

# THE UNSINKABLE TABBY BROWN

By Jane S. Martinke  
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Although it is generally considered that Brown Tabby in some form was the original color of domestic cats, there is probably no color which is more generally misunderstood or about which more mistaken



Mrs. Martinke

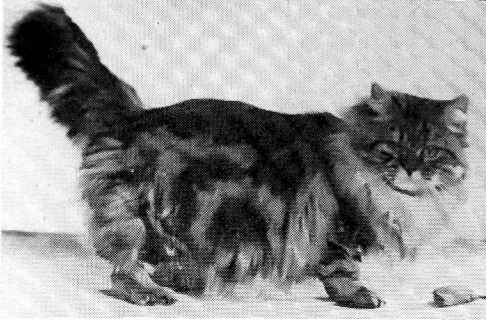
ideas have been held throughout the years. Much has been written about the color and many supposedly scientific theories for breeding it have been presented as being foolproof. The experts on genetics have propounded still further theories about them. The only trouble with all this is that these theories have a way of not working out and only those who have worked with the color intensively over a period of many years know which of them stand up in practice and which should be relegated to the realm of old wives' tales. My own practical experience with Brown tab-

bies extends back over more than forty years and that long ago I had the privilege of discussing this color in detail with the noted breeder and exhibitor who was then reaching the end of a long life, but who had bred Persian cats for more than sixty years and had watched during her own lifetime the gradual development of the various colors as we know them today, so that much of what will follow is from the combined experience of two persons over a hundred-year period.

Even this length of time is not sufficient to cover the known history of the Brown Tabby cat. At present we have two distinct and recognized patterns of tabby, the Classic and the Mackerel. However, originally neither of these types were known. I am indebted to a book published in 1889 and written by Harrison Weir, F.R.H.S., who was considered at that time to be the leading English authority on cats, their foremost show judge and who was the president of the National Cat Club, for some very detailed drawings of cats of the various tabby patterns then in existence in England and descriptions of still others. He mentioned the "Common Tabby" which was not considered a show cat. What was then considered the proper Brown Tabby for show purposes, and which is referred to as the "Banded Tabby," had very distinct and quite intricate markings in black running lengthwise. However, there was no trace of the solid blotch variously referred to as the "rosette," "oyster," "woodknot," "spirals," "horseshoes," "whorls," "swirls," etc., enclosed by rings which we now consider a mandatory part of the Classic Tabby pattern, nor was there any hint of the "butterfly" on the shoulders. The design of this cat was such as to lead

one to wonder, as with the zebra, which color was the ground color and which the markings, for the general effect is one of alternate stripings of equal width. Another diagram showed a cat whose perfect pattern is the same as this, but with the black markings much broader than the ground color with the disparaging comment that the markings are much too broad.

However, there was at that time another type of tabby of much longer standing and recognition which was spotted exactly like a



TPL. CH. SUNNY-LAND CALUMET OF MINQUA  
Sire of the first two brown tabby grand champions  
of any association

leopard and which was known as the "Spotted Tabby." Judging from the illustrations our present Mackerel pattern may have evolved from the Spotted Tabby, for its spots were placed in such a position that in time they could have joined into irregular bands running around the body.

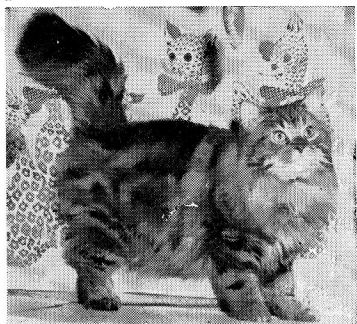
As late as 1889 the Abyssinian cat, which was well-established in England, was considered to be another

form of tabby, although a ticked cat. This is not too surprising when one remembers that a spotted cat, which is certainly not the striped cat we now consider a tabby to be, was then recognized as a tabby also. Many people refer to the Abyssinian as the closest now in existence to the earliest known domestic cats and this appears to be accurate. However, we are told by some authorities that this ancient type actually developed during the later dynasties of Egypt, where the cat had already been considered sacred for centuries, as a mutation of the striped tabby or of the spotted cat which was itself a development of the striped tabby in which the stripes broke up into spots and then further disintegrated into the ticking of the Abyssinian. This is the exact reverse of the theory that the original cat was spotted like many of the breeds of wild cats with the spots joining in time to become lines, then bands. Whichever theory is correct, it appears reasonable to assume that the Abyssinian cat is closely related to the tabby cat and may be considered a form of it.

