

THE CAT OF CONTRASTS

MRS. ROBERT L. GREEN

Not so many years ago, it was not uncommon for me to walk into a showrom in many areas of the country and find that I was exhibiting the only Black Smoke Persian in the show. Occasionally, there would be one other, but usually, there would sit my "pride and joy," alone and almost forgotten at the end of the then Silver Division. After a class of ten to twenty Chinchillas and Shaded Silvers, that one lone Smoke looked for all the world as if she didn't "belong," although genetically, her copper eyes had just as much right to be there as any of the green eyed beauties. I consistently wondered what had happened to this dramatic cat and why more people were not showing them.

To truly understand the Smoke cat, we must begin with its genetics. The Journal of Cat Genetics (Vol. I No. 1, 1963) says that "like the Siamese, shaded hair is the result of mutated alleles of the same autosomal gene as the one which results in the Burmese effect and Albinism."

Also that "The allelic genes (of which there are at least two alleles, C^{sh} and C^{sm} or possibly three) for the shaded hair appear to be dominant to their non-shaded allele ($C+$)". If this be true, and in my breeding experience, it has been so, no two solid colored cats (other than when whites are involved) bred to each other, regardless of parentage, can produce a Smoke patterned cat. One of my pedigrees shows this happening, but upon checking the Stud Books, I found that one of those "blacks" was registered as a Black Smoke—human error in copying a pedigree at some time in the past. Too, you get many pseudo smokes (really blacks) in black smoke breedings and an inexperienced breeder can readily err. Some of these pseudo Smokes will carry the silver frill and light colored undercoat all of their lives, whereas others will keep it only until the first full adult coat.

All the genetics in the world, however, have not told us from whence the Smoke came. It is one of the earliest colors on record and our own stud books verify that the color was prevalent in this country in the early 1900's. There is a recorded birth of a registered Smoke in 1897 and I have heard it rumored that they were shown in France in the late 1880's. There are theories as to how this color developed. Some say from a Silver Tabby mutation. In the July, 1963 issue of All Pets Magazine, Donald Martin, in his article "Breeding



Mrs. Green

Smoke Persians" states that "Originally, the Smoke came from a Tabby in which the gene for marking mutated and, instead of producing black markings on top of a silver white coat, the mutation gave a solid black coat on top of the white." This seems to me to be the logical answer. I discount the theory that Smokes originally came from a Chinchilla bred to black. True, you can work up to a Smoke by this method, but it takes many generations and is not practical. My own experiment (a continuation of one begun by Melba Preston of Chaton Mew) of starting with a Silver is now in the sixth generation. Fig. 1 is a picture of the best colored out of generation 5. Her eyes are a good copper, but a brilliant green ring persists. As you can see, the top coat is dense black; the leg, body, and face barring has disappeared. Also to substantiate the tabby mutation theory, our English cousins delegated Black Smoke as Breed 6 whereas the Chinchilla is Breed 10 (as of 1963 they didn't even list Shaded Silvers) indicating that, if they weren't there first, the Black Smoke was at least recognized and being shown as early as the Chinchilla. The true origin of Smokes though, like that of "Cat" itself is elusive and will undoubtedly remain a mystery to all but Cat.

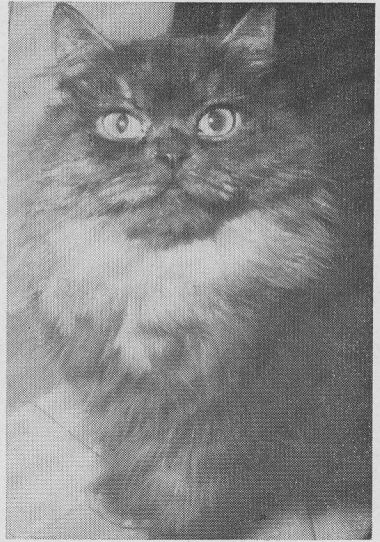


Fig. 1. Petite Chinchilla x Black
(Experimental Breeding)

With all its glorious history, however, the Smokes, or rather the Smoke breeders, have not kept up with the solid colored Persians typewise. Since we started on an equal basis, we should be with them today, but somewhere in the interim period, something happened and the Smokes were left behind. For example, Figs. 2, 3, and 4, reproductions from CFA Stud Book, Vol. II, were all winning cats in the same area and in the same era. I am not saying that there weren't better of each or worse of each, just that these are comparable. Fig. 2 is a Blue, Ch. Shiraz, (Imp) (CFA #659) born May 25, 1907; owned by Mrs. C. W. Chapin. His wins include 1st, Orange, Washington in 1909 and Chicago B.C.C., 1910, 1st, Open, Hartford, New York in 1909, Boston in 1910, and Hartford, Empire, New York, Boston, and Pittsburgh in 1911. Fig. 3 is a blue eyed white, Kilvarock Don Leon (CFA #563) born July 9, 1908; bred by Mrs. J. K. Krock. He was 1st, Novice, New York in 1909. 1st, Open, Empire and New York in 1910. Fig. 4 is a black smoke, Kewey (CFA #734) born March 14, 1909; bred by Mrs. Otto Nagel. Wins listed were 1st Novice, 2nd Open, New York, 1910, 1st Open, Boston, Hartford, Empire, 1910. 2nd Open, New York, 1911 and 1st, Open Boston, 1912.

