

LETTER TO A PROSPECTIVE ABYSSINIAN BREEDER

Dear Joan,

I am happy to hear that you are seriously considering Abyssinians as your chosen breed. I am more than pleased to meet your request of some candid advice and information on the breed as I see it and I sincerely hope that it will be of some help to you.

You will be joining a group of breeders who are dedicated to improving the breed and who enjoy the many delights offered by this beautiful, affectionate and intelligent cat.

If you are the type of person who is easily discouraged, this is not a breed for you to raise, for there are many aspects to consider, many challenges to face.

It is generally accepted that the Abyssinian breed is one of the most difficult to perfect. Devoted breeders are working to produce that elusive 'perfect cat' and several excellent cats recently shown have proved that they are well on the way to reaching their goal. Abyssinian classes at shows are getting bigger and the quality is improving immensely.

The problems of the breeder are many. Breeding out the faulty leg-bars and necklaces often results in the loss of good ticking, while many times a perfectly 'clear' cat will be too pale in color. Then there is the bouncy coat to strive for, the deep eye color to retain, the white area to control and of course the type to watch very carefully. Small wonder that some breeders give up after a short attempt to produce top show winners in a matter of a few short years!



Checking the Ticking when judging an Abyssinian



Mrs. Field and Russet

However, it CAN be done and new breeders have the advantage of being able to purchase stock that has been produced after many years of painstaking study, selective breeding, trial and error, endless genetic notes and years of observation. No doubt, each breeder sets up his own particular 'pattern' and works with his own system. Mine has been the "4 C's theme", namely Color, Clarity, Coat and Condition; each one being very important. **A CAT CAN BE PERFECT IN TYPE, BUT WITHOUT THESE 4 C's, THIS IS NOT THE ABYSSINIAN WE WANT!**
COLOR

A good deep ruddy color, with clearly

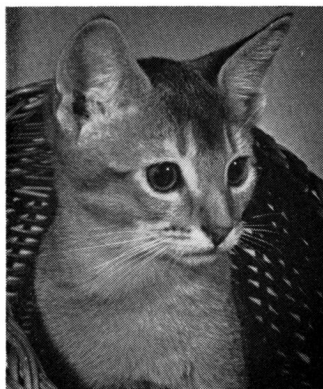


A "Pride" of Aby Kittens (an unusually large litter)

defined ticking, no greyness or solid black areas on the body. This is what we want. The **tip** of the tail **only** should be black (or brown in the Reds), but some blood-lines are producing cats with one-third or even one-half of the tail solid black. This should be discouraged and bred out right away.

Young cats continue to improve in color up to two years of age, with some taking even longer. Encourage your Abbies to soak up all the sunshine they want, as it helps to bring out the best of their color. How lucky we are to be able to do this! The breeders of black and blue cats must protect their cats from sunshine, as it will give the coats a rusty appearance. Watch young cats and kittens for deep ruddy coloring on paws, around the nose and at the back of the ears.

These are the places where the good coloring usually shows first and is a sign that the color will deepen as the kit gets older. Abbies are like cheese and wine — they improve with age!



Abyssinian Kitten Kanata Ruddoch

CLARITY

Most Aby breeders will agree that one of the most difficult features to "fix" or "set" is clarity — clearness of all leg bars, belly mottling and necklaces. It has been proved that it can be done by selective breeding, usually by using a clear stud. Once you have that precious clear kitten, you may find that he is paler in color than you would like. Now, the next step is to look for a mate for this kit that excels in color, even if it means choosing one that does have some faint leg bars or a partial necklace. In every litter from a combination like this, you could get at least one kitten with clarity plus color. Use **ONLY** this type of kitten for showing and breeding and do not be tempted to use the heavily marked or dark kits in the litter (and chances are there will be some) — sell them for pets and be sure they are neutered or spayed. Experiment with some in-breeding and try mother-son, father-daughter, brother-sister breedings, but again

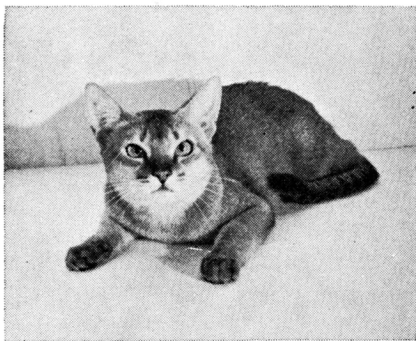
be very selective in the kittens that you keep. If kittens from the in-bred litters show any signs of excessive nervousness or are hard to handle, discontinue the practice immediately, as these are not desirable qualities in any breed. Always remember that we are trying to breed **BETTER** Abyssinians, not **MORE** Abyssinians, so be very selective in your future breeding stock.

Needless to say, type is all-important and great care should be taken to keep closely to the Standard. In-breeding can rapidly produce kittens with heads and bodies that are too long, or can swing to the other extreme and produce short, round heads and cobby bodies. We want to keep our cats in the "happy in-between".

