

The MANX CAT

BY

D. W. KERRUISH, M.R.C.V.S.



Photo: Manx Press Pictures

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PREFACE

The decision to write this booklet was made many months ago. Fortunately, during the months of delay a number of new and interesting facts with respect to this unique animal have emerged which would have necessitated the re-writing of the booklet.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to establish the origin of the Manx cat, to dispel some of the illusions which have surrounded these animals, and to provide some advice to those who wish to purchase and to breed them.

July 1964

D. W. KERRUISH



Photo: Island Photographic Co.

MANNINAGH KATEDHU

Presented by the Isle of Man Government to the Home Office in May, 1964, and renamed "Peta." She is a permanent member of the staff and receives a weekly wage of 5/- as "official mouser."

Chapter One

WHAT SHOULD A MANX CAT LOOK LIKE ?

The standard accepted by the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy and by the American Cat Breeders gives a very fair description of the breed.

The points to be awarded for the various parts of the standard indicate the importance of these:—

Taillessness	15 points
Height of hind quarters	15 points
Shortness of back	15 points
Roundness of rump	10 points
Depth of flank	10 points
Double coat	10 points
Head and ears	10 points
Colour and marking	5 points
Eyes	5 points
Condition	5 points
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Total ...	100 points
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THE STANDARD

1 — SHAPE

Apart from taillessness, the Manx should have a distinct hollow at the end of the spine where the tail normally would begin. It should have a shortish, deep body, with long hind legs. The rump should be rounded.

2 — THE COAT

The coat should be double, with a distinct undercoat plus a harder top coat.

3— COLOUR

In Great Britain, colour is unimportant and only 5 points are awarded in the standard, but in the States solid colours are preferred.

4— EYE COLOUR

In Great Britain, eye colour is not considered important. The majority of native Manx have either yellow or greenish eye colour. Many people consider that orange eyes are a desirable feature, but I think it should be pointed out that it is not usual in the native cats, and when it is present it is, in my opinion, probably the result of an infusion of "foreign" blood.

5— GAIT

The hopping gait of the Manx is mentioned as a desirable feature. A stiff, stilted walk is quite a typical feature, but, as I hope to show in a later chapter, the hopping gait is an indication of spinal deformity.

Many "hoppers" are perfectly healthy, but others may have undesirable defects.

The fact that breeders have advocated the hopping gait in Manx cats on the show bench may be linked with the superstition that the Manx cat is the result of a cross between the rabbit and the cat.

I would not advise the purchase of a "hopper" for breeding purposes. If the confirmation is good, the "hopper" may do well on the showbench, and there is no doubt that the quaint gait may be an added attraction to many. However, one should be careful to avoid "hoppers" which are unable to control bowel movements or which show signs of lack of urine control.

6— LENGTH OF LEG

It has been stated that the increased length of leg of the Manx cat is an optical illusion, due to the fact that the tail is missing. After examining many Manx cats over the years, I am convinced that in the majority of specimens this is not the case. In many animals the hind legs are longer than in the normal tailed cat. The part of the leg which is lengthened is variable. Sometimes

the increase in length is confined to the thigh and involves both the femur and tibia, while in others the extra length appears to involve the whole of the hind limb.



The cat illustrated shows a lengthened thigh, but with extremely short hocks. Occasional kittens show exaggerations of the hind limb to such an extent that the hind legs resemble those of a kangaroo.

7 — HEAD

Judges like the head of the Manx to be larger than other British short-haired cats. The head should be round, with no tendency to snipyness. Ears should not be large, should be slightly wide at the base and tapering to a point.

Chapter Two

ORIGIN OF THE MANX

Probably the most attractive story of the origin of the Manx is that of the two Manx cats which, at the time Noah built the Ark, *had* tails. Noah sent for all the animals to come into the Ark, two by two, but the Manx cats said, "*Oh, traie di lhooa*" ("Time enough") and continued to play outside. Finally, when they did decide to enter the Ark, Noah was just slamming the door, which chopped off their tails.

