

TWENTY-FIVE WORDS OR LESS

Marj Estes



Remember the days of the jingle contests? The contests wherein one completed a statement in twenty-five words or less? The cleverest and shortest statement was the winner?

In reading the present day standards of perfection for our cats, I get the feeling that the same criteria were practiced in the creation of these standards.

I am like a lot of other people who, if they will but admit it, have paid little attention to the standards in the past years. I read them, and I knew

what kind of cats I liked, and just where I was headed in my breeding program.

And then CFA commissioned me to illustrate the standards.

Now this was a horse of a different color! In the efforts to accurately reproduce each feature of all the breeds, I became increasingly aware of how inadequately the standards describe the animals. It is remarkable that the judges are able to evaluate the cats with any degree of competence. Consider the plight of the novice breeder who is endeavoring to measure his cats accordingly. His only real example is the current winning exhibit in the flesh, which in itself, cannot incorporate all the required features.

These standards have served us well for many years. A rapidly expanding CFA includes many enthusiastic new breeders and aspiring judges who should be offered a more explicit idea of what the Association is striving to accomplish with the breeds of cats. The illustrations should be a great help in this direction but more is needed.

I am not advocating changing the standards. I am advocating rewriting all of the standards using the really meaty, descriptive passages. The Breed committees, now in an embryonic stage, have a challenge and a great opportunity before them.

There is a definite need for a glossary of terms with illustrations regarding the parts of the cats. Any informative text book on horses contains a line drawing of the horse with each part of the horse labeled. How many cat people glance sideways when you ask them where the tail-head is? Withers? Flanks? Back-skull? It makes little difference just what each part is labeled, as long as the entire cat fancy uses the same name for the same part of the cat; there would not be room for the interpretation and misconception seen today if such a glossary were in use.



MARK



Let me illustrate this point. The description in most standards is a farce. No standard describes the chin further than attempting to determine the frontal plane from a profile view, with the exception of the Russian Blue standard that states "Under chin is level." 'Level' suggests a line parallel to the line of the horizon; therefore the levelness' of the Russian Blue chin would be wholly dependent upon the attitude of the cat's head. The Siamese, Balinese, and Colorpoint standard states that the "Tip of chin lines up with tip of nose in the same vertical plane. 'Vertical' suggests a line at a right angle to the plane of the horizon; thus the status of the chin will depend upon the position of the head in relation to the line of the horizon. Words such as 'level' and 'vertical' are inappropriate in these cases since they connotate conditions unrelated to the animal itself. The American Shorthair and Birman standards describe the chin as "forming a perpendicular line with the upper lip." This simply says that the chin will form a right angle with the upper lip, but does not limit the actual placement of the angle. The chin could protrude or recede, and still have the correct angle.



The Persian, Himalayan, and Exotic SH standards define chin as "Full and well developed," while the Korat standard is content with one word, "Strong". What is strong? What is full? How developed is well developed? There is too much leeway left for interpretation in these loosely defined descriptions. The Doberman Pinscher standard describes the chin as follows: "Teeth . . . strongly developed and white . . . Lower incisors upright and touching the inside of upper incisors

... a true scissors bite." Scissors bite is the key here. It further states, "Disqualifying faults . . . overshot more than 3/16 of an inch, undershot more than 1/8 of an inch." There is no question of interpretation concerning the bite and resulting look of the dog's chin. It states definitely what will constitute a disqualification. Obviously any degree of imperfection in the jaw and bite will be penalized. The Cocker Spaniel standard uses the reference to perpendicular in the description of the mouth as follows: "Teeth should be sound and regular and set at right angles to their respective jaws." How many Persians are seen with teeth protruding from the side of the jaw at an impossible angle? How many Persians are seen with the canine teeth offset from the normal fit so that the jaw is actually crooked?

The Rex standard is the most descriptive: "Strong, well developed" . . . what is strong? How well developed? . . . Later, it goes on to state: "In' profile a straight line from end of nose to chin with considerable depth and squarish aspect." This still makes no provision for the teeth and their relationship to each other and to the

jaws. The teeth and jaws are what make up the chin, so why not describe them, thus delineating the perfect chin? Incidentally, just for fun, look up Webster's definition of chin. Surprise!



VERTICAL

I do not advocate that judges physically measure the degree of faultiness in a cat's bite. With a proper description of the mouth the cat will fit the standard or he will not. I **do** advocate that judges look at the mouth and teeth. It is a simple matter to lift the upper lip to look at the way the teeth fit. Any cat destined for the show ring can, and should be conditioned to allow his mouth to be examined.

The Burmese, Havana Brown, Abyssinian, and Manx standards make no provision for chins. Therefore, when these breeds, who possess improperly formed teeth and jaws, are

presented in the judging ring, they are not faulted. Literally speaking, they would not be faulted at all if they HAD no chins! It does not make sense to ignore the chin simply because the standards authors apparently do not know the words with which to describe the chin, nor does it make sense to ignore chins because "they have not become a problem as yet." Would it not be simpler to decide if the cat should have a level bite, or a scissors bite, or whatever seems to be right for that breed and then describe in detail just what makes up this proper bite and be done with it? The possession and use of a glossary would be invaluable to define the terms used in such a description.

