

ACBA: Breeds and Varieties

EVALUATING THE TEDDY

By Cindy Sanford

As promised, here is the completed article conveying the survey results. Those who contributed and deserve some mention and thanks are the following, Val Horning, Laurie Gill, Shanna Mallory, Penny Christopher, Julie Gailey, Peg Smith, Pat Haefle, Margaret Wells, Amy Dudenbostel, Rachel Fair, Teri Leach, Mark Osgerby, Sheralee Kelly, Megan Rygel, Linda Kelley, Chuck Steel. -- *Cindy Sanford*

I can still remember the first Teddy I ever set eyes on. It was at a pet store, and therefore probably not one of the finer examples of the breed, but still it got my attention. It was at that moment I decided I simply HAD to have one. That desire was only intensified when I visited my first show and saw for myself the finest representatives of this wonderful breed.

A good teddy is the epitome of cute; plush and cushiony like a stuffed teddy bear, hence the name. But as I soon learned, teddies go through several stages before they achieve that dense, springy coat and some never do. In this article I will attempt to describe how a Teddy coat evolves and how to best evaluate the quality of its coat throughout its lifespan.

Perhaps this would be a good point to say that I am no expert. I have only been raising Teddies for about 6 months. But what I lack in experience, I have attempted to make up for with enthusiasm and tenacity. This article is the result of a survey I sent out to all the better known Teddy breeders I could locate, both on line and via mail. There would be no article if I had to rely on my knowledge. But anyone with an ounce of persistence can assemble data, and fortunately, many good Teddy breeders were willing to help out. What follows is my attempt to organize years of THEIR experience and knowledge.

When evaluating a Teddy, most breeders feel you can begin to determine quality of coat at birth or soon after. Look for curly whiskers and bellies, and frizz between the ears and around the shoulders.

According to Teri Leach of Phoenix, Arizona, curly bellies are an absolute must. "Flat hair on the belly never gets better," she states, "and most of these animals wind up with flat coats." Tight C shaped curls over the belly are an indicator of good belly curl.

Along with curl, the Teddy should also have a definitive wave over the remainder of the coat. Val Horning of Auburn, NY, explains, "you should be able to feel as well as see distinct ripples in the coat. Just as important as this evaluation of kink, is coat length. Longer coats lend an unfinished appearance and most breeders felt that they did not develop the density or resiliency needed as an adult. Ideally, coats should be no longer than 3/4 of an inch in length and as even as possible throughout the coat. Therefore, Broken Teddies whose patches vary in length would be faulted.

Finally, one of the most important determinants of coat quality is density. Most breeders felt good density was also the most elusive attribute to consistently achieve. Fortunately, it can be fairly accurately assessed, even at a young age. Val Horning explains, "As far as determining density, it's a bit tough on new babies since they don't have much hair to begin with. But basically, you want a coat where you can see as little skin as possible when you part the coat." Undoubtedly, this is a judgement that will take some practice. But keeping records of your early assessments will soon enable you to predict such outcomes with some measure of accuracy, once you see how your babies turn out.

The next stage a Teddy coat encounters is the "fluffy stage", where coats begin to resemble a puffy, dried out perm. Most of the breeders who responded felt that Teddies should reach this milestone by 3-4 weeks, preferably two. There were some notable differences on this issue however, with some breeders responding that this "puff out" period did not occur in their lines until 4-5 weeks, and that oftentimes, the better animals were those that matured more slowly and steadily.

Whatever the timing, the coat typically fluffs out away from the body during this stage, albeit with some wave still evident along the hair shaft. At this point you will probably notice a corresponding increase in density, and on a good coat, parting the hair will not leave a noticeable gap. Additionally, density will probably be best along the crown and back but should be fairly plentiful along the rump and sides as well.

The next coat stage encountered is what many breeders fondly refer to as the "uglies." During this period, which corresponds roughly with the intermediate age and weights, your teddy may very well send you to the brink of despair, especially if you are not yet familiar with how your particular line develops. The kink you so pinned your hopes on fades, the coat may flatten, and your cute little furball may suddenly appear quite scruffy.

As Margaret Wells of Washington states, "an intermediate coat will go flat, look scruffy and generally have you wondering why on earth you kept that pig. Don't despair," she explains. "If they had kink as babies, it'll come back as a senior."

Across the country, this ugly stage appears to vary in making its appearance. The earliest breeders reported seeing these ugly ducklings was four to five weeks, the latest, twelve. Many stressed that there were even individual differences within a line. According to most of them however, you'll definitely know it when you see it.