As Mr. Weir was the leading English judge of cats at the time and apparently had himself written the standards for the various show classes we may take it that his lengthy description of the proper coloration from which some excerpts are quoted below may be considered to have been authoritative for that day. "The clearer, redder and brighter the brown the better. The nose should be deep red bordered with black, the eyes an orange color slightly diffused with green \* \* \* feet round with black claws and black pads; yellowish white around the black lips and brown whiskers are allowable, but orange-tinted are far preferable and pure white should disqualify \* \* \* what are generally shown as **Brown** tabbies are not sufficiently orange-brown, but

mostly of a dark brownish-gray. This is simply the ordinary tabby and not the Brown Tabby."

It might be mentioned, as a curiosity, that there was in evidence at that time a color of tabby which seems to have disappeared completely now and which was definitely related to the Brown Tabby. It had a soft very pale blue ground color, the clearer, brighter and paler the better, with the markings of JET BLACK. It must have been very lovely and it is a pity that it has been lost. This is not the Blue Tabby as we now know it, a color which, by the way, was in existence even then.



**GR. & TPL. CH. MINQUA'S POW WOW**  
Son of Calumet

The tabby cat in one form or other was known by many different names. The word "tabby" was derived from a kind of taffeta or ribbed silk which was "calendered" or what is now termed "watered" to be covered with wavy lines and which was often called "tabby" in bygone times. The word "tabby" as the name for the silk referred only to the markings and not to the color, as a quotation from a book published in 1612 gives us "her petticoat of satin, her gown of crimson tabby." Other oldtime names for cats of the tabby pattern were "the brinded cat," "the brindled cat," "the tiger cat" and the "graymalkin," but in the English countries of Norfolk and Suffolk they were known as the "Cyprus cat." It is interesting to note that in a dictionary published in 1730 "Cyprus" was defined as a kind of cloth made of silk and hair showing lines and coming from Cyprus. It is conjectured by Mr. Weir that both the tabby name and the Cyprus name were adopted at some time after 1597, as prior to that time the shape and color of the markings appear to have been of the leopard-spotted type only. There is another tie in with Cyprus as the domestic tabby cat is said to have been brought to England from Cyprus by sailors trading there, along with tortoiseshells. "Cyprus is also defined as a color, a sort of reddish-yellow something like citron, so the original Cyprus cat may well have been a red tabby rather than a brown tabby.

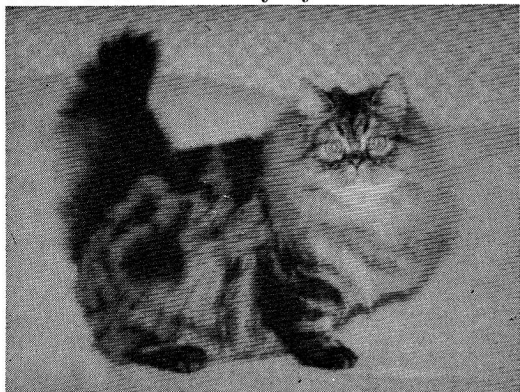
Among the Spotted Tabbies there were black-spotted tabbies, brown-spotted tabbies, red-spotted tabbies, etc. In fact, in the old days there was even a color known as black tabby, which appears to have been a brownish-black ground color with dense black markings, quite different from any type of brown tabby as we have known them.

It is also interesting to note that there are many records of hybridizing between domestic tabby cats and the English Wild Cat, a breed which has virtually disappeared now except from the wilds of Northern Scotland, and which were never domesticated and were considered to be untameable even when taken as kittens. Some of these hybrids were even shown and at the Crystal Palace Cat Show in England in 1873 a hybrid from the East Indian Wild Cat and the domestic tabby cat was shown in the Spotted Tabby class and won first place.

