

## WILL THE REAL RUSSIAN BLUE PLEASE STAND UP

By BOB HAZLETT



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We've had two kinds of cats at our house during the time we've been captives of the fancy. For the first several years it was Siamese and they were, probably, the fancy's all-time worst. But we loved them and hauled them around to the shows, thrilled when we took a red ribbon over our usual yellows. Siamese breeders will be quick to agree that, when we elected to breed and show a good line of chocolates, we did indeed have a tiger by the tail.

Then, because a just providence takes care of fools and beginners, our good and cherished friend, Mrs. C. W. (Marge) Pallady, gave us the little cat which was to change our lives. Because I had so admired the animal and, I guess, just because that's the wonderful kind of person she is, Marge gave us our first Russian Blue.

What a change! Into our menagerie of howling banshees came our stately blue lady. Asserting her rights and her claim to total leadership took only minutes. And, from that day to this, nothing about our relationship with the fancy and, in truth, the world around us, has been the same.

Her name is Anna. I use only her given name as opposed to all that formality of titles and awards because she has retired to a tranquil life of absolute dictatorship. She came to us with a goodly share of acclaim already hers. And, happily, she continued her winning ways. It was quite a switch for us to exhibit a cat which, not only took blue ribbons, but also, wonder of wonders, even had a chance at those mythical, distant and mysterious things the other exhibitors called "the finals."

"Hey, this is all right," thought we, carrying home our loot. "If one Russian Blue can accomplish all this for us, just think what two will do." So nothing would do 'til we had a suitable spouse for our Anna. And, in time, he came. As if fate were writing the libretto, his name was King.

By now the Siamese were on borrowed time. The Blues had taken our hearts. Finding good homes for almost thirty loveable appleheads wasn't the easiest thing in the world



Mellstock Anna of Pallady. English import with solid Dunloe background.

to do but, somehow, we did it. The decks were cleared for action and let the chips fall where they may. The world was going to hear about our blue beauties.

"Faint heart never wins the race," they say but they hedge their bets with "look before you leap." In short, we really didn't know what we were getting into with these fluffy blue felines. It wasn't long until we realized that some deep and serious research was in order. Just where had these quiet little cats come from; what was their lineage or were they indeed a breed unto themselves; what far-sighted person was responsible for their introduction to the fancy and a myriad of other seemingly impossible questions. If we were going to be authorities, it seemed prudent to have a little information. But, sadly, and again from the bottomless barrel of semi-wise old sayings, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

As we dug into our Russian Blues' background the truth slowly seeped through. There just isn't one clear and solid story about this breed. Here, let me give you the benefit of a part of what we found.

A book written in 1959 by Grace Pond says "It is thought that these cats came to Britain many years ago, brought from Russia on cargo ships trading between Archangel and this country. It was not until after the last war that the name Russian was adopted. It must be appreciated that the Russian Blues seen in Britain today are the result of many years of selective breeding, and that the name Russian, like that of the Abyssinian, does not imply the country of origin but is merely the name given this recognized breed."

Okay, they existed but people didn't call them Russian Blues. They were Archangels but, Mrs. Pond went on, again writing in 1959, to give a standard for this breed which described what we would consider today to be very foreign type. Not quite what we think of as the cat called Archangel today. So, with apologies to Mrs. Pond, let's dig a little farther back.

In a book copyrighted 'way back in 1900, Helen M. Winslow, in her fine book "Concerning Cats" says, "The Russian Long-Haired pet is much less common even than the Persian or the Angora. It is fond of cold weather, and its fur is denser, indicating that it has been used to colder regions. Many of the cats we see are crosses of Angora and Persian, or Angora and Russian, so that it is extremely difficult for the amateur to know a thoroughbred cat which has not been mixed with other varieties."

There is also a fine short-haired cat coming from Russia, usually self-colored. Mrs. Frederick Monroe of Chicago, owns a very handsome blue and white one."

Whoops! Now we discover that they did too call them Russians, or at least in Miss Winslow's neighborhood they did. And, on top of that they weren't necessarily monochromatic cats at all. To compound



Ch. Biru's King (of Bobcat)  
Dunloe background with out-  
crosses to American lines.

the issue, this book even sports a picture titled in the list of illustrations, "A Genuine Russian Cat." And, sure enough, on the prescribed page, there is a picture of a very attractive blue and white little darling, looking no more like our Russians of today than does a Doberman Pinscher.

It dawns on me that I told a fib at the first of this. We've had three breeds at our house. There was a time before the advent of Anna when we owned three Korats. And with the Korats came one story of their origination. It seems that this is the "true" Siamese cat. That is to say that, if you go to Thailand (once called Siam) and ask a Thai to bring you a "Siamese" cat, he'll promptly return with a self-blue Korat. They are indigenous to the Korat Plateau, a high region in the north of that far-eastern country. Kinked tails bring luck to the Thai, it is said. A kink which turns up brings good luck; a downward affliction means you'd better get yourself a rabbit's foot for balance. Yes, you guessed it. Our Korats' kinks all turned down. We found that we just didn't have the strength, courage of our convictions nor the money to campaign for a then-unrecognized breed. We placed them with folks who indicated they had those qualities. As you can see, we must have done the right thing for the breed now does enjoy a place among its peers.