As far as the seniors, most breeders felt that you could begin to see the development of adult texture and density somewhere around the age of 5-6 months. Naturally, there were some lines where this occurred sooner, some later, but the 5 to 6 month span was most often reported for this development.

Though the Teddy's coat is worth the most points on the table, other factors enter in when evaluating a good teddy. Breeders were generally a bit divided on the size issue but most agreed that it does bear some consideration, since Teddies do tend to run a bit smaller than Americans. In addition, one experienced breeder reported the finding that the smaller animals in her herd tended to be less hardy, and if they were sows, more prone to toxemia during pregnancy. For that reason, and to be certain your Teddies consistently make senior weight, setting size parameters was an evaluation many breeders did choose to make. In general, a weight achievement of 2 pounds by 3-4 months was considered optimal for boars. For sows, anything around 28 ounces at the same age was considered satisfactory. Obviously, weight parameters should be more stringently followed if size is a concern in your own particular line, and again, it is just one of the many evaluations one makes when determining which animals to hang on to.

The remainder of the survey attempted to explore tendencies within the breed throughout the country, with respect to variety, color, type, etc. An

interesting point brought out often enough to draw some tentative conclusions was the frequent mention that white colored patches in Brokens tend to be less dense and a bit longer in length than other colors. Obviously, this may indicate a common fault and therefore a quality to be worked on. Most breeders felt that Brokens were the most developed variety at the present time, with

Agoutis a close second. Roans were also felt to be in the running for this honor.

Most challenging varieties were felt to be the TSW's, Sels and other less worked on colors. Many also reported an association of golf ball type heads and pea eye. This was not reported by everyone, but the majority did feel there was a greater tendency for its development in these animals. In addition, several made mention of the fact that Teddies with these rounder profiles also appeared more likely to develop coat faults and malocclusion.

Most common faults of the Teddy breed included unevenness and breaks in coat, saddle dips and flat sides. Density was reported to be the most difficult coat quality to achieve, and therefore an important consideration when purchasing stock.

Margaret Wells of Washington advised, "Buy animals with good coats. Heads are easy to breed for and type is easier than coat to achieve." Color and patching were also felt to be less challenging than the Teddy's all important coat. Be that as it may, clarity of patching should receive your attention. As one breeder stated, "I'd much rather have a pig with just a couple clean patches, than one that's patched nicely, but with a good deal of smut. It's hard to get rid of the smut later." Therefore, when dealing with Broken or TSW Teddies, it appears clarity of patching should receive more emphasis than distribution.

As far as the great harsh vs. plush coat debate, most breeders surveyed DID report that animals with harsh coats were favored on the show table, despite the contrary advice in the standard. As one breeder stated, "Yes, the standard says that there is to be no preference for harsh or plush, but I find harsh will beat

plush every time." Not all breeders reported this experience but the majority did, regardless of where in the country they resided.

Finally, the survey inquired about feed and supplements breeders felt their Teddies responded best to. Many agreed with Shanna Mallory of California, who stated, "Teddies seem to have a

tendency toward dry skin. For that reason, it is important to make sure they have some sort of oil in their diet to help out their coat. I find the use of unshelled sunflower seeds twice a week helps considerably in this regard."

The type of supplementation utilized varied from breeder to breeder, but the most common supplements reported were oats, wheat germ, sweet feed, calf manna and the aforementioned sunflower seeds.

Well, that's it. I sincerely hope there was enough "meat" in this article for you veterans, and enough

"milk" for the newbies like me. I greatly enjoyed hearing from all of you and appreciate the time it took for you to respond to this survey of over 20 questions. Most of you went into great depth with your answers and granted me the opportunity, not only to learn, but to pass on a little of your experiences as well. It is people like you who will help the cavy fancy to grow and flourish through your eagerness to help those who are just starting out.

In closing, I leave all those who were kind enough to contribute with "A Teddy Blessing", a poem I have written which you have inspired. I hope it reflects a small portion of what you have taught me.

A TEDDY BLESSING

By Cindy Sanford

May your babies have the frizzies.
May their patches be distinct.
May their whiskers look like corkscrews
And their coats forever kinked.

May your youngsters beat the "uglies."
May their coats grow dense as rugs.
May your herds remain completely pure
When others battle bugs.

May your seniors have the texture
Of a brillo in its prime.
And when they award the Best In Show,
May yours win everytime!

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