

THE ABYSSINIAN

SPECIAL SECTION

A C B A

Judging the Abyssinian Cavy

by Robert Spitzer



GENERAL ADVICE

The Abyssinian is the most difficult of the breeds to judge. This is because there is so much to look at, especially finer points of what separates very good, good, average, and fair to poor. In most breeds, the judge is basing his decision by feel and visual. The balance of the two is fairly even. However, the Abyssinian is primarily a visual breed. The eye must be trained in what to spot. Because there is so much to the breed, it takes time and training to gain that discerning judge's eye. This is also the one breed where there much more variation in judges' decision. An Aby may win breed in Show A and then fare very poorly in Show B. This confuses exhibitors to no end, and it is also frustrating to the two judges, who may be left thinking, "How could we be so far apart? Is there something I missed on an animal?"

Advice for anyone wanting to become a judge is to put their hands on as many Abys as possible. It greatly helps to raise the breed; however, it is not practical for anyone to raise all thirteen breeds. The solution is to seek out the top breeders and judges who have the best handle on the breed. Work with them one-on-one. Attend judge's conferences. Watch the judging of Abyssinians at shows. Ask many questions. Probably the most difficult aspect of

judging the Aby is deciding on and then explaining why one is placed over the other, especially in close-competition classes.

How the judge handles the Abyssinian makes a difference too. The emotions in Abyssinians are easily aroused. So the goal of the judge is to minimize them. If you handle the Aby wrong on the table, you mess up the ridges, pull out hair, or you might even get bit! Follow a few basics, and everything ought to go more smoothly.

Is judging the Abyssinian really this dangerous? As with any breed, it could be since Aby boars might fight if provoked. Judges often run two or three boars on the table at the same time to compare their rosettes and ridges. These boars smell each other as well as the scent of fifty other boars and sows. Boars are further stimulated by the judge's handling, who is trying to get them to move just right to see their strengths and weaknesses. What works best is to keep boars separated if they become agitated. Don't handle them roughly as this quickly makes them very aggressive, and keep fingers away from chattering teeth! Honestly, it is rare the judge will be bit if they take basic common sense precautions.

How has being a judge helped you become a better Abyssinian breeder and exhibitor?

As a judge, I am able to see Abyssinians from around the country. Seeing many top quality Abys gives me an idea of what areas I need to work on to improve my herd. Also seeing them helps me see that it is possible for the Abys to develop the qualities. One example is I have been having problems with a flat collar. Being able to see and analyze cavies from exhibitors, I was able to see it is possible to bring the collar up to it's correct structure. I have been working on this for a couple of year's and the work has started to pay off.

One other area that helped me change how I pick my replacements was when I judge at a show, the Abyssinians I would pick for the top awards would be the ones that had the best balance of rosette and ridge alignment. I used to focus mostly on the rosette quality and alignment in my herd since there were more points on rosettes. Since I started judging, I started looking for balance in the placement and ridges. This is especially important now that the standard will be changing so that rosettes and ridges will have equal points.

Dana Kolstad

HANDLING



After taking it out of the show pen, look at the Aby first, check for disqualifications, next straighten the ridges, and then walk it on the table to inspect.

To begin judging the Abyssinian, bring each out of the coop by putting my hand underneath and lifting up and next set the pig down on the table. This keeps all the ridges in pristine shape. Then take a first look at the Aby in its natural state before ruffling the coat checking for disqualifications. After checking for disqualifications, set the Aby back onto the table, straighten the ridges, and let it walk for a second or two. All ridges will then pop back into



Properly posed Abyssinian, Best of Breed at 2006 ARBA Convention

place and the judge will once again have a good look at its natural display of rosettes and ridges. Do not fix a fault, fix a fault, and then fix the fault again and again until it is no longer there. Yes, the fault really is there! Rather, straighten the ridges, walk the pig, and then check for faults.

Basically, handle the Aby as little as possible when walking it on the table. Tap it a little to get it to move in the right direction, but more aggressive and heavy handling will get it riled-up. Running several aggressive boars at a time will probably result in a fight. If one or two are becoming too uppity, set them back in the holding pen and work with one at a time.

NOTE: Italics is wording from 2006-2010 ARBA Standard of Perfection, Abyssinian standard, pages 229-230.

CLASSIFICATIONS

Abyssinians are shown in six groupings:

Self: *Beige, Black, Chocolate, Cream, Lilac, Red, Red-eyed-orange, and White*

Brindle

Roan

Any other Solid: *Dilute Solid, Golden Solid, and Silver Solid*

Agouti: *Dilute Agouti, Golden Agouti, and Silver Agouti*

Marked: *Broken Color, Tortoise Shell, Dalmatian, Dutch, Himalayan, and Tortoise Shell & White*

Brindle and Roans are the most common varieties in the Abyssinian breed followed by probably Blacks, reds, and then Tortoise Shell & White and broken. However, variety numbers range from region to region, and there is renewed interest in other colors, golden agouti for example.

TYPE – Points 10:

BODY

Abyssinians are to have medium body length, and plenty of depth to the shoulders and hindquarters. The limbs are to be well formed and closely set, without narrowness.

To judge the type, gently squeeze the shoulders, midsection, and then hips. Don't run the hands down the top and sides such as when judging the American. This flattens the ridges.

Sage Abyssinian Advice to All Judges

In my view, the most difficult breed to judge is the Abyssinian. Surely cases can be made to award other breeds the DIFFICULT TO JUDGE label, but the Aby has so many qualities (rosettes, ridges, collar, texture, shape, condition, etc.) to assess and ponder over before a judge can come up with a sensible decision.

Difficulties in evaluating this breed causes even experienced judges anguish from time to time. For those fanciers starting their judging career, this breed can be a nightmare, especially if the new judge has never had 'hands-on' experience raising the breed.

On the other side of the coin (or table in this case), nothing is more frustrating for serious breeders of Abyssinians than having a good specimen poorly evaluated, resulting in an animal exhibiting less quality being given a higher placing. Top quality Abys are few and far between – bloody rare indeed. To have your efforts go unrecognized is very disconcerting at best.

Hopefully, experienced breeders will help new judges learn about the breed. I have learned much (and still pick up tips) from 'masters' of the various cavy breeds... One thing that every judge should keep in mind is that there is always more to learn. Nobody can ever know everything about every breed.

And, probably the worst thing an exhibitor can do is heap stress on the judge by talking out of turn about the job they are doing. Though mistakes might be made, remember that he/she is trying their best. Politely, after the show, if a serious mistake in your view has been made, chat with the judge and discuss with an open mind both points of view. Don't forget that even you, an experienced exhibitor/breeder, could be the one who is wrong! Also, remember in some instances there might be no right or wrong answer, just an honest difference of opinion.

Most of the qualities a judge needs to do a good job on Abys are the same that are needed to do a good job on any breed.

A systematic consistent plan when looking at animals. Set a routine for examining the cavy and stick to it. Be thorough but remember you have time constraints to deal with; your exhibitors don't want to be at the show room until 8 P.M.

An ability to call the standard as written. Call the standard you are being paid to judge. Leave your personal likes and dislikes behind you. If you feel strongly enough that your views are better than those written in the standard, then contact the Standards Committee Chairperson.

A decisive but not a cocky attitude. One of the worst things a judge can do is to leave exhibitors with the impression that they know it all. Refer to the standard if you need to; there is no law against referring to your standard during judging. However, when you do make a decision and give your comments, try to come across like you believe in what you're saying. Don't sound like you are not sure of yourself or your own abilities. It is a fine line to walk indeed.

Diplomacy. Even when giving negative remarks, do so in a constructive, non offensive manner. Be truthful but do it in a nice, tactful way.

Ability to judge animals not exhibitors. It is a cardinal sin for a judge to fail to reward a good animal with its proper dues just because the judge doesn't see eye to eye with the owner. Similarly a good animal shouldn't be placed over an excellent animal just because the judge has a fondness for its owner.