Mr. Weir makes no mention at all of the other type of tabby long in existence which was known as the "Marbled Tabby," "Blotched

Tabby" or "Curved-Banded Tabby," and to some simply as "Brown Tabby," and which corresponds exactly to our present Classic Brown Tabby. This is the **only** type of Brown Tabby to carry a bold and perfect butterfly across the shoulders, the beautiful feature which makes it unique. (While it is not generally realized, many mackerel tabbies carry a butterfly delicately outlined, one might almost say etched, by narrow tracings, but it must be searched out and is not readily apparent at first glance.) This omission of Mr. Weir's is odd as this type of tabby is a very old one. We read that Linnaeus refers to the Blotched Tabby in Sweden in 1746 and that Pocock believed it had its beginnings in Europe, possibly as a mutation of the ancient striped tabby or even as the descendant of an extinct type of wild cat. It must be noted in this connection that no present-day wild cat species have this type of coat pattern, so if it is, in fact, an inherited characteristic it must be from an extinct species. This may also indicate that this type of brown tabby came to us from Europe rather than from England which was the source for so many of our colors and breeds originally. In one way or another the various authorities manage to convey the impression that they believe this type of tabby was originally of a separate and distinct breed from the "tiger cat," although of course they have been crossed and recrossed for so long now that this would no longer be true. It should be mentioned also that in cross-breeding these two types the "Tiger Cat" pattern is dominant to a large degree over this lovely "Marbled Tabby" pattern which we now know as "Classic."

There seems little reason to doubt on the basis of available records that all the other colors of tabby have evolved from some form or other of brown tabby by mutation fixed by selective breeding.



DBL. CH. MINQUA'S BANJO  
First Brown Tabby Kitten Sectional Award winner

blue, which are completely different in tone).

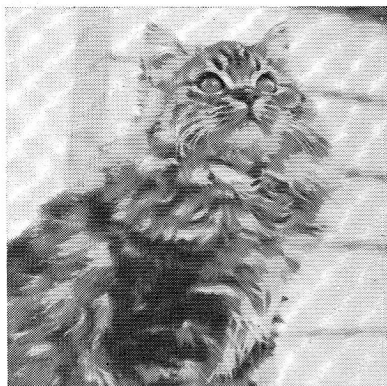
Originally in England three distinct longhair breeds were recognized, the Angora, the Persian and the Russian. The Russian Longhair appears to have been a direct import from Russia and it was notable that all of them were tabbies with the exception of two which were black and it was conjectured that this was a matter of melanism. This is the more astonishing as **none** of the Russian Shorthair cats were

In consulting the old authorities who differ on some points, it is noteworthy that there is complete unanimity of opinion that the true **Brown Tabby**, especially for show purposes, **must** have a brilliant, rich brown ground color which we now describe as copper-brown, as opposed to the Common Tabby whose ground color tended to be dull or even verged on actual gray (not silver or

ever anything but solid color, which would seem to argue that the two Russian breeds must have been kept pure in Russia.

One of the most interesting facets of the Brown Tabby is its tendency to reappear in the litters of other colors even after many, many generations of color-breeding, apparently as throwbacks, confirming the theory that all colors had their origin in brown tabby. This happens most frequently in cats within the silver range, probably because they are closer to their tabby origin in point of time than some of the other colors. When the darkest of the silvers, the smoke, is crossed with brown tabby it is not uncommon for the entire litter to be brown tabby. Most breeders of solid colors are well aware that at birth any color of kitten other than white is likely to show a perfect tabby pattern which disappears as it grows older and it is very difficult to eradicate the tabby tendency in tortoiseshells and blue creams.

For some reason the Brown Tabby cat has always appealed more to men than to women. I have always found when offering brownie kittens for sale, and especially when other colors are available at the same time, that the brownies are far more likely to be chosen if the



