registration by the Cat Fanciers' Association in 1970 and for championship competition in 1976.

The Bombay (see photo at left) has characteristics in common with its Burmese parent breed. The body is heavily muscled and the face is sweet and rounded with large, expressive eyes. The American Shorthair contributed not only color, but health and an easygoing approach to life. Bombays are head bumpers and nose rubbers, jumping instantly into any offered lap.

Suzanne Zwecker and her husband Herb breed outstanding Bombays at the Road to Fame cattery in Farmington, N.Y. They feel sure these cats love people more than any other breed. She warns they need lots of love and demand extra special treatment if they have been alone for any length of time. A good solution, she says, is to make sure the cat has another cat or dog for a companion.

— Carolyn Osier



SHARLETT PRANSKY

These Oriental Shorthairs look like polished ebony in their sleek coats.

be hardier and survive better than kittens of other colors. She says they tend to have mellow, laid-back temperaments, making them particularly desirable as family pets.

Like most shelter workers, Palombi and her daughter foster many animals in their own home.

Black cats' eyes, copper, gold or green, they remind one of a panther. Mary Hughes Bruesch of Rogers, Ariz., fell victim to the hypnotic effect of black cats and began to raise black American Shorthairs under the cattery name Timari.

Four years ago she found the ultimate

"little panther," a relatively new breed called the Bombay. In addition to a glistening black coat, these small, muscular cats possess large, round eyes the color of a copper penny. The combination is irresistible, she says. They are a "super intelligent family cat that is a perfect lap cat, always sweet, loving and constantly purring," Hughes says.

If you are a pedigreed cat lover who wants a touch of midnight and a hint of the jungle, many choices exist.

Out of more than 45 recognized cat breeds, approximately half come in black. The elegantly coifed black Persian has a draping coat and expressive copper eyes. The lean, muscular Oriental Shorthair has a coat of polished ebony, accented by mysterious green eyes. If you are less inclined to extremes, try British and American Shorthairs, Maine Coons and Turkish Angoras, among others. Even the newest kids on the block, from Munchkins to LaPerms, come in basic black.

Like Dick Whittington, it is easy to open your life to the treasures a black beauty, pedigreed or domestic, can bring into your heart. 🐾

Carolyn Osier, a Cat Fanciers' Association all-breed judge, has been breeding cats under the Wil-a-glen cattery name since 1970.