The Aby needs a wide, solid body. A narrow, long body makes the rosettes look too elongated in shape. Short and cobby gives the wrong scrunched-up look to rosettes and ridges. The medium body length best displays the symmetrical shape of its saddle and hip rosettes.

HEAD

The head is to be wide, with fair length.

This is a little different wording than the American head where the standard states its head should be a Roman nose, which is a wide head too but with a blunt nose. This is an area where Abys have improved over the decades. Few now have the old very large and often triangular shape nose. Today's Abys are much closer to the ARBA's wording of a wide head with fair length. Fair length is medium, in other words not a short, round tennis ball head (not proper in Americans either, by the way), nor the big triangular honker routinely exhibited years ago.

EARS

The ears are to match the variety description, be shapely, and slightly drooping, but not fallen.

Abyssinian ears are basically the same as all other breeds. The problem here is many Abyssinians do have poorly shaped ears and often tiny ones. As a result, they also stick up in the air like little wings, instead of slightly drooping as requested. Junior Abys are notorious for having ears sticking up in the air, but this usually corrects by large intermediate age.

EYES

The eyes are to be large, full, bright, and match the variety description.

Abys need the same bright, bold eyes as all other breeds. There are no separate points for eyes, as in some breeds. In Aby, they count under the ten total points on type.

COAT – Points 65:

The coat is to be dense, and of sufficient length to form deep rosettes and ridges, but not to exceed 1 ½ inches in length.

The standard calls for a dense coat. Ironically, when the Aby has a 'very' dense



Head, Eyes, Ears, Mustache

Proper Head, Eye, and Ear. Fair head furnishings.

Better head furnishing, but poor ear carriage.

coat, the ridges do not look right. What happens is that extremely thick coat often makes for fluffy ridges instead of the crisp ones that look so sharp. However, lack of density hurts in a couple ways too. Ridges don't want to stand up correctly. It also results in a softer feel to the texture.

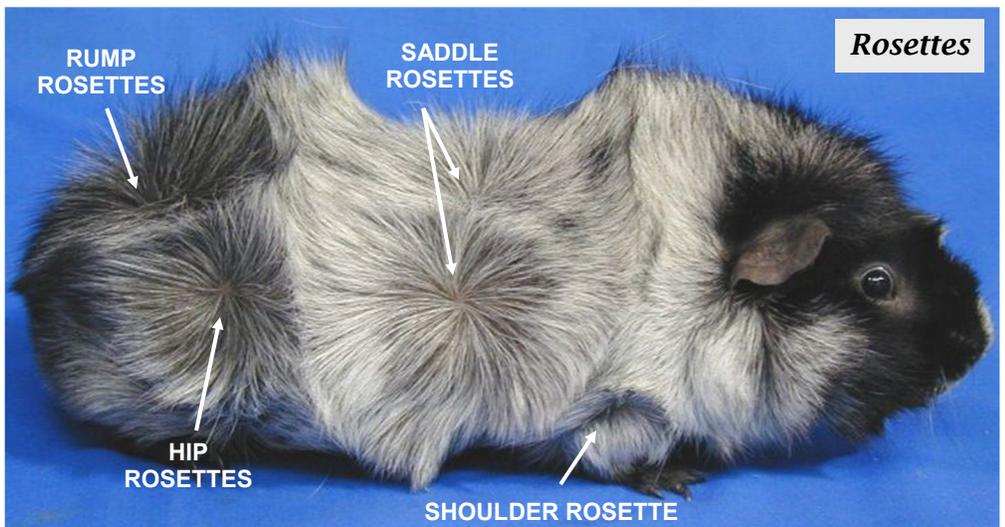
A better Aby has very good depth to the rosettes. When an Aby has a short coat, it does not have any depth and the rosettes appear flat. The longer the coat generally the better the depth, yet too long a coat is also a disqualification. Abys having close to the maximum allowable 1 ½ inches have the better depth. What about Abys with over 1 ½ and even two-inch coats and longer? Besides being a disqualification, the ridges just don't stand up correctly either. They tend to fall over and the animal looks a bit odd.

TEXTURE – Points 15

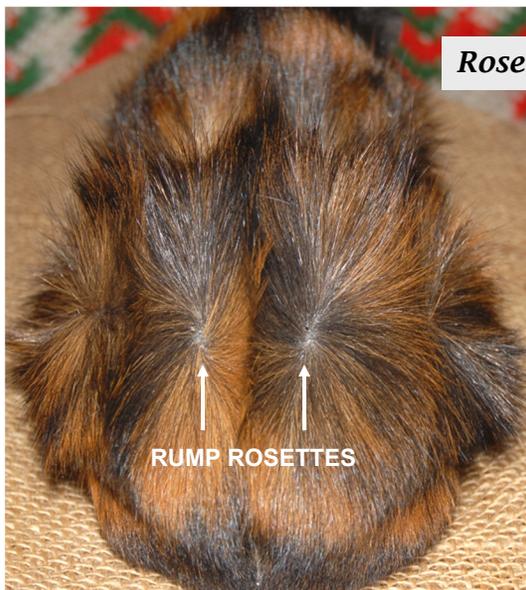
The coat is to be harsh in texture, having a firm feeling when ridges are patted with the palm of the hand. Allow for softer texture in juniors.

Abyssinians have gained quality in many areas over the years; however, the texture has declined. The harsher coat of the 1970's and early 1980's is mostly gone. There are still Abys which have good texture, but they are more difficult to find. Beware the dirty coat. Abys are generally not given baths. When the coat becomes oily and full of grit, this gives a false texture. So, as a judge, take cleanliness into consideration when checking texture.

To properly judge texture, just as the standard states, pat the ridges with the palm of the hand.



Properly posed Abyssinian, Best of Breed at 2002 ARBA Convention



Proper Rump Rosettes are pinpoint and evenly spaced apart. This picture also exhibits proper ridges.



Guttered, Misplaced Rump Rosettes



Proper Saddle Rosettes are pinpoint, evenly spaced, and all in a row. Distance from collar and rump ridge is also equidistant.

ROSETTES – Points 25

Each rosette should rise and radiate evenly from a pin point center. Rosettes should be placed as follows: one on each shoulder (2), four saddle, two hip, and two rump rosettes.

***Saddle rosettes** should be placed two on each side, in line with one another, and equidistant between the collar and the rump ridge.*

***Shoulder rosettes** should be placed just above each foreleg and below the collar.*

***Hip rosettes** should be placed on each hip, behind the rump ridge, and radiate evenly to create a round appearance.*

***Rump rosettes** should be placed high enough on the rump, and far enough apart on each side of the spine to prevent guttering and form an erect ridge around each rosette.*

***Other rosettes** may be present on the nose, belly, and high on the shoulder, in front of the collar. However, any extra rosettes or parts of rosettes, which interfere with the specified pattern of rosettes and ridges should be faulted.*

The rosettes should be as pin point as possible, with the coat evenly radiating away from the center. Guttered rosettes



Proper hip rosettes are pinpoint and centered in the middle of the triangle formed by ridges. This one pictured is well-placed but open centered.