**CH. SUNNY-LAND NERISSA OF LONGHILL**

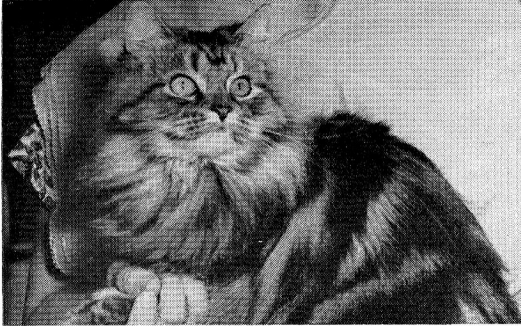
**Dam of first two brown tabby grand champions of any association**

man of the house takes part in the choice, and even those one wants to keep will be begged away if a man comes alone. As evidence of this masculine predilection for tabbies, the tabby has always been the color of choice for ship's cats, those invaluable members of the crews of sailing ships. One speculates whether this is simply a quirk of masculine taste, or whether perhaps it

has its basis in an atavistic instinct with deep-buried racial memories of the original domestic cats whose possession meant the safety of the food supply and possibly, who knows, warmth against the chill of the night. Farmers have long shown a preference for "tigers" for barn cats in the belief that they make the most skillful ratters and have the most stamina.

The tabby coat patterns are alike in both longhairs and short-hairs, but it is much more difficult to breed a striking brownie in a longhair because the length and bounciness of the coat tends to break up the pattern except when freshly groomed. In general a "hard-coated" brown tabby will show to better advantage than a soft or cotton-coated one. However, the brilliant copper brown ground color is

much more difficult to obtain in an American Shorthair than in a longhair, except where there is some longhair in the background. Oddly enough the brilliant color may be realized quite easily in Manx cats. This may indicate that the Manx cat had its original importation



**CH. SUNNY-LAND LAVINIA**  
Mother of Nerissa and Great Grandmother of Calumet

from Europe and the European Blotched Tabby. It may even have some connection in the dim past with the Russian Longhair which was always tabby, especially as it is a double-coated cat like the longhairs.

In the early days of the fancy in this country the brown tabby was very popular and other fine colors such as silver tabby, smoke, shaded silver and chinchilla owe their basic origin to it. Brown tabbies took their place in the finals in the shows at one time as their natural right. However, as with the breeding of dogs, there tend to be fads and the brown tabby lapsed into disfavor as people rushed to own and breed the newer and more exotic colors. Because so little work was being done with it over a period of many, many years during which breeders were bringing the newer colors to a high state of perfection it gained the reputation for poor quality, ranginess, harsh coat, etc. Certainly the grayed ground color which careless breeding had allowed to develop and which even became the standard in the early days of the century, a most uninteresting type of coloration, contributed to their later unpopularity. Only in the past fifteen years or so has intensive and intelligent work on them begun to show results and the improvement in quality during this short time has been phenomenal, so that now brown tabbies are once again holding their heads high and taking their rightful place in the finals in our shows.

No brown tabby grand champions appeared until within the last ten years, the first two of which are believed to be Gr. Ch. Minqua's Pow Wow and Gr. Ch. Minqua's Gingersnap of Co-Mc, litter brothers sired by Tpl. Ch. Sunny-Land Calumet of Minqua ex Ch. Sunny-Land Nerissa of Longhill, both brown tabbies. For sheer perfection of color and markings there has probably been no finer example than Calumet and, to the best of my knowledge, all the present brown tabby grand champions, certainly all CFA brown tabby grand champions, the first four of which are named in the Parade of Grand Champions of this issue, are descended from him. He was bred by Miss Klara Schick of Miami, Florida, who did most of the recent pioneering work in this color which has led to its present renewed popularity, and came to us at Minqua as a young kitten, along with his two litter sisters.

Another brown tabby who helped to focus favorable public attention on the brown tabbies once again was Ch. Minqua's Banjo who was, *Year Book, 1966*

I believe, the first brown tabby ever to achieve a Sectional Award from Cats Magazine in the Kitten classes where it was necessary to compete against all colors. Banjo was a spectacular cat, almost a peke-face, that quality so rare in brownies until recently, and he later won an All-American award.