Continuing with our smoke history, Fig. 5, General Smoke (CFA

#2675) born May 15, 1918; bred by Mrs. J. T. Stalford and pictured in CFA Stud Book, Vol. VI is representative of the Smoke as shown in the 1920's. Fig. 6, Ch. Inverness Banshee of Sunny Knoll (CFA 18-SB-438) born May 13, 1935; bred by Misses Alice and Judith Phillips and pictured in Stud Book Vol. XXIII is our representative of the late 1930's. Finally, Fig. 7 Inverness Dark Beau (CFA 22-SB-052) born April 15, 1939; also bred by Misses Alice and Judith Phillips and pictured in Stud Book, Vol. XXVI was shown extensively in 1944-45.

To begin the comparison Figs. 4-7 span a period of almost 40 years and there is no really outstanding change in type. True, Fig. 7 is a superior cat to Fig. 4, but in this amount of time, most people would think that we would have done better. However, one thing is very apparent. The beautiful color and contrast was kept and this is not easy to do. By 1960, not only had the type



Fig. 2. Ch. Shiraz, (Imp.)

not improved to any great degree, but far too many breeders had lost the dense black top coat or had acquired blue undercoats, or worse still, had reverted to barred legs and tabby facial markings. To get back to my original statement of not keeping up, look again at Figs. 2 and 3 and compare them to the cats of their colors being shown today. Then look at Figs. 4-7. Some of the Smokes in today's showroom (some even winning their division) are no better than these older cats. Fortunately for this most spectacular cat, the breeders after a fifteen year lapse, have gotten to work. We are beginning to see some Smokes with beautiful type and we've found the color again. Currently, the type improvement each year is obvious and this "cat of contrasts" is coming into its own once again. For instance, Chaton Mew's Beau Bo, (Fig. 8) bred by Mrs. Gordon Preston made his debut late in the season this past year.

If you have never seen a tippy, beautifully colored smoke, you have something to look forward to. It is distinctive and the ultimate in cats with its dense black mask framed by a silver frill and ear tufts and with bright copper eyes shining from the black depths. Top this off with legs of shining black and black body color shading to a less heavy tipping on the underneath and the most sparkling of white undercoat ALL over the cat, and you have an animal of unforgettable beauty.

The first question that comes to mind now is, why the slow progress? It most certainly was not the fault of the breeder of the past. We wouldn't have what we have today if they hadn't worked so diligently. My feeling is that there just weren't enough breeders willing to give their "all" for the Smoke. The few serious breeders were scattered and had to go it alone. With the problems involved, it is surprising that they accomplished anything. Until a breeder

has worked in the world of the Smoke, it seems that this color's type would be as simple to improve as any other, but this is not the case. It takes the tenacity of a bull dog (forgive the term), the stubbornness of a mule, and the patience of a saint to "stick" in this challenging field. Many knowledgeable breeders just gave up and went to an easier color. Not only is it one of the most depressing and difficult of colors to breed, it is also difficult to show. The novice,

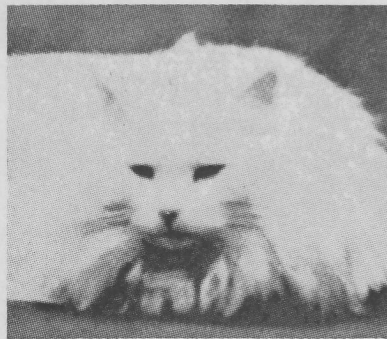


Fig. 3. Kilvarock Don Leon

and the experienced alike consistently find that they are butting their heads against a brick wall. First you must eliminate breeding to today's fine specimens of cream, red, and blue cream for, by working with a sex-linked gene, you end up with far too many A O V's and, unless you also want Cameos, they are of no value. So you stick to the conventional blue, white, or black breeding to try to get the type you need. And what happens, you get magnificent type on the solid colored kittens and beautiful smoke color on the pet

stock. Or worse still—after making a perfect "paper" breeding, you get a litter of all solid colors. So you try again—next year.

The next question asked is "Why not breed Smoke to Smoke?" At least you get smoke colored kittens. But they are not all Smokes. You still get a lot of solid colors and you have a better chance of overall improvement by going to the typier solid colors. Also, many breeders are of the opinion that too much Smoke to Smoke causes tabby markings to reappear and may cause loss of type.