Much of the fable which has surrounded the Manx cat has been with respect to its origins. No more founded on fact is Joseph Train's (F.S.A.) statement that the Manx is a cross between a cat and a rabbit. He bases many of his statements on his own observations of his one cat. Because his own female Manx cat failed to produce kittens, he states that all Manx females are sterile.

Many people have, in the past, speculated on the origin of the Manx cat. Because it is so very different in conformation to other British breeds they have felt it must have originated from outside Great Britain.

Firstly, let me state what is my own considered opinion as to the origin of the breed, and this opinion is that of most people who have studied the question during the past few years.

I feel sure that the Manx is a mutation of the common short-haired British cat which appeared between 200 to 300 years ago in the Isle of Man. The reason for dating its appearance as recently as 200 years ago is that it must have appeared after the time when the Manx language was no longer generally used throughout the Island.

The word "*stubbin*" is given in one Manx dictionary as being the Manx word used to describe the tailless cat, but Manx

scholars cannot accept this as anything but "anglicised Manx" and not part of the original language. Surely, if the "rumpy" had been as common in the Middle Ages as it is today we would have had a Manx word for it.

The earliest references to the Manx cat I can find refers to Manx cats owned by the famous painter, Turner. The book is *Turner's Golden Visions*, by C. Lewis Hyde. Under Chapter 17, when the painter was aged 35, date 1810, the following appears on page 83:

"It may have been about this period that Mrs. R. and Mrs. H. paid Turner a visit, an account of which was communicated to Thornbury by Mr. Rose, of Jersey: 'Two ladies, Mrs. R. and Mrs. H., once paid him a visit in Harley Street, an extremely rare (in fact, if not the only) occasion of such an occurrence, for it must be known that he was not fond of parties prying, as he fancied, into the secrets of his menage. On sending in their names, after having ascertained that he was at home, they were politely requested to walk in and were shown into a large sitting-room without a fire. This was in the depths of winter, and lying about in various places were several cats without tails. In a short time our talented friend made his appearance, asking the ladies if they felt cold. The youngest replied in the negative. Her companion, more curious, wished she had stated otherwise, as she hoped they might have been shown into his sanctum or study. After a little conversation he offered them wine and biscuits, which they partook of, for the novelty, such an event being almost unprecedented in his house. One of the ladies bestowing some notice upon the cats, he was induced to remark that he had seven, and that they came from the Isle of Man.'"

Let us get rid of the fable that Manx cats arrived with the Spanish Armada. Apart from the fact that there is no record of a ship of the Armada ever having been wrecked on the coasts of the Island, the Spanish have no record of tailless cats ever having existed in Spain. I discussed this point with the Professor of Zoology in Barcelona several years ago, and he had never heard of a tailless cat and looked up all his possible references on the subject.

No, if the Manx, which is a dominant character, had existed at the time of the Armada there would still be traces of them there.

Some Manx families have been alleged to be descended from survivors from the Spanish Armada, yet these names can be found in the Manorial Roll of the Isle of Man long before the Spanish Armada was even thought about.

The story of the Spanish origin of the Manx cat and the Manx families does not bear investigation.

What about the story of the importation of cats into the Island from the Far East? This suggestion appears, at first glance, to be more feasible.

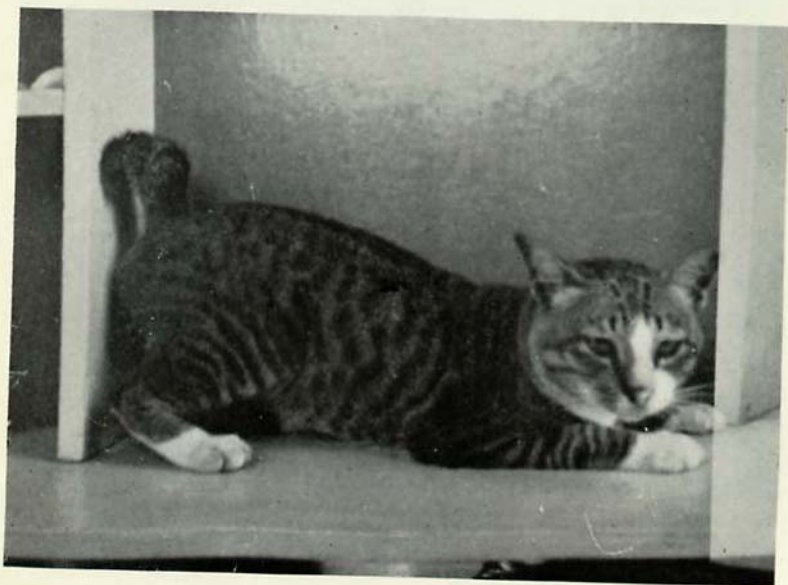
In Japan, Borneo and Malaya there is a stump-tailed cat. These animals have a very short tail, which is usually hooked or twisted. The animals with the shortest of such tails often appear Manx-like at first glance. Anatomically, however, the condition is quite different. As Dr. Neil Todd, of the Department of Genetics, Harvard University, has stated, they are of a different phenotype and genetically quite a separate strain of cat.