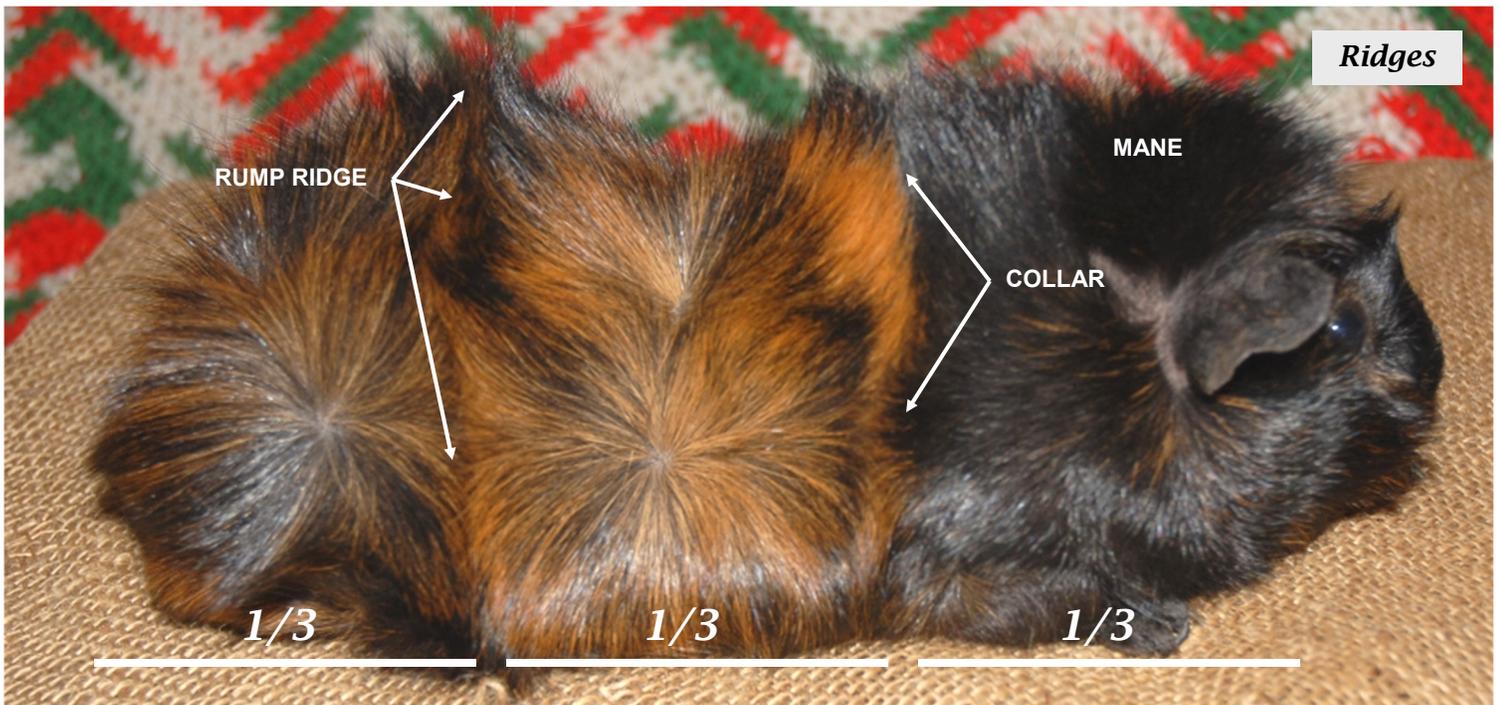
(where the hairs in the center are jumbled) are to be faulted. Open, elongated, and double centers are to be faulted too. Then there are doubles and extra rosettes that may ruin the required pattern. These are major faults.

For **saddle rosettes**, the standard requires four required rosettes running exactly in a straight line right down the middle of the saddle, with that line evenly spaced between the collar and rump ridges. Now if one is out of line a little, this is a fault, but not the end of the world. Consider it more major if they are obviously well back out-of-line or zigzagged (one forward, one back, next one forward...). The whole row of rosettes may be lined-up too far forward or back as well, and thus should be faulted too. When they are too far back, for example, it looks like the rosettes are pushing up under the rump ridge and this spoils the symmetrical pattern of the rosettes and ridges.

The two **shoulder rosettes** are of least importance as far as the judging of rosettes goes. Usually Abys have these. Judges need to check to see they are present, but their form isn't so important like the required eight rosettes. Missing one or both shoulder rosettes is a fault, not a disqualification. When they should be more seriously considered is when the class is very close in quality, especially for breed/variety honors.

Hip rosettes do need to be pinpoint (more difficult to find truly pinpoint centers on hips than the saddle). The centers should be right in the middle of the triangle formed by ridges surrounding this rosette. The ideal Aby's hip rosettes will also be at the same level off the ground as side saddle rosettes. Many times the hip rosettes are placed too low or they are too far forward and the center is right up next to the rump ridge. Again, this spoils the symmetrical look of a top-quality Aby.

Of all the rosettes, **rump rosettes** are the most difficult to find truly pinpoint well-placed centers. Often rump rosettes are too close together (pinching the back ridge), or too low or too high or one up other down... Rump rosettes are most likely to be guttered, elongated, or even elongated to an extreme there is not recognizable centers but runs going up toward the rump ridge. Rump rosettes are best placed about the midpoint between the top of the rump ridge and the tailbone (yes, cavies have tailbones) with plenty of distance between the two centers. The best Abys will likely have pinpoint



The rump ridge and collar need to be straight, well-formed with a stiff, dense coat that goes all the way down to the body right to the floor. The pictured Aby exhibits excellent placement of ridges as well as alignment of rosettes, all working together to create a pleasant symmetrical pattern.

rump rosettes.

The standard states **other rosettes** are allowable. However, the standard also adds in a clause saying these extras should not interfere with the set pattern of what is expected. Nose rosettes are a good example of what compliment the look of a fine Aby. When an Aby has two well-formed nose rosettes (one on either side of the tip of the nose), it is just the cutest thing (no points on ‘cuteness’ but it sure doesn’t hurt...). These pigs usually have better head furnishings too. Nose rosettes do not interfere with any of the other rosettes or ridges. For the most part, extra rosettes anywhere else on the body do detract from the pattern of required rosettes and ridges. Some extras are within the ridges and these split the ridge into two. Double saddle and double hip rosettes also detract from appearance.

RIDGES – Points 20

Each rosette should be separated from the next rosette by an erect ridge of hair. There should be clear, straight ridges running around the shoulders (collar), down the spine (back ridge), across the hips (rump ridge), and separating each saddle, hip, and rump

rosette. The coat should rise sharply from the center of each rosette to the top of the ridges without any flattening.

The goal in breeding for ridges is for them all to be clear (crisp), straight, forming an even symmetrical pattern with the rosettes, and have excellent depth with no hint of flatness anywhere on the coat. The ideal proportions are for the head/shoulders to form a third of the animal, saddle to form a third, and the rump to form the final third. Looking down from above, the saddle and rump rosettes/ridges should form a generous ‘H’ pattern. The ridges are to compliment the rosette pattern. They work together to form the magical look of the Abyssinian. This is why the ARBA is considering making rosettes and ridges each worth twenty-five points instead of just twenty for ridges. The revision is due to take effect in the 2011-2015 ARBA Standard of Perfection.

Ridges and creativity go hand-in-hand, but not in a good way. We call such creativity ‘faults.’ Swirls are a no-no. Runs are a no-no. Flat spots are a no-no. Fluffiness is a no-no. Zigzags are a no-no. Was it mentioned swirls are a no-no? Split ridges are a no-no. Anything short of perfection is likely caused by a no-no. This

When to Breed Your Show Abyssinians

Soap Box: Personally, I rarely show an Aby over 1 ½ years of age (seldom over ten months for that matter). Why? Because if the animal is this nice, it needs to be at home in breeding! It needs to be creating the next generation of winners, not out on the show table attempting to win its ‘umpteenth’ leg. Besides this, their rosettes and ridges just do not hold up forever. So please understand when a former Best in Show winner doesn’t fare well on the table anymore.

One example of this ‘breed vs. show,’ I have had a number of Abys win breed at conventions, put in breeding upon returning home, then have their offspring win breed again at the next convention. If I had kept showing them, I would have lost all future generations of winners which were born.

Breed thy Abys! Legs are just paper. Trophies and

ribbons look nice, and they are great dust collectors. But each new generation is what keeps the breeding program thriving, what keeps me going back to more and more shows.

So when is the best time to breed show Abys? When they are old enough and you know in your heart they belong there. It is all right to sacrifice the next couple shows’ ribbons and sweepstakes points for the future of your breeding program. I am very guarded with my Aby sows, especially, and rarely show them. If they are this nice, they need to be in breeding making more of themselves, not wasted on the show table for months on end. No ribbon, no boat-load of sweepstakes points can replace the loss of what may become the cornerstone of my breeding program.

Breed thy Abyssinians!

