

BLUE TABBIES

by Tom and Jane Martinke

Once again CFA has made history and has shown its progressive spirit and its desire to cooperate with the breeders in their problems when its Executive Board in June of 1961 recognized Blue Tabby as a championship color for both longhairs and shorthairs.

Whether longhair or shorthair, Blue Tabbies are purebred cats which may be produced in two different ways. As is the case with both silver tabbies and brown tabbies, blue tabbies may be created artificially by careful interbreeding of two or more colors, in this case brown tabby and blue. However, this is a color which appears to be so dear to Nature's heart that she takes a hand in the matter herself on occasion and includes perfectly marked blue tabbies in litters of kittens from predominantly brown tabby pedigrees. All breeders who have worked systematically over a period of time with brown tabbies are familiar with this phenomenon. Such kittens appear to bear the same relationship to brown tabbies as blue-point Siamese do to seal-points, in that they are a natural and spontaneous dilution or mutation and some bloodlines seem to carry a stronger gene for this dilution factor than others. In one recent litter from well-known brown tabbies where 17 of the first 30 ancestors were brown tabbies and no blue was included closer than the great-grandparents, the proportion of blue tabbies in the litter was 80%. Blue tabbies which appear in this fashion tend to have much more spectacular coloration and markings than those which appear in the first generation of color crossing.

The primary purpose for crossing brown tabbies with blue has been to try to incorporate the strong type and beautiful heads of the blues in the tabbies, and the steadily rising quality of the brown tabbies over the last few years, after a long period when they had reached their nadir and had become so poor that they were almost lost to the fancy, is ample evidence of the efficacy of this procedure. Unfortunately, desirable as these crosses are, they have posed problems of their own. No dedicated breeder will carelessly risk the production of a large number of kittens for whom, for one reason or another, it may be difficult to find suitable homes, nor can any true cat lover accept the idea of euthanasia for healthy wholesome kittens whose only fault is a non-championship coloration. In many cases the blue tabbies from such breedings far surpass the brown tabbies of the litter in general type, and the color has a delicate charm of its own which is most appealing. In most instances the eye color is the intense copper usually seen only in the best blues or creams which contrasts most vividly with the pastel quality of the coat. It is well-known to brown tabby breeders, too, that when these blue tabbies are mated back to brown tabbies, the resulting brownies tend to have better type, more distinct markings and more brilliant coloration than those from two brown tabbies. Yet always they came up against a hard cold fact. These were AOC in which no one

was interested. People who pay even a pet price for a kitten want to feel that it conforms to championship color requirements. Also, few breeders have unlimited space for the numbers of cats needed for constructive experimental breeding and they have naturally been reluctant to keep many of these blue tabbies who, no matter how outstanding their type or how beautiful their overall appearance, could not be shown in championship competition.

There comes a point in any experimental breeding when the breeders have gone as far as they can go by themselves and further progress depends on the official recognition by a national organization of stature that the new color or breed, as the case may be, is lovely in itself, a potential asset to the cat fancy and worthy of inclusion among the breeds and colors which may compete for championship status. The CFA Executive Board has decided that this point has been reached in the development of blue tabbies and has most graciously given its blessing to this new color.

In no way does the blue tabby resemble the "spoiled" blue with which we are all too familiar, which is simply a blue cat with unwanted dark markings. A cat of this sort is nothing more than a blue cat with a fault. The blue tabby is a separate and distinct color which differs much more widely from the blue cat than the red tabby does from the solid red. Here is the standard which has been adopted:

"Ground color, including lips and chin, pale bluish ivory with warm fawn overtones, fawn more noticeable on upper part of face. Markings very deep blue affording good contrast with ground color. Pattern of markings as described for brown tabbies. Lips and chin slightly lighter in kittens and young adults. Nose leather rose. Eyes copper or deep orange, copper preferred."

While this is an accurate and factual description of these cats, it cannot properly convey the charm and delight of this delicate soft color which is overlaid with what might be described as a patina or bloom, giving an overall effect at first glance of a mauve cat with deep rich markings in striking contrast to the pale ground color. Of course they have the piquancy which the face-markings impart to all tabby varieties.

Happily, the recognition of this color is a two-fold blessing. At one and the same time it gives to the fancy a new and striking color which is as beautiful as any of the longer-established ones, and it provides a most effective means for rapid improvement of the brown tabbies, so dear to the hearts of their admirers and especially those who remember them in their heyday when they could hold their own in competition with the colors which now dominate the top wins at our shows. This recognition, though, is a beginning, not an ending, and much work remains to be done with this fascinating new color. A great deal of experimentation is needed to determine just what proportions of the various colors will produce the strongest combination of type and markings. This is a task to which the tabby breeders look forward to applying themselves with pleasure and interest. The best is certainly yet to come.