Dr. T. Tansanguan, of the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Bangkok, Thailand, confirms this view. In a recent personal communication, he states that the stumpy-tailed cat of Thailand is quite normal except for the deformity of the tail. "The cat of this type never suffers from what the Manx undergoes in movement nor in excretion. No matter how short the tail is, the last coccygeal bone is not in a straight line, but is always bent sideways."

It is evident that the deformity is confined entirely to the coccygeal vertebræ and never extends to the sacrum and spine, as commonly occurs in the Manx. The body appears longer and has less depth than the Manx.

There seems little doubt that the Manx cat is one of Nature's accidents, which established itself in the Isle of Man and nowhere else some 200 to 300 years ago. Whether there was originally a single mutant or a litter of kittens in which a number of mutations were born we can never prove, but the latter case is the most acceptable to me, and would account for the rapid establishment of the breed which has occurred in the Island.

Thailand cats.



Photographs by Dr. T. Tansanguan (Thailand)

MANXLAND MAISIE

Owned by the writer. Winner at the Royal Manx Agricultural Show. Dam and Grand-dam of American champions.



Photo: D. W. Kerruish.



MANXLAND JIMMY

Owned by the writer.

Chapter Three

DEFORMITY AND DISEASE

It is not generally realised that the Manx cat is in fact a deformed version of the normal long-tailed cat. In case this should seem distasteful, it should be remembered that many of the aristocracy of the canine world are "deformed." The bulldog, the Pekinese, the pug, all have deformed noses. The deformity of the Manx cat is at the opposite end of the animal,



U.S.A. Champion "Manninagh Mona" as a kitten
in the Douglas Corporation Cattery.

but while in the case of the short-nosed canines this is a man-made deformity, Manxness is one of Nature's accidents.

Just as the canines with "deformed" noses are more susceptible to respiratory disease, so the Manx cat, with its "deformed" rear-end, seems more liable to suffer from intestinal upsets.

The alteration in the skeleton of the Manx is not confined to a mere absence of tail. The pelvis is frequently shortened, and there may be some fusing together of the bones of the sacrum. In the more extreme cases the pelvis may be twisted and the spinal column may not be completely closed, leaving the spinal cord imperfectly protected.

The better the specimen the more likely it will be that pelvic deformity will be present. The more the pelvis is deformed the more likely it will be that undesirable characteristics may be present in the animal. The hopping gait mentioned previously is the result of the animal's inability to exercise complete control over movements of the hind legs. The more extreme cases may be completely paralysed, but the majority of these die during the first few days after they have been born.

Diarrhoea is fairly common amongst Manx kittens just after weaning, but this is not usually serious and most of these cases readily respond to treatment with antibiotics and the bowel active sulphonamides. Many Manx farmers think that cows' milk does not suit Manx cats, and that if they are weaned on to a non-milk diet then diarrhoea does not occur. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this belief, as I have always weaned my kittens on cows' milk without any undue trouble.

Unfortunately, amongst some of the more extreme Manx there can be a much more serious condition. This condition is a result of extreme pelvic deformity and results in the inability of the animal to control either bowel movements or the passing of urine. Such kittens are impossible to "house-train" and it is inadvisable to allow them in the house where they are liable to soil the furniture. Some kittens grow out of this condition, steadily improving as they grow older, but unfortunately, a number never recover and have to be "put down."