But, right or wrong about the Korats, it did put us in contact with another blue, short-haired cat. And, predictably enough, provided us with another story for the files.

There's a wonderfully entertaining but sadly rare old book on cats which bears an 1889 copyright. Written by the then-President of the National Cat Club of England, Harrison Weir, F.R.H.S., it can be logically assumed that the author knew something about his feline friends. And, you're right, dear reader, he gives us still another version of the tale.

Writing as Miss Winslow did about the long-haired Angora, Persian and Russian cats, Mr. Weir says, "But if it were so put that the prize (Best Long Haired Cat) should be for Best Angora, Best Persian or Best Russian, etc., it would make the task rather more difficult, for I have seen some 'first-cross cats' that possessed all, or nearly all, of the points requisite for that of the Angora, Persian or Russian, while others so bred have been deficient, perhaps showing the Angora cross by the tail and a slight and small frill. At the time it must be noted that although from time to time some excellent specimens may also be bred, it is by no means desirable to buy and use such for stock purposes for they will in all probability 'throw-back'—that is, after several generations, although allied with a thoroughbred, they will possibly have a little family of short-hairs."

Hold on there, Mr. Weir. Did we understand you correctly? Were you saying that the Russian variety of long-haired cat back in your day was, in fact, hanging on to his long hair just by the skin of his teeth? I think you were. It looks for all the world as if you were admitting that the Russian was a short-hair bred to the Persian and Angora to make an unnatural cross that wouldn't hold through breeding.

But we haven't finished with Mr. Weir's treatise quite yet. In later paragraphs he noted, "I advisedly say 'Russian Long-Haired cat,' for I shall hereafter have to treat of other cats coming from Russia that are short-haired, none of those which I have seen being tabbies, but whole colour. This is the more singular as all of those of the long-hair have been Brown Tabbies, with only one or two exceptions, and those were Black."

Treat of them he did in later chapters. Now, bear in mind we are reading the words of the President of the National Cat Club in 1889. "It was at first shown as the Archangel cat, then Russian Blue, Spanish Blue, Chartreuse Blue and lastly, and I know not why, the American Blue."

A paragraph or two later in the same context he said, "It is not my belief that it is a distinct breed but merely a light-coloured form of the black cat."

Later on, however, Mr. Weir did admit that those he had seen from Archangel were "of a deeper, purer tint than the English cross-breeds; and on reference to my notes, I find that they had large ears and eyes, and they were larger and longer in the head."

Jumping forward in time, the story has mellowed. Rose Tenent, writing in 1955, tells us, "the Russian Blue is a direct descendant of the Archangel Cat bred in the Palace of the Czars." L. H. and Helen Fairchild, in their cat book published in 1942, inform us of what purports to be an American standard for "the rare Russian Blue," calling for a "decidedly longish face and narrow skull, while the ears are large and pointed."

But that wasn't what the first CFA registered Russian Blues looked like. As far as we can determine (and a deep bow of thanks to Mrs. Ralph (Pat) Robie for her assistance in this area) the first Russians to appear in the CFA Stud Books are in Volume 34, published in 1949. They are Dunloe Jan (Imp.) and Dunloe Blue Silk (Imp.), litter-mates out of Dunloe Aphrodite by Dunloe Blue Blue Socks.

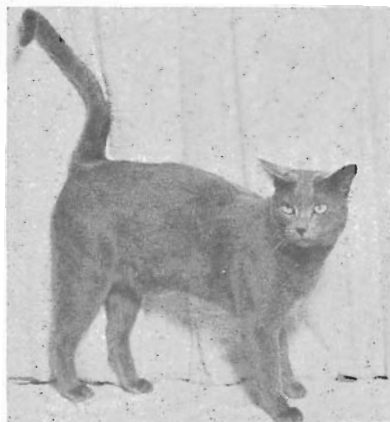
Remember Anna? Lo and behold, it turns out that Blue Socks is her Great-Grand-Sire. And amazingly enough, Jan and Blue Silk are King's Great-Grand-Parents. Now, Anna is a short headed, almost (by today's description), a domestic-looking cat. King, on the other hand, sports a modified wedge shaped head. There weren't enough Russian Blues around for sufficient out-crossing ten or fifteen years



Gr. Ch. Tinnerdalens Njusia of Bobcat (Imp.) Best Russian Blue, Hydon-Goodwin All-Stars. 2 years All Southern RB, AHRB, GSR awards #5 cat and Best RB plus many other awards.

ago, so all of them have more or less comparable pedigrees. So, where do we go from here?

