

Abys USA

(Reprint from May 2000)

I was able to see Abys and a just a few Somalis in four different parts of the United States, on a visit there in late April and early May. I have the following overall impressions from my first visit to the States in five years:

1. Cat fancy politics are considerably more intense than here. I was there somewhat before the CFA AGM at which all office bearers were up for election and re-election, and what I was hearing at both ends of the continent was deadly serious and very much akin to US presidential elections.

2. Abyssinian (and Somali) breeding and showing is healthy and well. Yes, there has been something of a drop off in CFA registrations, as with most other breeds, but much less than here and exhibitors there are much more prepared to travel to shows than most of those in Australia (I'll have more to say on this elsewhere).

3. I saw very few, if any, cats that I could describe as undersized; there seemed to be a trend in that direction a decade or more ago, but I saw no evidence that it is continuing.

4. Ears tend to be bigger than here, but apart from that, there is no longer a significant difference in type between the two countries, as there certainly was when we imported the first American Abys in 1980. Moreover, I saw far fewer instances than in the past of what I would describe, through my Australian eyes, of wrongly placed eyes that were too round.

5. There was not much difference between the colour of Blue and Fawn Abys I saw there and what I am used to seeing back home. Indeed, warmer undercoats would have been desirable (and were consciously desired).

6. The colours I saw on many Tawny and Cinnamon Abys were very rich indeed. In comparing them with ours, I can say that my own best cats would definitely be in the top 6-8, but not at the top. It is worth adding, though, that facial markings were not always as distinct as here.

7. Clarity and coat texture were similar to Australian good show cats. However, I feel that we would have scored on muscle tone, because in general our cats (especially males) have more running, jumping and standing still room than their US counterparts. We must not forget that they generally have much colder winters than here, and there is the risk of contracting rabies, so outdoor catteries are in most instances not practicable propositions.

8. The cats – of all breeds – almost invariably showed themselves off very well. They were not better than our best ones, but almost all handled themselves extremely well. No doubt they were helped by training, whereby a lot of them had been through mock shows at home, placed in cages among other cats, taken out to a table and handled by strangers. This is a practice I can recommend to anyone who has doubts about their cats' show temperament.

9. Do not **ever** complain about airline food in Australia if you have not sampled what they dish out on American domestic flights, where the stale peanuts seem to be the only items that do not have molten cheese poured over them!



Gr Ch Hillstblues AZ Wildcat of Abyzona (BLU M)



Pandorasbox Samos



Out West Shaniko with breeder/owner Kimberlee Wienke

subscriber who in the past imported Abys and Somalis from Australia, very kindly took me around Portland. The trip to the show on Sunday morning, in Kim Everett's open-top Mercedes sports car, was enlivened by the presence and antics of Magic, her 8½-year old Doberman. He is a beautiful and very well behaved dog, much more civilised than in 1992, when, as a large pup, he gave every impression that he would eat me if he could. However, Magic was worried that his mum was going off to the airport to fly to a judging appointment, and he

was going to be bugged in a kennel for two days. Accordingly, he kept whining almost super-sonically and resting his head in my lap for comfort, but he brightened up considerably as soon as we got to the show grounds. Kim kept popping out of the show hall to take him walkies during the day.

This was a small, end-of-season show with just under 150 entries, including 10 Abys and two Somalis. The only Aby kitten there was quite splendid: A Cinnamon male bred by Wain Harding and owned by Kendall Smith, Bastis Adam 12 of Kenipurr was a richly coloured near-



Kim Everett's house, facing Mt Hood



Gr Ch, RW Zzaby's Cigar (TWN M) with breeder/owner Karyn Dillard

I visited a show in Portland, OR; and was able to visit breeders in Little Rock, AR; Asbury, NJ; and San Diego, CA. Here are some detailed, illustrated comments.

Portland

I stayed with Kim Everett, whose very posh home is in the process of becoming palatial, with the addition of a new floor and all sorts of other improvements. The Paws 'N Roses show at Hillsboro, near Portland, was a back-to-back show, with four rings on Saturday and four on Sunday, each with a different set of judges. Kim was judging on Sunday, while on Saturday Kim Ghobrial, a



Zzaby Tawny male kitten¶

adult with excellent type. He is a full brother, from the next mating, of Bastis Tim Buck 3, who was runner-up to CFA Kitten of the Year for 1999/2000.

Unfortunately, I didn't take any worthwhile photos of him, but I did take one of a very nice Blue male, Gr Ch Hillstblues AZ Wildcat of Abyzona, who was Best of Breed in 6/8 rings and appeared in three finals; of a nice Blue neuter, Pandorasbox Samos; and of a very good Fawn Female, Out West Shaniko, who appears below with her breeder/owner Kimberlee Wienke.