Robert Spitzer

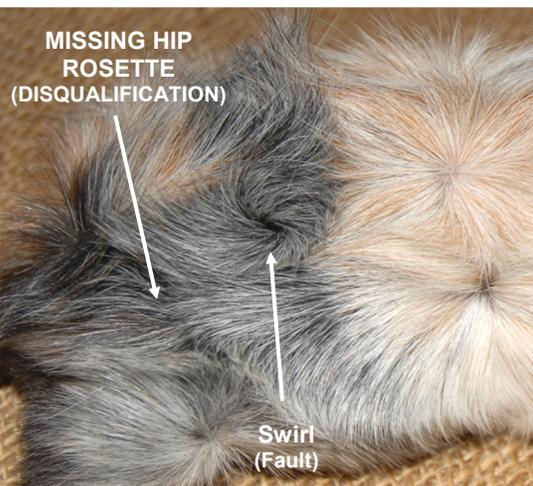


The back ridge should not have any dips, and needs to stand straight and erect from the nose, over the mane, and down the spine to the tailbone.

wide-variety of faults is what makes the Abyssinian breed more challenging to exhibit than most.

The **collar** needs to be well-formed with an erect ridge running from the one shoulder up over the crown and down the other side. The best collars run down to the floor on both sides and not generously curving up under the saddle rosettes. The most common collar fault is a run up over the crown, which disrupts the back ridge and mane too. A common problem many fail to recognize is the split collar. This is where there are two collars, the main one, and then a kind-of secondary one running parallel between it and the ears. When it is most noticeable is when the Aby turns its head causing the split in the collar to appear, occasionally even a double split. This gives an unsightly look and also weakens the form of the main collar.

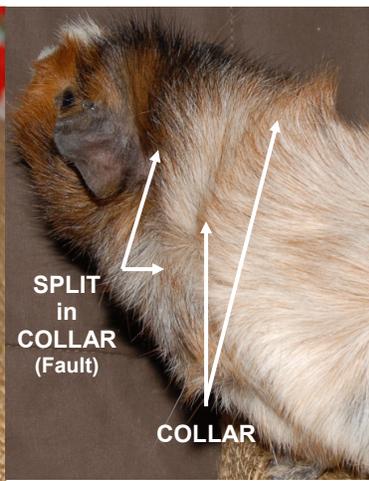
The **rump ridge** runs from the hips up over the top of the back. The most common problem here is swirls, which ruin the straight line of the rump ridge and often causes it to zig-zag across the back. Another common fault is the rump ridge curving up under the saddle rosettes instead of going straight down to the ground. Other issues include flatness over the back, missing segments to the ridge, and runs which push part of the rump ridge backward or forward. The rump ridge needs to be one straight, solid line running



Swirls in the rump ridge cause the ridge to zigzag across the rump. The rump ridge lays over the hip, hiding the hip rosette from view. A partially covered rosette is a fault. A missing one is a disqualification.

from as far down the hip as possible up over the back and straight down the other side.

The **mane and back ridge** runs from the nose on up the crown, over and along the top of the backbone and down over the rump to the tailbone. It should be well-formed and stand up as straight as



This picture shows a split collar, a fault that literally forms two collars.



In this picture the back ridge has an improper zigzag between the rump rosettes.

possible. Common problems here include flat spots and dips. I often see a dip in the back ridge over the saddle between the rosettes there. Walking the pig may help the dip disappear a little, but the best back ridge stands-up on its own. One problem often ignored is between the two rump rosettes. At this point, more and more Abys are showing-up with a little zigzag pattern in the ridge there.

There are also a series of secondary ridges separating each rosette. For example, there are ridges running between each hip and rump rosette as well as between each side and upper saddle rosette. These need to be well-formed and stand up straight too. If these do not, the rosettes appear to be flat in appearance and lacking depth. Where these secondary ridges meet the rump ridge is where the worst swirling often appears. Again, these swirls take away from the crisp appearance and form of the rump ridge.

HEAD FURNISHINGS – Points 5

The coat on the head of an Abyssinian should form a well developed mustache around the nose and an erect mane rising between the ears to the collar.

Head furnishings are often ignored in the breeding pen because they do not concern the eight basic required rosettes or the ridges. However, head furnishings complete the appearance of a very good Aby and it is worth five points. As stated previously, those with nose rosettes often have better head furnishings. The breeder should not ignore the head furnishings. The Aby needs a well-pronounced mustache with accompanying prominent furnishings that run underneath the eye and up each side of the cheek.

COLOR – Points 15:

The color is to match the variety description. In Marked varieties, color points are to be divided equally – ½ the points to color quality and ½ the points to markings.

After rosettes and ridges, color is the most important category with fifteen points. So, judges and breeders should not ignore color.

Bottom line, color does matter on the Aby. It is fifteen points that needs to be counted when selecting class order and breed/variety picks. When two animals are fairly even on rosettes and ridges, then color may well become the deciding factor.

Does Color Variety Affect Quality of Rosette Centers?

Most Abys are brindles or one of the roan colors: tri roan, blue roan, red roan, etc. Brindles and tri roans are natural pairings for breeding. The intermixing of the colors also helps show-off the pinpoint centers (especially true of roans). This is likely why more brindles and roans are shown than the other varieties. I have shown many color varieties over the years, but on most of these judges have complained bitterly about the open-centered look. This is especially true on dilute varieties. These have light-colored skin which just radiates light through the center and gives an open-centered look to it. I see the problem on roans, too, where the skin under the rosette is pale or pink. Those centers usually appear more open than the dark-skinned centers. Now this is on the same pig! This is why I try to remember to look closely at the centers to see if they really are open (missing hair) or if it is the illusion of light skin

giving it that look.

To give an extreme example, I was judging the ACBA Specialty and had an Aby Satin Cream on the table. First glance, the centers were as big as dimes! Upon much closer inspections, the rosettes did have hair all the way to reasonably pinpoint centers. I sure hated the look of the animal, and I fully understand judges docking points, but I am making the point that as a judge I try to make the effort to look closely at the centers to see for sure. This isn't just true in satin creams, but also to a lesser extent in all many varieties. I have had judge after judge complain my blacks are open centered, yet verbally gush over pinpoint centers on their littermate blue roans. So, are blacks genetically predisposed to having more open centers than their blue roan littermates? I am not convinced of this. This is why I choose to look a bit closer to check on these varieties.

Robert Spitzer

CONDITION – Points 10:

The coat is to be close and thick. The Abyssinian is to be firm fleshed.

There are only ten points on condition. However, condition affects many other parts of the Aby which are worth considerable points. Poor coat condition results in a fluffy or scruffy look and ridges do not stand up quite right because of it. Body condition affects the look of the animal too, not just feel. The result of a well-conditioned pig is a better-looking Aby with bright eyes, crisp ridges that stand up well, and luster to the coat (not sheen, as that is satin).

FAULTS

Double, split, swirled, guttered, misplaced and/or open centered rosettes; extra rosettes or parts of rosettes which interrupt the specified pattern; flatness of coat over the shoulders or back; crooked ridges; soft texture; coat too short.

In most breeds, the judge must find the most faults by feel. In Abyssinians, the vast majority of faults are visual ones. There is often so much to comment about, the judge may give exhibitors the appearance of 'nothing good' to say about their Abys. What happens is judges state the faults they see, and on some animals there is a lot to see! This gives the impression there is nothing

redeeming about the animals, that the judge hated 'all' the Abys, and the owner might as well go home and pet shop the entire lot. No, no, no! This does more damage than good. Exhibitors often hear their pigs are pretty bad...and then the judge says afterwards the Abys at the show were quite good! So which is it? Unfortunately, this is the nature of judging the Abyssinian breed. We see the negative, point it out, and then the positive goes unrewarded. Thus, the owners do not hear comments that would confirm the value of animals to their breeding program.

Request to judges: Try to also comment on the positive too. Often there is much value to an animal and the exhibitor needs to be educated on this side too.