Apart from the susceptibility to bowel complaints, the Manx kitten is fairly hardy once he has reached the age of nine or ten

Fig. 1



Photograph: D. W. Kerruish, M.R.C.V.S.

Fig. 1 shows an extreme form of "Manxness." The kitten was unable to exercise control over his left hind leg and could neither walk nor trot. He could move quite rapidly by hopping.

weeks. The danger period is in the first ten days after birth, when the Manx do not seem to be as robust as their tailed litter mates.

If one is seriously breeding Manx, it is probably better to destroy tailed kittens at birth, so as to reduce the competition in the nest. If kittens still die after tougher competitors have been removed, it is probably due to the fact that they were some of the more extremely deformed type.

"Manxness" is a partially lethal character — in extreme cases it kills; in the less extreme forms there may be interference with the normal functioning of the body. In the least extreme type, the cat is normal in every way except for the inability to wave its tail.

Fig. 2

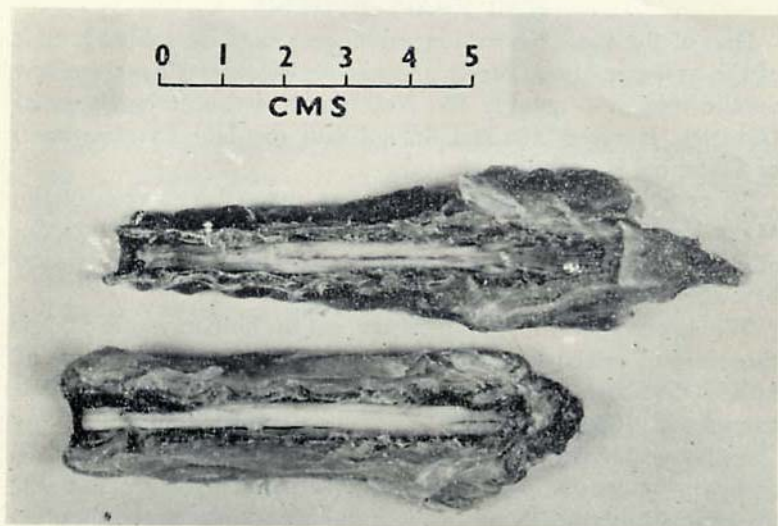


Fig. 2 shows the dissected spinal columns of two kittens. Bottom one is from the hopping kitten in Fig. 1. The spinal cord is stretched and ends much lower down the spinal column, and the nerve roots pass directly sideways. Top one is from a stumpy kitten and shows a normal spinal cord with normal nerve roots.

Photograph by courtesy of Michael James, Ph.D., F.R.C.S. (W. J. Sanderson Orthopaedic Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne) and L. P. Lassman, M.B., B.S.(Lond.), F.R.C.S. (Department of Neurological Surgery, Newcastle General Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne)

Chapter Four

GENETICS

One of the most interesting problems yet to be solved is that of the genetics of the Manx. A number of experts have worked on the subject — notably Dr. Neil Todd of the Department of Genetics, Harvard Medical School and the late Dr. Herdman of Liverpool University.

To explain what is known at present about the genetics of the Manx I should explain that the term homozygous means genetically pure bred while heterozygous means of genetically mixed breeding.

We know that the *living* Manx cat is heterozygous and is therefore of mixed breeding and must carry in its make up the tailed character. Manxness is partially dominant so that it tends to make its appearance even when one parent is tailed.

So far no Manx has ever been found which could be described as homozygous. Dr. Neil Todd considers that such an animal is an impossibility, or as he put it in a recent private communication to me "the homozygous Manx cat would be a tailless cat without any cat."

Dr. Herdman and Mrs. Bisbee of Liverpool University thought that the homozygous Manx was so deformed as to be incapable of living. Whichever view is correct the fact remains that the genetically pure Manx is non-existent.