The use of the glossary coupled with measurements will also lead to a more competent standard. The Rex standard makes a tentative step in that direction by describing the head: "Length about one-third greater than the width." The Basset Hound describes the head, in part as follows: "The length from nose to stop is approximately the length from stop to occiput." Where is the stop? The occiput? Either of these animals may vary in size from their 'class-mates', but both still fit the head standard as written if their respective measurements as stated above are correct.

The Havana Brown standard contains approximately 160 words. The paragraph describing the Collie eye contains approximately 160 words. There is a message here. Either the Havana people are at a loss for words, or the Collie people are too wordy, or the Collie people have carefully considered the words used to describe the eye, and have written accordingly. Surely the Havana Brown as an entire animal is worthy of a few more descriptive passages than the eye of the Collie!

Consider the word "medium". Webster defines medium as: "that which lies in the middle; hence a middle condition or degree; mean." The entire Collie standard of 3 1/4 pages contains the word 'medium' once with a qualifying phrase. The Havana standard uses 'medium' three times. And it stands alone. In order to define what is in the middle, we must first define the large and small. Cars come in sizes, small, medium, and large, as does soap powder. Neither cars nor soap boxes give us a definitive property to relate to cats.

Dogs, horses, cattle, and sheep can vary quite a bit in size from one breed to another. Cats on the whole will vary only slightly. Therefore, a measurement in height taken at the withers (or shoulders) has a limited value. Obtaining measurements in cats is difficult, since the animal is so flexible and mobile. The only feasible use of height taken in inches would be to set a maximum size for the breed involved. The method of arriving at that measurement must also be given in detail because of the difficulty in accuracy. Three measurements of the same cat can result in three different heights at the withers!

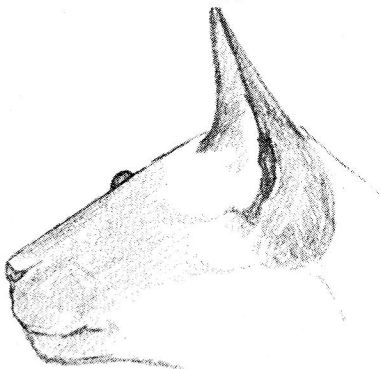
Weight is an entirely different story. Persians and Himalayans appear very large but some, when they are lifted are quite small. Rex give the impression of little fly-weights, yet when they are lifted are surprisingly hefty. Burmese are heavier than they appear. Therefore,

weight by pounds can be a valuable asset in giving a basis for size. For example: A Siamese of 'medium' size will weigh between six and seven pounds. Thus, a small or too small Siamese would weigh under five pounds and a large specimen over nine or ten. A range, then, of four pounds gives a lot of leeway regarding size, yet offers a basic size with which to evaluate the animal.

Any person who has handled cats as long as any of our judges have will be able to come very close in approximating weight. You can prove this to yourself. Go to the store and select six pounds of apples. Heft them in a sack. You will be surprised when you arrive at the scales to find that you are within a quarter pound of accuracy, if you apply yourself and if you have been cognizant of the weight of your cats.

The problems of underfeeding and overfeeding to meet the standard are already with us. We all recognize a fat cat and conversely, we know an emaciated animal. This is tantamount to cruelty to animals, and should be regarded as such. The standards ought to be more stringent on this.

I do not mean to imply that our standard must become wordy; or that the best standard will be the longest. In the application of our standards to create these illustrations I was, in many instances and particularly in the case of the newer breeds, left without guidelines. The Korat describes the chin and jaw with one word; "strong." Is the line of the chin deep? Does it recede or protrude? The Birman standard describes ears as follows: "medium in length." Description of the eyes: "almost round." The Havana Brown describes the eyes as "oval," without further information on placement, size or relation to the rest of the head.



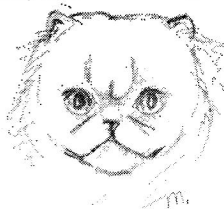
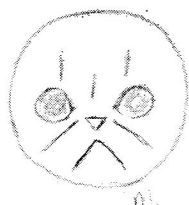
The ASH describes the nose: "medium in length, same width for entire length, with a gentle curve." The only impression I could gather from that statement is that the nose must be the same width in its entirety. "Medium in length" does not suggest **how** medium it should be. The phrase "with a gentle curve" set me to giggling, and indeed it is still funny. This "gentle curve" could go up, or down, or sideways! The Siamese profile is not so funny. "A long straight line is seen from the top of the head to the tip of the nose." First one must determine the top of the head. Is it at a point directly between the ears? If so, there are no Siamese with completely flat profiles. Here is a good example of the need for a glossary of terms.

A quite unique problem occurs in the Siamese, Balinese and Colorpoint standards which contain a phrase describing eye placement: "(eyes) placed well within the frontal planes of the face, never

at the side of the head." Visualize, if you will, a Siamese profile that is completely flat as stated. If the eyes, then, are on the front of the face, in profile view there will be no eyes visible. The eyes would be set somewhere on the frontal plane. This statement is so outrageous that I for one cannot live with it. I have questioned breeders about this matter and their reply is "Well, they don't mean exactly that." Now what is our standard doing giving a description that it does not mean? I asked another breeder and judge if he did not realize that it is impossible to reach this point. His reply was simply that he knew that it was impossible to breed a cat like that, but in trying to reach the standards specifications, the breeders would tend to breed away from the bulge in the forehead seen in so many Siamese.