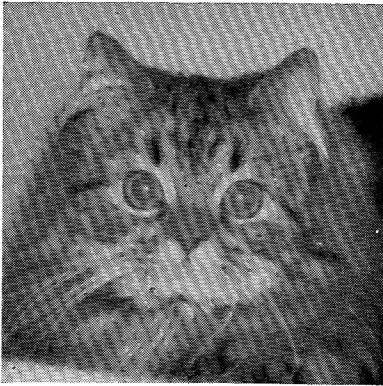
My own first experience with brown tabbies came over forty years ago when my mother and I answered a newspaper advertisement for Persian kittens and went to see them. They proved to be six magnificent brown tabby male kittens, all from one litter. At no time since then have I ever seen any brown tabby litter to equal their quality for their own day. One was the brilliant copper brown so much to be desired, the other five a rich horse-chestnut brown. All were perfection itself for markings and it was then that the full beauty of the "butterfly" on the shoulders was first explained to me. The sire, who loved to stretch out on the floor near the dam with the six kittens frolicking over both of them indiscriminately, was a good brownie of medium



**CH. MINQUA'S TALLYTOO**  
Granddaughter of Calumet

coloring with an outstanding head, massive, with small ears and short nose, huge eyes. The dam was a brown so brilliant as to verge on the deep apricot with dense black markings. She was the product of the mating of a beautifully marked silver tabby queen to her outstanding smoke champion sire. I have found from personal observations that brilliant brown tabby coloration is not uncommon from such matings, although it is unfortunate that we no longer have silver tabby Persians as beautifully and densely marked as this queen to work from. The copper brown kitten and one of the others were found under the tree when I came downstairs that Christmas morning and were the beginning of a lifelong interest in brown tabbies. It was this contact which resulted in my having the opportunity to visit with the breeder of the smoke grandsire and learn from her much of what has since has been put to good use in breeding show Persians of all colors, for this fine woman, Mrs. Mackey, had during her own lifetime pioneered in the development of smokes from brown tabby background and during her experimentation learned that outstanding brownies may be obtained in turn from smokes.

Over the years I have learned that the litter of six male brown tabbies was very far from unusual. Most breeders working with brown tabbies find that there is a disproportionately large number of males in their litters compared with other colors. Even more, a much smaller percentage of the females which do appear are of show calibre as compared with the males, so that to breed a top-notch brown tabby female is a difficult achievement. However, this need not be too dismaying in the breeding programs, because experience has shown that in breeding tabbies more consistently good results are likely to be obtained from matings between outstanding brown tabby males and



**TPL. CH. MINQUA'S NESQUEHONING**  
Daughter of Pow Wow

females of either the same color or other colors than from the reverse type of breeding.

Until recently the brown tabby breeders had to work under a severe handicap because most standards called for chins of the same color as the ground color. This provision had been forced into the standards by non-tabby breeders unacquainted with the proper characteristics of the true Brown Tabby, as distinct from the Common Tabby or Tiger Cat, which never have and never should include dark chins, under the mistaken impression that they should be made to conform to other colors. Ac-

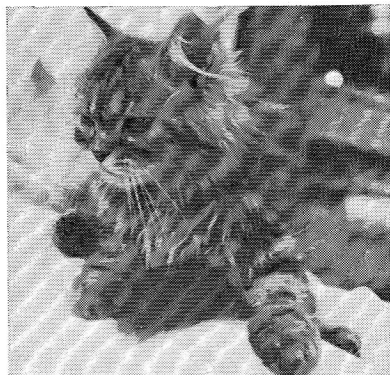
tually the chin should be the color of the eye "goggles." There is a wide variation in ground color on brownies from the very dark brown through the chestnut and the copper to the rich fawn-brown, and these goggles are always of a shade in harmony with this ground color, whatever it may be on the individual cat. Because of this it is unrealistic to attempt to define the proper shade for the lips and chin area. If it matches or approximates the shade of the eye-rings it will be "right" for that particular cat. I have found that very dark chin rarely appears except in "sports" which are not true brown tabbies. All brown tabby chins darken with age and when these sports are fully mature there is a tendency for the chin fur to become black next to the skin, giving a muddy or dirty effect which is most unaesthetic and which robs the face of the piquancy which the contrasting goggles and chins lend to the brown tabby. The true brown tabby chin is quite light, although never actually white, not only in kittenhood but even as young adults, gradually deepening to a gold rich tone. One prominent English judge once told me some years ago that when she found a fully developed chin color on a brownie under three years of age she immediately tested it for artificial coloring. In my younger days some brown tabby breeders, bowing to the artificial dictum that the chin color must be dark and not wanting to harm the cat with dye, resorted to the subterfuge of coloring the chin with strong tea or coffee. These pitiful attempts to deceive the judge were not only dishonest, but futile, for by the second morning of the show, the fastidious cat would usually have managed to remove all trace of the offending substance and the chin would emerge in all its pristine whiteness — and at that time they were quite likely to be pure white — to the embarrassment of the exhibitor. Because of the careful and thoughtful work that has been done in recent years the chin color is showing a tendency to develop earlier than it used to and a good coloration in a young cat now is not necessarily suspect, and I know of no exhibitors resorting to such shoddy devices today.