Opinion differs as to whether tailed cats can carry the Manx character in a recessive form which can result in tailless kittens appearing in a litter from tailed parents. Dr. Todd states that tailed cats are homozygous for tails and that two tailed parents cannot produce a Manx kitten. Dr. Herdman has stated that tailed parents *can* produce Manx offspring.

This diversity of opinion over the genetical make up of the Manx shows how much there is to be done to clarify the genetical detail of the Manx cat.

Chapter Five

BREEDING MANX CATS

If you have decided to breed a few Manx kittens what are the pitfalls?

There is a certain fascination in trying to produce and reproduce an animal which is in itself unique. The more difficult and complicated the problem then the more fascinating it can become.

In breeding Manx kittens it may be that less than one in ten kittens produced will be good enough to exhibit and to win prizes and that is where the interest lies.

Breeding Manx is rather like putting one's hand in the brantub — one never knows with certainty quite what to expect.

If your facilities are limited then restrict your purchases to one or two females. If you can purchase from known registered Manx stock so much the better, if not, selected kittens as far as possible out of tailless parents. This may save you the disappointment of producing litters of Manx in which the majority of litters consist almost entirely of tailed kittens.

If you are using a Manx stud try to find out if he is producing plenty of Manx kittens in his litters. This is important if you are not to be disappointed. If you have the facilities for keeping a stud Manx, make sure that his parents are tailless.

In spite of all your care be sure your success in breeding Manx will not be anything like 100 per cent. You will get tailed kittens, stumpy kittens, kittens with one or two coccygeal vertebrae and, let us hope, some perfect short-backed tailless Manx.

Unfortunately, it is amongst that last group you may find the kittens with the excessive deformities. The tailed kittens can be destroyed but the stumpies and rumpies can be reared and by

nine weeks it should be possible to decide whether you have produced any outstanding Manx. Your stumpy female may, in time, if mated to good Manx sires produce some quality Manx kittens.

It is probable that if you continue to breed Manx to Manx for a number of generations the number of severely deformed kittens may become excessive. The use of stumpy cats from time to time will reduce the risk of this occurring too frequently.

The rearing and feeding of Manx cats does not differ radically from that of other cats with the exception of the condition previously mentioned whereby Manx cats seem more liable to bowel upsets than the average cat.

I do not recommend that Manx kittens should be weaned prior to nine weeks of age.

Chapter Six

MANX CAT POPULATION

Some four years ago Tynwald (the Manx Parliament) expressed concern about the possibility of the Manx cat becoming extinct in the Island.

It was decided to establish a Government Cattery under the auspices of the Isle of Man Board of Agriculture and Fisheries at Knockaloe Farm so as to preserve at least a nucleus of breeding stock. The cattery was established by selecting suitable males and females from those offered to the Board by the Manx public. Since that period it has been maintained with a steady population of approximately twenty adult females and three adult males.

The Cattery has attracted world-wide publicity. Enquiries for kittens have been received from all over the world.

Unfortunately, Knockaloe Farm was not readily accessible to the public. In spite of this some 600 tourists visited the cats in one fortnight in August, 1963.

In 1964 the Douglas Corporation offered to take over the Cattery from the Isle of Man Board of Agriculture and Fisheries and to maintain it as a permanent attraction at Noble's Park. For this purpose the Corporation has provided, at a cost of approximately £4,000, a most attractive building capable of housing some thirty cats. The building is heated and each cat has comfortable sleeping quarters and a bench with individual heating beneath.

The new Cattery has been a great attraction for tourists and although the building was not completed until July, 1964 several thousand adults and children have already visited the Cattery where the cats and the playful kittens can be seen to advantage.

The improved facilities have already resulted in an increase in the number of kittens born and reared in the cattery. Most of the 1964 crop of kittens have been sold. The first two of these to reach America from the Corporation Cattery have already acquitted themselves well in their first show, receiving between them sixteen awards.

The increased accessibility of the Cattery will no doubt draw many more visitors, some of whom will doubtless wish to take away with them some of the attractive kittens bred there. These will undoubtedly prove to be quaint, attractive, intelligent pets and reminders of happy summer holidays.

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