Little Rock

My first ever visit to Arkansas was highlighted by the lovely Abys bred by Karyn Dillard in Little Rock, and a visit, nay, pilgrimage, to Graceland in Memphis, TN, which is to Elvis worship what Lourdes is to another religion. Before I go any further, I must tell you that I saw his grave (see the last photo) and that must surely put paid to any lingering doubts as to whether he is dead, and yet we cannot be **quite** sure who is buried there, and so...

Karyn lives in very pleasant countryside near Little Rock, with husband Pat, a nice old black Labrador and lots of her (Zzaby) Abys. She has four Tawny studs, one of whom is the lovely Gr Ch, RW Zzaby's Cigar, pictured here with Karyn. You immediately get an overwhelming impression of type, colour, sweet expression and lovely temperament from him. My photo here is, if I may say so, a very good one, and yet it falls quite short of showing the real cat. Cats and kittens were to be found in most of the rooms of the Dillards' comfortable house. The vast majority of them were Tawny, as is the kitten in the photo here, a young male sired by Cigar.

The trip to Memphis was uneventful, with Karyn's Mazda eating the distance at 85 mph, but we did get lost on arrival. After looking but not finding a map of the place in the back of the car, which contained many, many maps and countless other things, I suggested we ask someone for directions, thus inadvertently shocking Karyn who is not used to men doing such a thing. Graceland is a lovely homestead and beautifully presented; I can recommend a visit to anyone who gets a chance, and please note that this recommendation comes from the very antithesis of an Elvis fan. Having said that, I could help but notice on the many TV sets there, how much better he sang and how much more clean-cut he appeared than the present day rock scruffians. We went through cyclone-like downpours on the way back, but that didn't seem to slow down my driver very much at all.

{¶ Shown here at 13 weeks, he grew up to become CCCA Gr Ch, Gold Dbl Gr Ch & (US) Gr Ch Zzaby's Pipe Dream, DM}

Asbury

This is a very small town in New Jersey, more like a



Gr Ch Clarion's L.L. Bean, DM



Gr Ch Clarion's Graffiti

housing estate, midway between New York and Philadelphia, and about an hour by car from each. Ralph and Karen Helmrich live there with their 7-year old daughter, Leah, a younger son whose name I've forgotten again, their Clarion Abys and the occasional visitor like yours truly and a Dutch Aby breeder who was there on her 4th or 5th kitten-buying foray. The house stands on large grounds; it is lovely and of manor-like proportions. The ground and first floors are the living and sleeping areas, while the huge basement, with its own separate entrance, houses the breeding cats — several pet cats live in the house itself, and keeping them thoroughly spick and span takes up a fair amount of Ralph and Karen's time.

It all adds up to quite a few cats, the majority of them Tawny, and the best ones also happen to have the richest colour I have seen in any Abys anywhere. Their temperament, body type and clarity are also excellent, as you can see from the

photos here, though you will have to go to the Web site to check out the colour. Nor were they slouches in the head type or ear size and placement stakes. This is shown, I hope on the photos of the Tawny male, Gr Ch Clarion's L.L. Bean, DM, and Tawny female, Gr Ch Clarion's Graffiti shown with Karen Helmrich

San Diego

The main difference that their annual rainfall is just a quarter of ours. Sylvia Fitzgerald's cattery is therefore very similar to our indoor-outdoor ones, with stud cats having very large, comfortable runs with plenty of scope for exercise.

On my previous visits to San Diego, "Rider" had always been there, but not this time. This magnificent Tawny male, Gr Ch Phaulkon's Ridin' High, DM, had died toward the end of 1999, at the age of 15½ and Sylvia was still missing and mourning him. At least she has a very worthy



Ch Phaulkon's Favorite Trick

descendant, Rider's grandson Ch Phaulkon's Favorite Trick, born in 1998. Sylvia divides her time between judging, running the Phaulkon cattery, spending time with her married son who also lives in San Diego, keeping very fit and, last but by no means least, watching the San Diego Padres play baseball, often live when they play at home, and on TV otherwise. They were playing the Arizona Diamondbacks in Phoenix while I was there, and lost all three games. This sort of performance is, regrettably, a regular occurrence for the Padres.

Sylvia's cats have – and in my opinion have always had – some of the best head type I have ever seen anywhere. I don't think that the photos I took do them sufficient justice, but let's hope that the one of Tricky above at least give you a good idea.



Elvis's final resting place?

George Kennedy