

# Aby Perfection

## (Are We Getting Closer?)

Going to a major show like the recent Abyssinian Breeder show in Canberra is invariably an eye-opener, simply because you get to see so many good cats that are normally exhibited a long way away, so you learn a lot. Having attended each of the previous 28 Abyssinian Breeder shows, I am in a pretty good position to gauge by how much the breed has improved, even if age does blur the memory. My strong impression is that the current crop is the best ever, although I must confess that I have had this impression many times before.

In parallel with that, I have just completed an extensive update of my Web site, and in doing so, noticed that the CCA standards on the site are dated 2001, so at least a dozen years have passed since the last significant update. Having said that, I should add that the standards have been pretty static over many years, even as Abys evolved significantly. The last really major changes were in the 1980s and 90s, first admitting Blues and Fawns, and Silvers, and finally Chocolates and Lilacs. So, are the Abys of 2013 meeting or even exceeding the standard of 2001? Should it be updated to reflect the evolution? Are Abys perhaps evolving too fast or in the wrong direction?

You will recall that the Abyssinian standard is divided into distinct parts:

- General Type Standard
- Scale of Points
- Faults/Penalties
- Coat and Colour

I would now like to look over these sections in reverse order.

**Coat and Colour** comes in two parts. The first is a general section on coat length, texture and pattern, with specified details for eyes and paws. I have – and have always had – a problem with one word under Coat Length and Texture. It currently states: “- short, but long enough to accommodate two or three bands of ticking. Fine and close, resilient to the touch and with a lustrous sheen.” I would really want the initial word “short” removed. There is no need for it, since the Abyssinian standard is clearly listed under shorthaired cats. Having it there gives the erroneous impression that the Aby coat should be *short by shorthaired standards*, and that sort of thinking has led to phases when Aby coats were too short, though we seem to be OK in Australia currently. That is

not so everywhere, as you can see in Teresa Keiger’s show report elsewhere in this issue

There little else to quibble with, in this section, but there is an interesting sentence that is worth exploring. “**COAT COLOUR** - deeper colour shades are preferred, however intensity of ticking is not to be sacrificed for depth of colour.” I couldn’t agree more, but here is a historical perspective. While the standard always said that for Tawny Abys the ticking could be black or dark brown, back in the early 1980s, Tawny Abys were generally pale and ticked with black; they also tended to have good black hocks. Our first American Abys, like those other breeders imported, tended to be quite well coloured, and their dark brown ticking added to the impression of warmth. Now that overall colour of the Tawny Aby in Australia is better than it has ever been, methinks that the *intensity of ticking is not to be sacrificed* criterion will be better satisfied by black ticking rather than dark brown. And black hocks might become more prevalent.

### Faults/Penalties

**Faults** It strikes me as a bit odd that there is this statement: “Should not be oriental in type” under faults, without any previous or subsequent reference. After all, Abys should not be Burmese or British in type, either! I’d remove this and just go with the excellent definition of the head. Separately, “Too strong a broken necklace” is very badly phrased, and really means “if there is a broken necklace, it should be unobtrusive.”

**Withhold** Those of you who have been breeding Abys in Australia for a mere dozen years or less, have probably never seen distinct bars or rings anywhere on an Aby, nor an unbroken necklace, nor white anywhere not allowed, like a locket. Those withholding faults were put in at a time when such faults were common in Australia, and represent a (correct) intolerance of tabby expression. Incorrect undercoat colour is something even I have not seen, except of course on Fawns and Blues; for them, this is the bane of their existence. It is doubtless the main reason for the much smaller number of Blues we see nowadays, compared with 10 or 20 years ago.

**Scale of Points** The current scale of points is the result of almost interminable past wrangles, a lot of them between breeders who believed that the number of points given for the head was much too high and those who believed that it should be much higher. The resulting table, below, strikes me as a reasonable compromise. Moreover, unlike Europe, we do not have points judging, so the scale is only cursorily observed by most judges. For comparison, the CFA USA points table is shown immediately below, taken from the CFA standard as revised in 2008. It is not too different, but it does give five extra points for the body.