Many breeders believe that by outcrossing to red or red tabby they will deepen the chin color. This is a weak reed on which to lean  
*Year Book, 1966*



as they would realize had they been breeding reds even as recently as 35 or 40 years ago, for the rich red chin color is a comparatively recent development in the reds themselves. At that time the red who did not sport a white chin — and even worse, a white tip on its tail — was a rarity indeed and the few with sound chin color commanded very high prices. Self-reds, it must be remembered, evolved from tabbies and light chins are natural to all tabbies, whether wild or domestic — remember that Abyssinians were once considered tabbies and even today in this ancient breed light chins are the rule rather than the exception? If reds are carelessly bred, in time they will revert to the light chins, so that to count on their contributing to soundness of chin coloring in another color in which light chins are also normal and dominant is not realistic. Neither does red help to brighten the ground color as so many novices believe it should.

Breeding brown tabbies can be a frustrating experience. If they are colorbred too long it is possible to get beautiful color and markings, but they will almost certainly tend to regress to the original long-nosed, big-eared, rangy brownies of the beginning years. If too much outcrossing of color is permitted, only a very small percentage of the kittens in each litter will be tabby and still fewer will be well-marked. Some brownies tend to throw a large percentage of solid black kittens in their litters even when bred to another brownie, so too much black



**LITTLE BROWNIE**  
Great grandmother of Nerissa

outcross can be undesirable, yet it must be used occasionally if they are to be prevented from regressing into narrow markings with ticking and even changing their pattern or metamorphosing into either a shaded type of coat, i.e., tipped color pattern, an agouti pattern of ticking, or even, in extreme cases, into a solid color. Blue, which is the dilute of black, tends to be more neutral and can be invaluable in improving head, type and eye color with comparatively little loss of markings.

Many breeders like to outcross to tortie or blue cream and have had very good results from it. This has one major disadvantage. Females from such crosses tend to have tortie blotching superimposed on the tabby pattern and color and even one red patch, most often found on the head although they can be scattered, makes the cat AOC. Although these females can be used to great advantage in producing good brownies, they are themselves a “lost” generation where show-

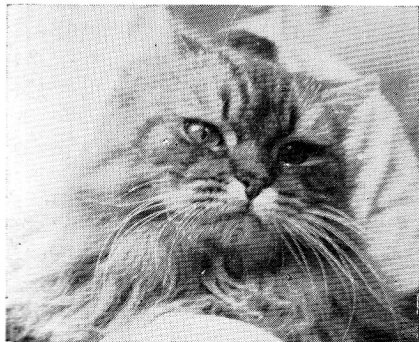


**DBL. CH. FLORIDANUS JUNGLE MONARCH**  
Sire of Calumet

ing is concerned. Some of us use the name "torbie" to describe these cats. Since they can be of the same value to breeding brownies that the odd-eyed whites are in breeding either copper-eyed or blue-eyed whites, perhaps in time those who make the show rules and standards will be moved to recognize this as a championship color for the same reason that the odd-eyed whites were recognized. Certainly it is an interesting color which can be attractive in itself.

Whatever the outcross used, if one is to follow the advice of House, no males of the first generation should ever be used for breeding. Instead the females, regardless of color, should be mated back either to their sires or to uncles, and the males from this second generation will then be valuable for use as studs in continuing the breeding program. In outcrossing, probably the soundest rule is to have the best-marked stud available and use a queen of outstanding type who need not necessarily have good color within her own class.