DISQUALIFICATIONS FROM COMPETITION

Coat over 1 ½ inches in length; less than eight clear rosettes (4 saddle, 2 hip, 2 rump – a double rosette counts as one toward the total.); satin sheen – not to be confused with the natural luster of some colors.

The most recent change in this list is the disqualification of a missing rosette. Two doubles or an extra rosette somewhere do not equal one missing saddle, hip, or rump rosette. If an animal is missing one or more of the required eight rosettes, it is still a disqualification even if there are plenty of extras on the pig somewhere. The standard states *less than eight clear rosettes* is a disqualification. Clear means the judge is not required to hunt to find it. However, when in doubt, the standard does state 'benefit of the doubt' may be used.

Cleanliness and Bathing Show Abys

Some older boars have over-active oil glands and the animal becomes very icky feeling, and this grease is what traps all the finer shavings and dust in the coat. Clean this gland by massaging in Dawn dishwashing liquid, let it set a couple minutes, then rinsing well. This may need to be repeated two or three times.

What is the secret to a keeping an Aby clean? A clean cage. A clean oil gland. Hold them in clean hands. But of utmost importance is a clean, clean, clean, a very clean...cage! It should be a rare Aby you need to bathe. And beware, that when you do bathe it, its show prospects likely just got destroyed for awhile. It will take time to recover from the bath.





Satin sheen is a disqualification because this means the animal is entered in the wrong breed. Being a satin carrier is not a disqualification. In the past, some claimed satin carriers had a 'little sheen.' However, what they were seeing was the natural luster of a healthy coat. Do not mistake this luster for satin sheen.

After checking for disqualifications, judges should set the Aby down and straighten its ridges again.

Abys are more at risk than most breeds for polydactyl toes (extra toes, normally found on back feet) and extra teats. These two disqualifications are not noted under Abyssinian disqualifications because they are listed with General Disqualifications From Competition, All Breeds on page 220. Polydactyl toes are easy to see when turning the pig over to check its sex. Extra teats take a little more investigative work. Check the belly for these and even flip through the belly coat if suspecting something doesn't look quite right. On rare occasions the animal (true of any breed) may have three or four or even five extra teats! On Abys, there will likely be a bald spot where a future generation may have an extra teat. The ARBA Standard states *bare spot or spots where there should be hair* is a disqualification too.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT JUDGING AND AGE

Age definitely makes a difference to an Abyssinian. Age affects texture, depth, how crisp ridges are, and even cleanliness.

Small junior Abys are often at a disadvantage to older animals in a couple areas. First, they usually have very softer coats. The standard does say to give allowance for this in juniors. Also, as juniors shed out their baby coat and the adult coat is growing in, they may have poor depth to their rosettes. Quality of rosettes, ridges, color, body, etc. are identifiable, but it will be fault heavily for lack of depth to the rosettes. The more mature junior will have its adult coat mostly grown in, thus better texture and depth.

Large junior to small intermediate size is a strange age for

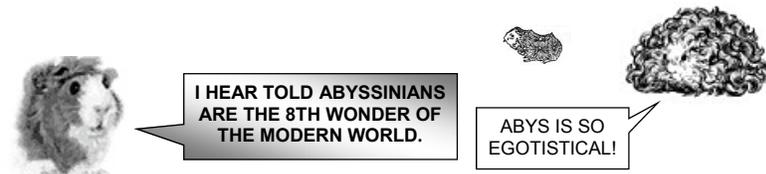


Extra teats are a disqualification. These are more common on Abyssinians than most breeds. The pictured Peruvian had five extras. Three are pictured.

Abys. Breeders call this age the 'uglies.' Their bodies and heads are growing longer and/or wider, and this results in rosettes and ridges moving around some. The ridges flatten out and then move a bit, swirls may appear in the ridges. Rosettes do funny things too, and the centers may not look quite right for a time.

In the opinion of this author, mid-intermediate to young senior Abys is the prime show age show for this breed (on average, again, just author's opinion based on many years experience). At this age their coats are mature. The bodies become close to the finished adult proportions, depth to the rosettes is at its best, and the coat is relatively clean with its natural luster.

The seniors in most breeds have the advantage of age and size. This is not usually an advantage for the Abyssinian where juniors and intermediates are quite competitive. The older coat becomes 'fluffy,' is probably the best way to put it. The older coat become lifeless with dead hair that needs to shed out, and the ridges tend to 'fluff-up.' As a result, ridges on an older Aby just do not maintain the crisp, clean look of their youth. Rosette centers open up too, and so they lack the fine, pinpoint centers needed to win higher awards. The coats are often more soiled too with grease and grit. Giving an Aby a bath a few days before a show really trashes the coat. The bath strips the coat of natural oils it needs for that healthy look and destroys the ridges.



Abyssinian Age and Change

If Abys change so much from birth to intermediate to senior, how do breeders go about culling and does this affect judges' comments?

As a breeder, I try to memorize their 'look' of when born. Usually they will return to this quality of rosettes and ridges by the time they have matured. I can be patient and wait.

However, judges must based their decisions on what they have in front of them at that moment, not what they think the animal will be mature to be at a future date. I often hear judges say 'promising' to young ones of all breeds they feel will mature well.

Basically, an old Aby does look 'old' to me, and I often comment on this at shows. The eyes and eye lids have a different look about them. Older animals just do not have the body and coat

condition of younger ones, ridges becoming fluffy and disorganized. I know...many breeders have had exceptions, geriatric anomalies which win when they are 'ancient.' I have had these 'aged wonders' too, but it is rare. Interesting thing, I find brindle seniors hold their show quality longer than my roans and other varieties. I don't know why, but I have seen this many times.

Again, judges cannot consider how they think the animal might have looked months or even years earlier, how what they saw at a previous show. I have won with all ages from that barely legal twelve-ounce young 'un to an occasional one of more advanced age (usually a brindle boar). As a judge I select breed/variety from all ages too. I know because after all awards have been handed out, I have had a number of people tell me the age of some of their pigs.

Robert Spitzer

How to Purchase Abyssinians for Your Breeding Program

by Robert Spitzer



For those who want a creative breeding challenge, try the Clown Prince of the cavy breeds, the Abyssinian.

Having raised Abyssinians since the early 1970's, I have seen the rise and fall in activity in this breed. I heard it predicted that the popularity of the Abyssinian Satin would replace the Abyssinian, and that it would all but vanish from the show table. This has not happened. In fact there is much renewed interest in this old breed. Often at conventions, the Abyssinian numbers are often in the top three breeds.

The Abyssinian would be even more popular if it were not for the bad press given it. I often hear, "Oh, don't buy Abyssinians, they're too hard to raise," or, "I don't like Abys because they won't sit still, they're too noisy, they're obnoxious...the last one I owned went and..." Those who do faithfully raise this breed do so for the Abyssinian's creative personality and its breeding challenge. I have to admit Abyssinians, regular and satin, are like hyperactive children, the only breeds routinely encouraged to run up and down the show table to best show their finer points. These guys are literally little clowns. This is what draws me to them.

They are not born like little clones, as each one is different. Being incredibly horny, Abyssinians breed like flies, providing a good selection of show stock to choose from. At birth when the baby coat is first dry, I know if this may be a promising show animal or not. Every batch born is like a present waiting to be opened because at times I really do not know what will be born.

HOW TO OBTAIN QUALITY STOCK

Much of the difficulty in breeding show quality Abyssinians actually comes in the purchase of stock. I hope to provide some helpful tips for the new breeder.

The best place to start looking for stock is the established breeder. This person has a working gene pool proven in the pens and on the show table. The breeder may also offer the best advice as to how to breed the stock you are obtaining. Every now and then I talk to someone who says, "Look at what I found at the pet store! What a steal for only \$32.50 plus tax!" However, the animal was at the pet store for a reason, probably not a very good one either. The animal could be there for genetic deficiencies such as extra teats, size, breeding problems, or other reasons that only the original seller knows. This is part of my point. The breeder can assist in instructing what best to breed their animal with and may guide you toward stock that will complement it.