The early standards by which our cats were judged called for a plushy-coated cat with blue color and an un-defined body and head



Ch. Bobcat's Walter Carl, one of the results of out-crossing unrelated lines (King and Njusia).

ly animal is composed of a svelte, lithe body with a narrow skull and all that goes with "foreign type." Perhaps it's high time that we who are inclined toward this magnificent animal should face that fact and go about letting the cat be what it was meant to be by nature.

We've bred our King to a dozen or more fine Russians with lovely pedigrees. Some of the queens have been of the type seemingly favored several years ago, i.e., short noses, round heads, semi-cobby bodies, and some have been dainty, light-boned little queens. In every case King has given us a predominance of long-headed cats.

Some years ago we bought a little kitten, sight-unseen, from a noted Swedish breeder. She grew up to be somewhat of a legend in her own time . . . at least, from our point of view she did. Grand Champion Tinnerdalens Njusia of Bobcat is a complete out-cross to the Dunloe-based line of Russian Blues. Breeding her to King was the experiment which, we reasoned, would tell the tale on the long or short head issue.

Njusia gave us all long heads and has repeated this with every litter. Another out-cross from a California breeder gave us long heads. Several other un-related breedings followed the same pattern. It began to look as though nature still has a hand in this after all.

But, back to basics. What then is the true heritage of the Russian Blue cat? It's almost like saying, "will the real Russian Blue please stand up?" One authority tells us one version. Another gives us a different story. Whom do you believe?

For you, friend reader, it's in your choice. For me, I think, I'll make it even more confusing with still another verse to the same old song.

type. Only a short five years ago, the CFA standard asked for a cat which almost any blue short hair could have been.

My point is just this: we are the humans—they are the cats. By virtue of our alleged superior knowledge and reasoning power, we are in a position to pair them off to fit our whims. Somewhere back down the line, somebody of the human variety decided that the Russian Blue shouldn't have the longish, narrow head and the larger pointed ears. And, likely as not, set about breeding them to accomplish that sort of result.

The evidence seems to indicate that the real nature of this love-

ly animal is composed of a svelte, lithe body with a narrow skull and all that goes with "foreign type." Perhaps it's high time that we who are inclined toward this magnificent animal should face that fact and go about letting the cat be what it was meant to be by nature.

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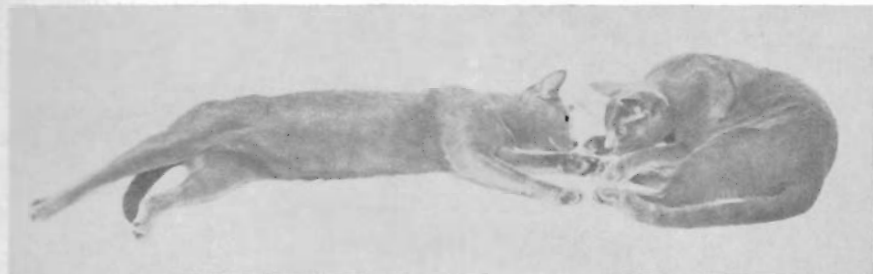
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Is it logical to assume that all the blue short-hairs could have come from one common stock? That, swallowing our pride as "Russian Blue people" or as "Korat people" or as "British Blue people," all of these lovely cats are, in fact, from one and the same progenitor? I think it smacks of the real truth.

But what difference does it make? Looking beyond the little trivialities, perhaps you'll find that really it makes no difference at all.



The quiet, shy Russian Blue, loveable and gentle, is an excellent companion.

I propose a moratorium on all "origination stories" of the Russian Blue. We, as dedicated advocates of this fascinating breed of cat, have far too much work to do on the current animals to concern ourselves with the cobwebs of the past. Breed the cats with the most distant out-crosses you can find. Repeat studs with un-related queens. See if you don't find that a true natural type will emerge and, more importantly, establish itself in your line.

This is what we've done with ours. Certainly there will be those who disagree, and probably some violently, with us. But our breeding experiences suggest strongly to us that the recently accepted standard for the breed most closely approximates what this cat should be.

Like everyone, you too have heard it said, "allow all the cats of the world to breed with no controls and soon you'll have all Brown Tabbies." I believe that, if the Russian Blues of the world were thrown together with no outside interference, within a few generations the hub-bub of two, three or four distinct types would be ancient history. The powerful hand of nature would settle the issue once and for all.

Obviously, there's a place for selective breeding. Human control is the *raison d'être* of the cat fancy. But our control must be within the natural boundaries of the way the cat was meant to be. I believe we've strayed from that straight and narrow path with our Russian Blues. Let type establish itself and then set to work putting the icing on the cake. Love the little cat for what it is and it will reward you, as it has us, beyond your wildest dreams.