Too often the novice breeder of any tabby forgets the importance of the color pattern. While it is true that a general description of the pattern is given in the standards, there is an infinite variation of detail possible within this prescribed general pattern. The most spectacular brownies are almost always those with the simplest, and therefore the boldest, pattern. When the pattern becomes too intricate clarity of detail tends to be lost and the general effect is much less striking. Each bloodline seems to carry its own pattern, even though the ground color may vary widely within the bloodline. When two tabby bloodlines, or more, are combined and the various family patterns are merged, clarity of detail is usually lost and a nondescript pattern results which may be technically correct according to the standard but which will almost always lose in the shows to a cat with a bolder, simpler and more striking pattern. This is even more important as the cats become



**CH. SUNNY-LAND NINIAN**  
Sire of Nerissa

cobbler, for there simply isn't room for too intricate a pattern. For this reason it is usually a good plan to outcross to another color and then line-breed right back into the original brown tabby bloodline, preferably with different individuals, generation after generation, keeping the line strong with the outcrosses, while at the same time retaining and perfecting the purity of pattern design from just one tabby line.

The blue tabbies which often result when the brownies are crossed with blue for type, or which appear spontaneously in brown tabby litters as they often do, can be invaluable in the brownie breeding program and are likely to produce some of the best-marked and most richly-colored brownies.

There has always been a strong difference of opinion among brownie experts on the desirability of bringing silver into the brownie breeding program and there is much to be said on both sides.

The green eye color is a disadvantage, but this is a recessive characteristic which can be bred out rather easily by the second generation. It must be remembered that silvers have their origins in brown tabbies and so they are carrying a basic tabby color pattern as evidenced by their color at birth, so they have something to contribute in this direction and for some unexplainable reason they tend to bring a richer and more brilliant ground color to the brownies which is on the plus side. At the same time care must be taken to be certain that the latent tabby pattern of the silver being used is one which is compatible with the brownie bloodline. This is difficult to determine except through trial and error unless careful observations are made of the silvers at birth and records kept. The greatest disadvantage is that there may be a tendency to bring in the agouti and/or the shaded color pattern. It must also be kept in mind that such a cross has nothing to give to the silvers, not even silver tabbies, for they will usually show a tinge of brown or yellow and this is a very serious fault in a silver tabby. The thing that most people tend to overlook is that they have a ready-made solution right at hand in the smokes. They are much closer genetically to their brown tabby forebears than the shaded silvers and chinchillas. While smokes are silvers, most of the disadvantages of outcrossing to silver are eliminated when the crossing is done with smokes and they have much to contribute, the more so as they already have copper eyes. Oddly enough, the smokes which will appear in the litters from such crosses are likely to have less tendency to tabby markings than those from the more orthodox breedings and they are also apt to have a much purer white in the undercoat.

It will be found that where red, black and white are all present on both sides of a pedigree the numbers of brown tabby sports in the litters will be quite high. These usually are either poorly marked or of a mackerel pattern, but they are likely to be very typey. Not enough work has yet been done in using such sports with strongly marked brownies to give any authoritative observations on their usefulness in the brownie breeding programs, but I should think it might be quite high and would merit some intensive experimentation.

The number of breeders interested in brown tabbies has grown to such an extent during the past few years and so much intelligent and constructive work is now being done with them that it is probable that sufficient progress will be made over the next decade that they will recover all the ground which was lost during the many years of neglect, and they will once again become routine contenders for best in show quite soon. These are the true "pansy faces" of the cat fancy. Their facial markings in contrasting color lend them a distinctive sweetness of expression not equalled in any other color. They are among the hardest colors to breed successfully, but because of this challenge and their potential beauty, not yet fully realized, there can be no greater satisfaction than the breeding of a good one to those with patience and ability to take the disappointments and setbacks which will be encountered along the way. Breeding brown tabbies is not for the faint-hearted or the get-rich-quick type of temperament, but the sight of a healthy litter of well-marked, typey brown tabby kittens romping together repays every effort which must be made to

achieve them. I have bred all colors of cats and loved them all, but nothing has ever been able to replace my beloved Brown Tabbies in my affections.

**NOTE:**

Pow Wow, Banjo, Jungle Monarch, Ninian and Nesquehoning were all All-American winners. Calumet and Tallytoo were American Honorable Mention. Nerissa and Lavinia were Sectional Award winners. Little Brown's heyday ante dated the All-American awards.

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