This makes the Siamese standard a bunch of double-talk! With clear thinking and direction in words from a dictionary and glossary of terminology the Siamese breeders could state precisely what is desired in the head of the cat without resorting to over-emphasis on one part to reach the desired goal of another!

I encountered a rather interesting problem with realism concerning the standards of the Persians and Himalayans. These standards dictate that the cat will have a sweet expression. Very few, if any, Persians and Himalayans winning today have a sweet expression.



We have fused over this until it is pretty much of a sore subject. At one point several people sat around in a room at a cat show looking at slides of the top winning Persians, and never did we find a true sweet face. The best we could

come up with was "Well, that cat **approaches** the sweet expression . . ." This is easily illustrated. Draw a circle. Place two large eyes at about the center of the circle. Add two vertical lines above the eyes, slightly wider apart than the inside corners of the eyes. Place a shorter vertical line directly between the first two lines, bringing it down to a point between the center of the eyes. Draw a tiny triangle between and just below the eyes, flat part of top, point downward. Add an inverted wide 'V' directly below, nearly touching the point of the tiny triangle. Add two lines of about 45 degrees beginning at the top of the little triangle, running down to a point directly below the outside corner of the eye. Look at what you have drawn. It is a sad little face . . . and the basic lines of a good Persian head!

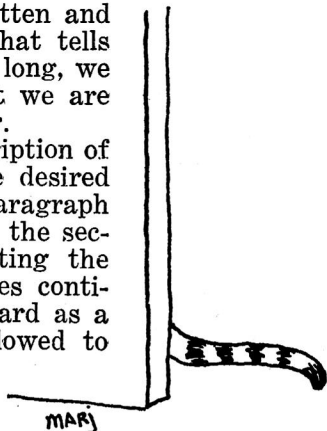
I think that I could write for days in this vein. Let me repeat that I do not want the standards to become wordy and cumbersome, nor should they remain in the category of the thumbnail sketch. These standards are what the entire show system is based upon. Here is not the place to be chary of words or paper! Let the breeders think descriptively about their cats and write down these thoughts. Be certain that before any changes are made that the new statements are precise! Let us come up with a definition of terms, so that all

people can learn and know what part of the cat is under discussion. Let us think, and think hard, on just how we want our cats to look, and then say the right thing in describing them.

Let us serve up a fine descriptive paper to our judges, so that they have something with which to work. Many breeders blame the judges for some of the extremes seen in our cats today. And since the desire (need) to win is present in all of us, we breed cats that the judges like, therefore perpetrating these extremes.

If a judge and a breeder have a written and illustrated paper for reference, a paper that tells just how long is long, and how long is too long, we will find that soon these extremities that we are beginning to find undesirable will disappear.

I make one final suggestion. In a description of one part, the ears for example, state the desired characteristics first, and in the same paragraph state the undesired characteristics, so that the section on ears gives the entire story. Listing the faults at the bottom of the standards loses continuity and lessens the impact of the standard as a whole. The show standards should be allowed to grow with the rest of the organization.



Biographical Notes on the Author

I was brought up on a farm in Eastern Nebraska; attended the University of Nebraska as an Art Major. Animals, art and music have always been my main interests, in that order. I have shown dogs, entered music, art, and even antique contests, and for the past 12 years have enjoyed the Cat Fancy.

My husband, Jim, and I began our married life and his career as an Air Force officer simultaneously. It was during our assignment in London, England, that we began our sojourn as cat breeders. You'll notice that the 'I' has become 'we', for Jim has shared my interests in the animals.

We have seen many changes in our tour of duty as Cat Fanciers. We have exhibited in many of the states, have served on show committees and have been active in new and established clubs. I have served as an apprentice judge in another association. At present we are members of Dal-Worth Cat SH Fanciers, Fort Worth Cat Fanciers, are charter members of Lone Star Cat Club (Jim serving his second term as President), Trinity Vally Longhair Cat Fanciers, and Tejas Siamese Cat Fanciers (I am serving as President) . . . and I am a member of Houston Cat Club. In all of our association with animals and the attending competition, I have learned two things. One is to take it slowly, building a solid foundation as you go, the other is to never take yourself too seriously. Keep a sound sense of humor and remember that when on top, the only direction left is down!

While in London I studied oil painting, and since that time have worked in other media including enamel on copper. I notice that while most dog and horse art is for the most part representative of the subject, cat artists seem to lose the 'cat look'. I began to study bone structure, musculature and techniques, and am beginning to master the difficult art of reproducing a believable cat. In 1967 I began a series of drawings to be used in the CFA Standards, and completed them for this year's Annual meeting. The drawings, rendered in pencil, have been accepted, but are not yet in print. I am now doing sketches and portraits of small animals, and am enjoying the work involved.

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