To top it all off, I have never found any Smoke breeders who agree completely on the proper method of breeding the Black Smoke Persian. They disagree on how to whiten the undercoat or darken the top coat. You find that you must work it out for yourself by selective breeding and trial and error. There are no rules.

To complicate matters further, top coat color can be confusing. Light colored kittens can, as adults, develop a very dark top coat. Smoke kittens go through some very disconcerting color changes. Some, due to dense undercoat, will have a completely silver body with only a black spine line from the ages of 4 to 7 months. Never fear, just wait. Gradually you see the black top coat cover first the shoulders and then continue covering the body like a mantle. On the other hand, there are days when you look at a

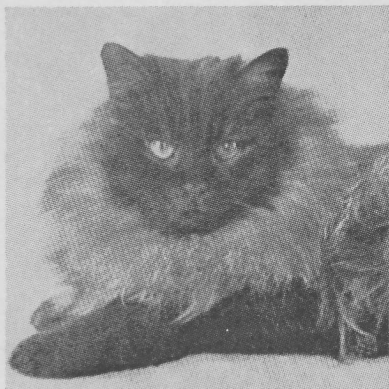


Fig. 4. Kewey

kitten that you are certain was dense black yesterday. Today it looks spotted with brown, giving it an overall moth-eaten appearance. Again the game you play is "wait"; wait for the black to cross the shoulders and work its way to the tail. All of this at the age when you could have been showing this kitten, if it were any other color. Smokes are unpredictable. They are a cat of mystery until the first ADULT coat. You can only observe the mystery unfold, not predict or control it.

The one thing that does not vary is color at birth. So many unknowing people say that a smoke turned into a black or vice versa. This is NOT the case. A smoke is a smoke and a black is a black. Below is an excellent example of a young smoke. It obviously is not black. Unfortunately, though, the contrast is not

always this distinct. Sometimes the face of the smoke will be much darker and the blacks in the litter will have tabby ghost markings after they dry. The novice can easily be led to a false conclusion. Many times this is due to wishful thinking. You know the kitten really is a black, but it has better type and you can see a trace of markings. The legs may look a little lighter than the body and at 4



Smoke Kitten

months it has become the loveliest smoke colored kitten, but it will return to black. It was a black in the beginning. It did not change from black to smoke and back to black again. The same holds true for blues out of smokes. At this one time I will touch on blue smokes as I do not pretend to breed this color though I have had some. At least 50% of my blues from smokes are born with tabby ghost markings, but this does not make them blue smokes. They are merely UNSOUND blues and, like the pseudo black smokes I spoke of earlier, may carry the lighter ruff and undercoat all their lives. The true blue smoke has just as distinct a color contrast as the black smoke. When you look at it, there is no doubt that it is a shaded cat. I have never seen an unsound black shown as a smoke, but many an unsound blue has had wins withheld, and rightly so, because the breeder mistakenly entered or sold it as a blue smoke just because it came from smoke breeding.

The time finally comes when you have met the challenge and won. You have bred a show-worthy Black Smoke Persian and are all

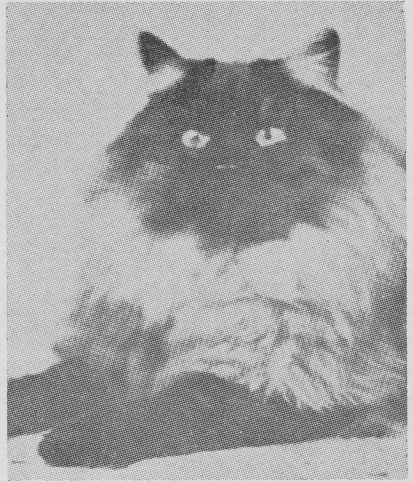


Fig. 5. General Smoke

the face of the smoke will be much darker and the blacks in the litter will have tabby ghost markings after they dry. The novice can easily be led to a false conclusion. Many times this is due to wishful thinking. You know the kitten really is a black, but it has better type and you can see a trace of markings. The legs may look a little lighter than the body and at 4 months it has become the loveliest smoke colored kitten, but it will return to black. It was a black in the beginning. It did not change from black to smoke and back to black again. The same holds true for blues out of smokes. At this one time I will touch on blue smokes as I do not pretend to breed this color though I have had some. At least 50% of my blues from smokes are born with tabby ghost markings, but this does not make them blue smokes. They are merely UNSOUND blues and,

ready to show it through the season. BUT, you have not reckoned with the problems of showing Smokes. To begin with, the Smoke