In Abyssinians, it is important to not breed weakness to weakness; rather, breed strength to weakness, otherwise you are perpetuating faults and creating a worse problem which will be harder to breed out later. So buy stock that has matching faults and does not have the fault your breeders already have.

Do not expect to buy the perfect Abyssinian. I commonly have possible buyers come up and say, "I want to buy a really nice one." Then they go on to describe such a quality that I do not often even see at a national convention. Buyers must be aware, especially in Abyssinians, the breeders must keep the best because not many perfect ones are ever born. A breeder especially cannot not sell their top sows.

The boar is the most important. Several breeding sows may be in with the one boar. The best quality is vital because so many genes are being passed on from that one animal to your future breeding program. Since fewer boars are needed, it is easier to purchase a quality boar, thus breeders are more willing to part with one of these. Again, remember that the breeder cannot give up their very best, so don't expect to buy it. You will have to breed your own, just like they did.

For breeding sows, try to purchase ones related to the boar you are going to use. Crossing totally unrelated lines many times does not work for the first generation. Surprisingly, the babies may actually be rather poor; however, breeding the daughters back to the father will likely provide the quality expected. Father/daughter breedings are often quite successful in Abys. The sows you purchase will also probably not be the quality of the boar. Again, the breeder must keep the best for themselves.

Realize, though, you are purchasing a gene pool, not Best in Show animals. This is especially true in Abyssinians.

Don't show the stock you buy, especially the sows. Go home, put them in breeding when the age and size is right, and show the babies. Road trips and shows weaken the sows, and they are more likely to die during pregnancy as a result.

It is all right to buy an Abyssinian which has a double, even on a boar. Currently, a couple of my best breeding boars have doubles. A few of my sows do too. It does not stop them from being fine breeders. Again, you breed strength to weakness, and so don't breed two together with double rosettes. In the early eighties, I exhibited a beautiful Aby brindle boar that had a double on his saddle. He still won five Best in Shows. Yet it is very common to have prospective buyers turn down an excellent prospective breeding animal just because it has this fault. Years ago I bought a blue roan boar from a very respected Aby breeder. This animal not only had a double, but also two other faults I consider very serious. Most, including me, would have pet shopped this boar. I bought him sight unseen and was leery how he would work in my breeding pens; however, I did keep in mind his solid genetic background. Well, his son took Best of Breed at the 1995 California State Convention and went on to take several other Best of Breeds. This reinforced in my mind the importance of buying into a strong gene



Properly Posed, Best Reserve in Show at 2003 ARBA Convention

pool, even if the boar or sow is nowhere near perfect. It is not uncommon for these Abys to throw babies much better than themselves.

PROBLEMS TO AVOID

MY PROBLEM IS
INDISTINCT CENTERS



There are several traits I do try to stay away from buying. The worst of these is probably a flat coat. Perfect ridges are difficult to produce and buying ones with flat coats or horribly twisted ridges and/or swirls just do not help. Having a bad run in the collar or rump ridge will inevitably cause problems too. Another trait to avoid is bad twists or runs in the centers of the rosettes. I at least try to buy an animal that does not have poor centers in the exact rosettes I already have problems with. This only perpetuates my problem. Texture is difficult to achieve also. If the coat you are buying is very soft for its age, think twice about buying it.

Basically if the animal has a couple of faults, it may still be well worth buying, especially if the faults are not a problem in your own line. However, make sure this animal has strengths you need. I buy parts of a breeding program. There are times I buy an animal purely for the pinpoint centers or strong ridges. Then I breed it to one that has the strengths it lacks. This is what I did to the heavily faulted blue roan Aby mentioned previously.

Beware of buying pigs with genetic disqualifications. One of the most common ones in the Abyssinian is extra teats. Many times this cannot be seen by just turning the pig over. You must ruffle the hair since it may lie over the teat. Usually this is easy to find since a bald spot surrounds it. Beware of a plain bald spot as well, since these end up becoming extra teats in a couple generations. The gene for extra teats seems to be recessive (my personal opinion, no scientific studies done to confirm it). This means it can remain a hidden trait for several generations, and so these cavies should be removed from breeding for good. What if you find an extra teat while evaluating someone's sale animals? It

is helpful to quietly inform the breeder of your findings, as they may not be aware there is a problem within their herd. Then they can go home and look into it concerning their own stock.

Other genetic disqualifications to check are extra toes, the mouth for good teeth, and the eyes for spots.

BUYING SHOW PIGS OFF THE TABLE

What about buying animals judges either did or did not like on the show table? While one should listen to judges (I am one and I appreciate people listening to me now and then...), if I removed every Aby from my house that a judge said negative remarks about, I would not have much left. Abys are very easy to nitpick. A judge may say several remarks, giving the impression it is a bad animal, yet actually feel the cavy is quite nice. This has happened to me a number of times concerning some of my finest. Two judges I highly, did not sound like they liked one of my top boars. In fact, it sounded to me like they totally hated it! My heart sank, as I was very proud of this Aby. Yet when asked later, they both thought the boar was very good. This is the way Abys are. It is so easy to see the smallest faults and comment, and this is why it has been so challenging for even top quality ones to win Best in Shows. Judges have cost me more than a few sales for this very reason. The prospective buyer hears two or three comments and thinks...*This guy is ripping me off! The judge hates this pig! No way I am buying it now.* Meanwhile, I know the animals will make a very good breeder for them. The judge would likely confirm this if asked. Very frustrating. My solution? I mostly quit showing what I intend to sell.

So who should breed Abyssinians? Everyone! The Abyssinian will provide a welcome challenge to the serious breeder and exhibitor, all the while giving entertainment with its energetic and clown-like personality.



Abyssinian Breeders

| Name | O/Y | Caviary | City | State | Contact | Varieties |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Devon Bean | Y | Jelly Bean Cavies | Norco | CA | Roan, Black, Brindle, Broken | sctshbean@aol.com |
| Brittany Bellows | O | Brigliadore | Orem | UT | Rainbow, Dalmatian | brigliadore@yahoo.com |
| Mary Anne & Al Chmura | O | Clermont Cavies | Tivoli | NY | Brindle, Roan, TSW | achmura@att.net |
| Randdee Cram | Y | Cram Cavies | Buena Park | CA | Self, Brindle, Roan, Marked | jcrfamfamily@sbcglobal.net |
| Vic, Becky, Allison Dubbink | O/Y | Rebason Cavies | Holland | MI | Roan, Brindle, Agouti, Marked, Self | rebasoncavies@hotmail.com |
| Brooke Gallagher | Y | Pig Squeeks Caviary | Hillsborough | NJ | Brindle, Roan, Self | gdabt@comcast.net |
| Mike Ginder | O | J & J Caviary | Lehigh Acres | FL | Roan, Brindle, Marked | JJCAVY1@aol.com |
| Suzette Glave | O | Cavy Cargo | Clyde | NY | Brindle, Roan, Self | cavycargo@yahoo.com |
| Jahcqui Guardiola | O | Guardiola's Guinea Pigs | Tampa | FL | Agouti, Self, Marked, Tan | Mermaid373@hotmail.com |
| Tracy Iverson | O | Iverson's Cavies | Cottage Grove | OR | Black, Red, Brindle, Roans | mrcavy@msn.com |
| Shelly Kohr | O | Oneisnotenough Caviary | Renton | WA | Roan, Brindle, TSW, GA | ourkohrner@comcast.net |
| Dana Kolstad | O | Red Star Caviary | Meridan | ID | Black, Roan, Brindle | DanaKol@aol.com |
| Russ Lash | O | Cavalcade Cavies | Morgan Hill | CA | Brindle, Roan | laurielash@aol.com |
| Linda Loucks | O | | Nampa | ID | Brindle, Roan | dutchnsuch@cablone.net |
| Samantha Marlin | O | Kar Mar Cavies | Wasilla | AK | Black, Roan, Brindle | karmarcavies@msn.com |
| Tara McParland | O | Tara's Cavy Cave | Ocoee | FL | Roan, GA, Self, Tan | animalcrazy113@cfl.rr.com |
| James Nielsen | O | Nielsen Family Cavies | Gilbert | AZ | Brindle, Roan | ACBAsec-treas@nghs.net |
| Tim Patty | O | | Oklahoma City | OK | Brindle, Roan | dignspigs@cox.net |
| Darcy Pierce | Y | Squealing Kiddos Caviary | Folsom | CA | Roan, Brindle, Agouti | squealingkiddos@hotmail.com |
| Amanda Scannell | Y | Bouncey Bunnies & Cavies | Hopewell Junction | NY | Various | Scannellhouse@hotmail.com |
| Sheila Schwartz-Zych | O | Abby Cavy Cave | Syracuse | NY | Brindle, Roan, TSW, Red | szych@twcnv.rr.com |
| Robert Spitzer | O | Lightshine Caviary | Willcox | AZ | Brindle, Roan | rspitzer@vtc.net |
| Alex Svigel | Y | All Star Cavies | Willowick | OH | Roan, Brindle, Self | svigelt@roadrunner.com |
| Dawn Turner | O | | Bisbee | AZ | Marked, Roan, Brindle, Self | xandert@cablone.net |
| Richard Vaerewyck | Y | Richard's Pig Pen | Tarentum | PA | Roan, Brindle, Self, GA | richard@vere.com |
| Karen Waite | O | | Candor | NY | Brindle, Golden Agouti | k5kv146@gmail.com |
| Gloria Wilson | O | GloWell Caviary | Albuquerque | NM | Brindle, Roan | WGJ3@msn.com |