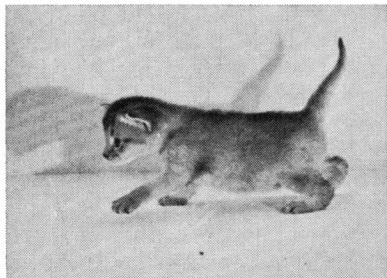
Most breeders seem to be able to control the white areas and fewer cats are seen today with white extending below the upper throat. (This is the only area where white is allowed in the Standard.) Any cats that throw white lockets or white spotting elsewhere, should be altered and enjoyed as a pet. This is a recessive factor and a very serious fault.

COAT

An Abyssinian cat is either born with a good resilient coat, or he will never have it! Some breeders resort to bathing their cats just prior to a show in order to discourage the coat from lying flat. This should not be necessary, nor is it desirable as too much bathing will dry up the natural oils in the coat. However, many an Abyssinian IS born with a good coat that is ruined by incorrect grooming. No harsh grooming should normally be necessary as the use of a hard brush will break the ends of the hair and give the cat the appearance of having "muddled ticking". The use of a fine-toothed comb is ideal to **GENTLY** remove any dead hair. If the use of a brush for regular grooming is preferred, be sure it is very soft, like a baby-brush, then finish off with a brisk rub-down with your bare hands. After the show season is over and the cats are shedding out their winter coats, I use a soft rubber grooming brush that really removes the old hair. However, it does tend to break the tips of some of the hair, that is why I say "after the show season is over". If your Aby has a good resilient coat, do look after it and show him at his best. If he is not so blessed, make up for it with extra attention to his diet, so that he will look his best regardless.



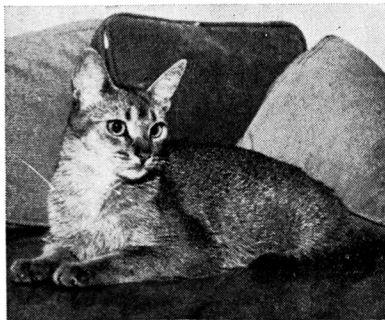
G. C. Chota-Li R.S.T.



Aby Kitten 3 Weeks Old

CONDITION

More than any other breed, this cat loves his freedom. He will visibly wilt if shut in a small cage and denied human companionship. If it is necessary to confine your Aby, do give him a large, roomy cage — preferably the 'walk-in' type — and let him out daily to run and exercise. Without room to stretch, run and jump, an Aby will not develop the firm condition needed for a show cat. He needs to be a happy, contented cat to have that bright-eyed, tip-toe appearance that is so much a part of this breed. If possible, give him access to outdoors and a chance to enjoy fresh grass. Try growing grass in flower-pots for your cats if they can't go out-doors; it will be greatly appreciated, especially by the older cats. I find that fresh raw meat once daily is a must, in addition to a variety of good canned foods, plus dry crunchy chow for the teeth. The babies are weaned on Pablum and milk, strained baby-meat plus egg-yolk. When old enough, they are fed a wide variety of canned foods, thus assuring they will not be fussy eaters when they go to new homes. Be sure there is always fresh drinking water available, but also offer a daily drink of milk — evaporated milk mixed with equal parts water.



G C Chota-Li Russet

I find that Abbies need extra Vitamin A to keep them in top show condition and I add this to their diet, in addition to a good Vitamin-Mineral supplement.

A FEW POINTERS!

Do not keep more cats than you can comfortably look after and enjoy. Strive for quality, not quantity.

Try to place your kittens with people who will continue to work towards bettering the breed and who will provide loving homes, for both the breeding cats and the pet-type kittens that will not be used in the breeding program.

Do work with a definite plan in mind and don't be tempted to breed to the closest male just for the sake of convenience, regardless of what he has to offer in blood-lines. Look for a male that excels in the features in which your queen is lacking — a male to compliment her.

When buying a kitten, it is better to get second or third pick of a litter from two excellent cats rather than first choice of a litter from poor quality parents. When you buy a kitten for breeding, you are not only paying for



Aby Kitten 3 weeks old

the kitten, but for the background, which is immensely important. If you are buying a show-type kitten, then you will want one that not only has a good appearance, but also has the type of blood-lines that will fit in with your planned program.

Try different studs and find out which blood-lines combine to produce the best kittens.

Be prepared to wait for a good kitten from an established, reliable breeder. Chances are that he will have a waiting list, but you will still be further ahead by doing so — he has already done much of the planning for you!

So — welcome to the group of cat-lovers who are owned by an Abyssinian! Ahead of you will be triumph and disappointment; success and failure, joy and heartbreak, but nothing is more satisfying than watching a beautiful Abyssinian queen with her adorable pansy-faced babies. Remember, a well-balanced diet plus plenty of exercise plus good coat care will enable your Aby to look his best when presented in the show-ring. Your reward will be your pride in his appearance.

So meet the challenge — and go after that Perfect Cat!

Sincerely,

Edna Field



A Basket Full of Mischief