### ICCCA SCALE OF POINTS

Head and neck	15	
Ears	5	
Eye shape	5	25
Body	15	
Legs and paws	5	
Tail	5	25
Coat texture and length	10	
Condition	5	15
Eye colour	5	
Coat colour	15	
Coat ticking and clarity	15	35
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

### ICFA USA POINT SCORE

HEAD (25)	
Muzzle.....	6
Skull .....	6
Ears.....	7
Eye Shape .....	6
BODY (30)	
Torso.....	15
Legs and Feet.....	10
Tail.....	5
COAT (10).....	10
COLOUR (35)	
Colour.....	15
Ticking.....	15
Eye Colour .....	5

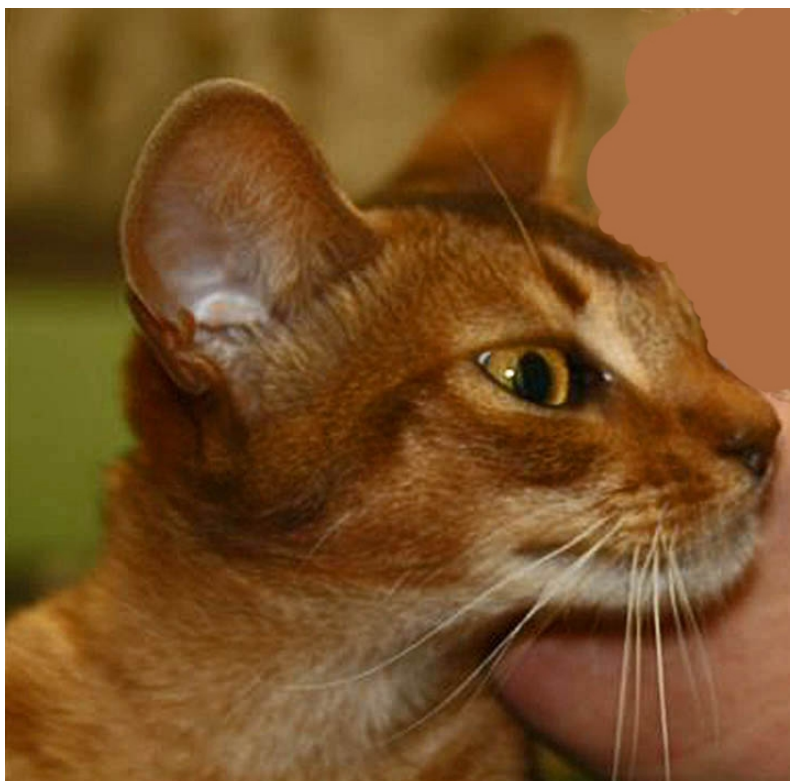
**General Type Standard** This is the most difficult part of the standard, and the part most likely to be interpreted differently by different judges and breeders. It is definitely part that calls for moderation. So, whereas you can interpret the colour standard as implying “the richer, the better”, here nearly every sentence includes words like “medium”, “gentle”, “relatively large”, “medium in length”, “moderately large”, “relatively long” and so on. Thus, for example, you must not interpret the ear definition, “EARS - relatively large, moderately pointed, broad and cupped at the base” as “the bigger, the better”!

#### **“The Argument”**

20 or 30 years ago, a lot of Abys’ ears were too small. Nowadays, it is entirely possible for Abys’ ears to be too large and/or set too wide apart. It is something we need to watch out for. The next two photos illustrate what I regard as an absolutely outstanding cat, with a superb head and ears. Forgive the clumsy erasing in the second photo; it was done to ensure that the identity of the cat was not easily determined. You are welcome to try and guess who the cat was, but the only reward is a warm glow of satisfaction. The one clue I can offer is that she graced the show bench during the “noughties”. The second photo was taken about a year after the first.

Now, assuming that you do regard the adjacent cat highly, what would you think of her if she looked like the first cat over-page? It’s the same cat, but the ears have been “Photoshopped” to stretch them out. A European-born Aby has recently been doing very well in TICA in the US. There has already been one remark online that his ears are too big, and this came not from me but from a breeder in the Netherlands. His photo appears to the right of the stretched one.

The Abyssinian standard is a standard of perfection, and therefore it may be approached – however closely – but it may not be exceeded. So when it calls for something to be slight, it may not be non-existent, while moderately large or long must not be very large or long. The standard describes a “happy medium cat”, and that,





I believe, is what we should be breeding. So with the slight word changes I suggested earlier, and with a some alteration to make it a little easier to breed Blues and Fawns, I am very happy with the current CCCA Aby standard.

The views expressed here are entirely mine, and the article is deliberately provocative. That is, it is designed to provoke you into responding, putting forward somewhat similar or diametrically opposite views, query other aspects of the standard, which can be read in a number of places, including on my Web site at <http://www.nileabys.com/standards.htm>.



**To facilitate all that, I propose to attach all contributions to this article, blog-like, as they are received, and you can include photos if you wish. The article would thus grow with your appended contributions, and additions would be noted on the home page. However, if you really want to “go to town” and write several pages, I would make that a separate article in the next issue.**

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*P.S. On the whole, I believe we **are** getting closer!*