Developing the Dalmatian Abyssinian

by Brittany Bellows



In April 2005, I decided to throw sanity to the wind and attempt the develop the Dalmatian color in the Abyssinian breed. I am no stranger to challenging colors in the Aby breed having raised TSW Abys since 2001. I also raise Lilac/Cream/White and rainbow Abys, and so I knew the Dal color was going to be a challenge going in.

I started my Dalmatian herd with a single Ameryssinian (Aby x Am) sow. Shortly after getting the sow, I also got a trio of Dalmatian Americans and a pair of Black Abys not directly out of Roans. Some of you might be thinking "isn't a black a black? Why does it matter if they are out of roans or not?" Sels out of roans carry modifier genes for good roaning. Exactly the thing you don't want when trying to breed for good spots. That has been one of the largest challenges with the Dal color. Finding good outside animals to bring into the herd that aren't going to mess up the spotting with roan modifiers.

Flashing back to 2005, I bred my Dal Americans to my Black Abys and my F1 litters were born. Because many Americans carry genes for coat faults, which are a similar genes to what causes the rosettes on Abys, I got a surprising number of decent animals in my F1 breedings. The rosettes were junk, all over the place, and the ridges were flat, BUT a large number of the animals had all their rosettes, and that was what I needed to move forward.

I bred the F1 animals to Abys and got my F2 generation. My F2 generation actually had some animals I could put on the show table. They didn't stand a chance at beating my other marked animals, but I liked putting them on the table to show they were out there.

Judges' comments have been interesting over the years. Some flat out didn't know what they were and wanted to move them from the Marked class to the roan class and then disqualify them for being a spotty roan. Some would say things like "this looks like a Dal" but in a disbelieving way as it just couldn't be what they were seeing. I had to break the rules on occasion and actually explain to the judge that, yes, they were a Dalmatian Aby; yes, they are a work in progress; and, no, I didn't expect it to win anything that day. Some judges said I must enjoy torture to want to breed Dal Abys. Most judges were excited to see this new color on the table, and most have given me encouragement.

My F2 and F3 generations began losing spot quality due to the pesky roan modifier that was now a couple generations in. I made the choice to breed my F1 and F2 animals to the F3 animals to

try and lock in the spots a little better and hopefully not loose rosette quality. The first half of the plan worked very well and I was able to get a number of babies born with good spotting, however the rosette advancement pretty much ground to a halt. For the most part the rosettes didn't get any worse, but they didn't get any better either. I found my self in a strange holding pattern where babies born with



wonderful spotting were almost always missing a rosette. Those born with wonderful rosettes usually had very poor spotting. I would on occasion have animals born with a nice blend of rosettes and spotting; but as Murphy's Law goes, those were usually the animals that up and died before three months of age.

In 2007, I started to actively look for some outcross animals as my herd was in danger of becoming closely inbred with only six animals as its core foundation. Finding animals that didn't have any roan parents was extremely difficult. It wasn't until early 2008 that I was able to add five or six full Abys to the herd. Since the addition of the new animals to the herd, the progress has grown by leaps and bounds. Many of the babies now being born have both good rosettes and good spotting. More and more babies in the litters are keepers, and I don't have to tell the judges what the animals are as the spots are very obvious now.

The Dalmatian color is not quite there yet. Soft coats and other little things that are throw backs to their American heritage still pop up from time to time. The Aby rosettes also cause challenges with the spots, making them difficult to fully see. Because of the rosettes, you can get a better sense of the spots when looking straight down at the animal than when viewing them from the side. I believe with another year of work the color will finally be truly competitive and be able to give my other marked colors a run for their money.

In March of 2009, almost four years after I started this project, a Black Aby sow out of my Dal herd took 2nd Runner Up Best In Show at the Utah State Convention show. This sow only barely has Americans off her pedigree as her Great Grandma was one of my original F1 animals. That win was a good anniversary present for all the years of work on this color. With any luck, many more wins are in store for this challenging color.



Raising Abyssinians: The Youth's Perspective

by Tara McParland



I was in the eighth grade and my third year as a member of the FFA when I was introduced to the world of breeding and showing guinea pigs and rabbits. Of all the qualities and traits of this wonderful subculture, it was the adorable nature of the animals themselves that sparked my interest. After much research, I arrived at the conclusion I wanted to undertake this challenge; I wanted to become a guinea pig breeder.

Informing my parents of this wish was an entirely different matter, however. It was far from a sure thing, as I had no idea how they would respond to this somewhat strange request. I posed the question without being able to predict their answer, but I was hopeful in my parents' judgment that I was both mature and responsible enough to pursue such an endeavor. It was not without some early resistance, but my parents granted their permission. With this approval, I was ready to take my first steps.

When the time came to choose my first guinea pigs, it was the Abyssinians which first grabbed my attention. Their wonderful personalities along with the relative ease of grooming in comparison to the breeds with longer hair created the perfect match between breeder and show animals I felt would lead to success. It was with this in mind that I selected my first two show animals, an Abyssinian roan and a Satin Abyssinian roan; two junior sows which were the foundation of my initial line of guinea pigs.

It must be mentioned that I would never have succeeded as a breeder without two local breeders that provided both the guidance and mentoring I needed to develop both the knowledge and experience that has been an integral part of every high point that my guinea pigs and I have experienced. It was the kindness and patience that I was shown from other breeders that instilled the perseverance that fueled my confidence and desire to continue through each and every one of the low points.

An example of one of these low points would be when I was forced to discontinue my initial line of show animals due to multiple medical issues. It was a wonderful local breeder that agreed to get the stock I would need to start a second line. It was this kindness that led to my early success; it was the line I started from the stock animals she acquired which led to my win of Best of Breed at

my first national convention the following year.

It has been more than five years since those first two junior sows, but even after all the high and low points, all the wonders and disappointments that I've been fortunate enough to experience, it is still an understatement to classify breeding and showing Abyssinians as merely a challenge. The steps required to bring about a successful breeding range from judging the openness of the centers to the length of the hair, to the pedigrees to ensure they have excellent genetics and to categorize the varieties to avoid potentially lethal combinations for the babies. It may be a challenge to provide the ideal environment for a successful litter, but that will not guarantee a show-quality animal. To use a cliché, you win some and you lose some. You can only hope you are up to the challenge and the hard work that goes into successful breeding will pay off. It should go without saying it is more than worth it.



Tara's 2006 ARBA Convention Best of Breed, Abyssinian.



Tara's 2007 ARBA Convention Best of Breed, Abyssinian Satin.