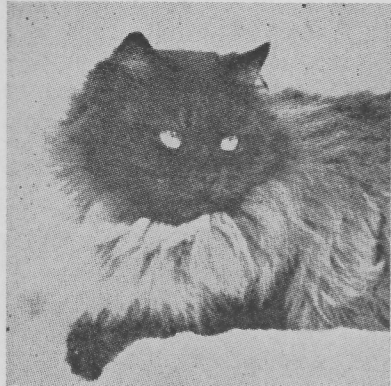


Fig. 6. Inverness Banshee

owner must forget the advantages of a last minute powdering in the show room. In fact, she finds a secluded corner so that powder from other cats will not settle and mar the dense black top coat she has worked so hard to get and keep. The method that works best for me is to powder the night before to prevent mats and then a good hard brushing to remove all traces of this aid. There are two distinct coat textures—the fly away, bouffant type with the massive undercoat that tries to lie on top of the black top coat and the harder textured coat, less apt to mat, but

with the top coat doing its best to lie completely flat and hide all signs of undercoat. I like the powder, hard brushing method for both coats, but with the soft coat, the top coat must be put back in place and with the hard coat, the undercoat must be filled with air to give body in order to present the cat at its best.

In addition, the Smoke breeder faces the same problem as that of the black breeder, rust. Once it starts, there is no stopping that red as it works across the body. The dead ends cannot even be removed as in solid colored cats, for when you start nipping ends, you don't just remove hair length, you remove color that must be there.

The Black Smoke is the only Persian cat that absolutely cannot be seen in the show room when it is out of coat. Other colors can enter early season shows, but until the silver white ruff comes in or when the cat begins to shed out the ruff, forget the showroom. When there is no contrast of a white frame around the black face, a Smoke is just another cat.



Fig. 7. Inverness Dark Beau

If the above isn't enough, be reminded that the standard calls for a snow white undercoat. However, the whitest of undercoats is not always white, or rather, does not appear to be white. As new coat comes in, the first part to show is that which will eventually be the black of the top coat. If you look closely, you can see that the muddied appearance of the undercoat is caused by this new

growth of coat. Powder won't hide it; it just looks like a powdered, muddy undercoat.

On the lighter side of the subject, Smokes are the most "fun" kind of kitten to raise. All cats have different personalities, but the Smokes have individual personalities, all falling under the heading of mischief. My solid colored kittens all do cute kitten things, but, at an early age, each Smoke kitten develops one devilish kitten trick of its own. It can be anything from hiding articles in your shoes to diving under the pillow to nip an elbow (and only the elbow) the minute the alarm goes off. The very facial expression of the Smoke, like that of the sphinx, never gives warning as to what will come next. The mischievous personality is as unpredictable as the coat color. Many a Smoke owner has been embarrassed and shamed by the "glare of the Smoke" when she has done something unfair, illmannered, or foolish. They are loyal and affectionate, but critical to the point that the owner develops a habit of doing certain things when the cat isn't looking rather than face the staring eyes of disapproval. Yet a Smoke is the first to sense when someone is in need of its companionship. It is there, at your side to give all the comfort you need in a way that only it can—with the stare of the Smoke that says "I understand."

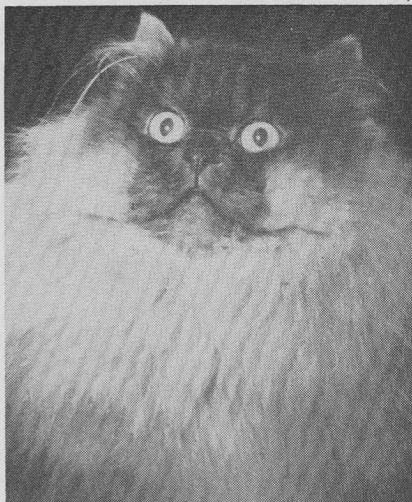


Fig. 8. Chaton Mews Beau Bo
Mrs. Melba Preston, Breeder-Owner

So, if you must be a winner first time, stay away from Smokes. But, if you want the "cat with the mostest," are willing to work, face disappointment, and press on regardless until finally you do produce a winner go ahead and jump in with all four feet. To those who don't choose to join us, at least understand us, and when a Smoke goes up, know that it was no overnight success and money didn't buy it; it was a product of blood, sweat, and tears before the smiles and it's the greatest feeling of accomplishment imaginable to have someone who knows recognize your efforts.

EARLY EDITIONS YEARBOOKS — STUD BOOKS

Order 1967 Year Book from **Christine Streetman**, 4803 Yoakum, Houston, Texas 77006. Price \$2.50.

Order other back editions (only 1959 and 1963 left) and Stud Books, 30 through 90 from: **Mrs. A. M. Dickie**, 747 S. Almansor, Alhambra, Calif. 91801. Price '59 and '63 Yearbooks, \$1.25. Stud Books, 30-86, \$1.00, and 87-90, \$4.00.