Tara with Jahcqui Guardiola

ACBA Roan and Brindle Cavy Genetics

by Harry Claus



Because roan and brindle are the most common Abyssinian colors, we are reprinting Harry Claus's articles on these varieties from his book Cavy Genetics. This book is printed and sold by the ACBA. See page 50 for details. What has always been a mystery to me is why Abyssinian brindles often have quality intermixing, yet some other breeds rarely do. - Editor

ROANS

The roans being shown at the present time are all heterozygous at the roan spotting and anophthalmos locus (Rs rs). They could have a white blaze and various amounts of roaning on the body with little or no roaning on the cheeks or feet.

The usual breeding procedure is to breed roan to non-roan giving you 50% roans and 50% non-roans. There is a common misconception that these non-roans are "roan carriers." This is incorrect. These are no more roan than animals with several generations of pure non-roan in the pedigree.

When roans are bred together, you can expect 25% to be non-roan, 50% roans and 25% to be sickly-looking whites, blind or at least with severe eye problems and usually tooth problems. These boars are usually sterile, but when they are not, they give you 100% healthy roans, no matter what they are bred to.

Dalmatians are roans with spotting in the roan areas of their coat. I tried for three years to figure out the difference with little success. When a roan and a Dalmatian are bred together, you get the 1:2:1 assortment that you get with the pair of roans. This shows that they are both products of the roan locus. Dalmatians, showing that the condition is under genetic control, but I wasn't able to show what other genes had to be present to change a roan into a Dalmatian. I suspect that more than two are necessary.



Heather Bondra's Mr. Wonderful

Silvering (roaning) has been studied by researchers in the scientific community since the 1920's. The gene (Rs) in our present day show roans was first reported by Catherine Whiteway in England in 1973. In 1975, she co-chaired a more comprehensive report with Roy Robinson in the Guinea Pig Newsletter 9: 13-16.

In 1947, Sewall Wright reported on several other types of silvering in the guinea pig in Genetics 32, 115-141.

The silver gene (si) is recessive and when homozygous, is very variable, from a few white hairs on the belly to completely white.

The grizzled gene (gr) is recessive and when homozygous, causes progressive silvering after the animal is a few months old.

When the gene that changes golden agouti to silver agouti (c^r) gets together with non-agouti (a) and tortoise shell (e^p), you get a dark sepia with roaning. The hairs that would be red on brindle

are white.

When you breed chocolate to chocolate (real chocolates, no bittersweets), you get animals with roaning, partially pigmented hairs (beige or white under color) and light chocolate surface color. Good chocolates are double heterozygotes ($Cc^x Pp$). Good chocolate roans would have to be triple heterozygotes ($Cc^x Pp Rs rs$). You would have to establish a good breeding colony of chocolates by chocolate x extremely pale beige ($c^r c^a pp$) matings, get good chocolates, transfer the roan gene (Rs) to them, breed those roans to the pale beiges until you got good dark chocolate roans and then continue breeding to the extremely pale beiges. This would be a good exercise in genetics, Mendelian assortment and mathematical probability. If this seems a little complicated, it is because it is.

This is why some exhibitors show silver agouti dilutes as "bittersweet chocolates." It takes no effort whatsoever to produce these.

ROAN CARRIERS

Question: I am finding roans popping out of cavies that neither parent shows roaning. Is it possible to have a roan "carrier"?

Answer: Whites and Himalayans could possess the roan gene (Rs). When bred to a colored animal, 1/2 of their colored offspring would be roans. Also, there is a recessive silvering gene (si) that would cause roaning when a pair of them got together in the same animal. These would not look like our present day show roans however, and I doubt if this is the case.

TRI ROANS AND BRINDLES

The white spotting gene (s) determines whether an epep cavy is a tortoiseshell or a brindle. Cavies that are enomozygous non-spotted (SS) would be brindles. Those that are homozygous white spotting (ss) would be TSW's.

A pleiotropic or secondary affect of the white spotting gene in addition to making the white spots, is to pull the red and black into patches making a tortoiseshell. There is never much brindling on a TSW.

The partial extension gene (ep) is incompletely dominant over non-extension (e).

Cavies that are heterozygous (ep) with one partial extension gene and one non-extension gene (e) will usually have more red (more red spotting on the tortoiseshells, more



Quality Brindle

Quality Roan

intermingling of red hairs on the brindles). A good portion of your epep or epe Ss would have a white foot, a few white hairs, white blaze, etc. The ones that don't have any white still have their red and black pulled into patches. Also, there is so much overlapping of genotypes that a breeding test would be required to erase any doubt.

A review of the possible genotypes and phenotypes would be as follows:

- epep SS – Brindle – usually with more black.
- epe SS – Brindle – more even amounts of red and black
- epep Ss – Tortoise shell with more black, possible minor white spotting
- epe Ss – Tortoise shell – more even around of red and black, possible minor white spotting
- epep ss – TSW, usually with more black
- epe ss – TSW, more even amounts of red and black
- ee SS – Red
- ee Ss – Red, possible minor white spotting
- ee ss – Red/White broken color

The intermingling of the white hairs on the coat of a roan is caused by a dominant gene at the roan locus (Rs). Normal, non roaned cavies have two recessive alleles at the roan locus (rs rs). Those that are roan have on roan allele and one normal allele (rs rs).

Those with two roan alleles are white, usually blind, have tooth problems, are sterile, and look sickly. However, one in every 7 or 8 boars will not be sterile and will be able to father 100% healthy roans no matter what colored non-roan cavy he is bred to.

The three types of roans that are described as dark, well-marked, and high grade are just variations of the expressions of roan (Rs rs). Roans that are epe are better marked because a lot more red is present. This has no effect on the amount of white.

It should be possible to acquire any array of roan modifiers that would give you more well roaned cavies than not. If this is the case, then any red produced should carry those same modifiers, even though you can't see them.

To set up a tri roan/brindle breeding program, I would eliminate any white spotting, then breed strawberry roans to brindles. 50% of the babies would be roans. If your brindles were epep, they would be 50% tri-roans, 50% brindles. If your brindles were epe, you would expect 25% reds, 25% brindles, 25% strawberry roans, and 25% tri-roans. If you breed tri-roan to brindle even if they are both epe, one of every four produced would be expected to be epep with not enough red.

To set up a breeding program would not be as hard as it might seem. Once you have all your ducks in a row, as far as the color genes are concerned, you could concentrate on ears, type, color intensity, etc.



Silvercrest Caviary

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Abyssinian Genetics

For a breed where it is so hard to get a top show prospect, the basic genetics of Abyssinians are quite simple and involve 3 loci or genes. The first locus is Rough. Ideal Abyssinians are RR and carry 2 copies of the dominant rough gene (allele). In contrast, Americans carry the recessive smooth allele (r) and are rr. The second locus is long. The ideal Abyssinian carries 2 genes (alleles) for short (LL) while Peruvians which should also be RR carry 2 recessive alleles for long (ll). The final major locus is Rough Modifier (M) which, as the name implies, modifies the action of the rough allele. This dominant gene suppresses the rosette forming action of Rough. Animals which are RRMM typically have poor or missing rosettes. Animals which are RRmm may have only a pair of weak rosettes on the rump with push forward hair on the head (some Peruvian breeders love the RRmm genotype!) while animals which are RrMM may have a bit of hair reversal on the feet as the only evidence that they carry R at all! So, for the three major loci involved, the ideal Abyssinian should be RRLlmm (pure rough, pure short and pure unmodified).

Of course, breeding show animals, particularly Abyssinians, is never as simple as just dealing with the major loci! There are a host of unstudied modifiers which may work singly or in combination to produce the ideal rosette placement, clean centers and good alignment which is necessary for the ideal Abyssinian. On top of that, you have to deal with coat modifiers which produce the desired stiff coat that makes the well placed, centered and aligned rosettes produce the ideal ridges and mane. I suspect that Abyssinian breeders are so fond of Roans because they remind the breeder of all the gray hairs you get working with this challenging breed! (*I'm not that gray yet!* - Editor)

Peter Herman

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