

A GUIDE TO HANDLING AND ASSESSING CATS

The following notes have been compiled from a range of comments kindly provided by BACs, Full Judges and experienced exhibitors to offer guidance to judges and stewards.

Asian (Spotted, Classic, Mackerel or Ticked Adult)

pattern is best viewed from a distance, at least arm's length. The body should be gently straightened, but not the legs and the pattern should be viewed from both sides, as there may be differences. Differences in pattern are not a fault, but seeing both sides allows one to get the best impression.

(Tiffannie)

Type first but look past the 'prettiness'. To check the limbs run your hand down the front leg to make the fur lie very flat. A cat that appears to have chunky limbs can just have a lot of fur. If the leg feels chunkier than you would expect an Asian Shorthair leg to feel, or if it still looks chunky when the fur is pulled flat then the cat should be marked down for that. Don't expect a full ruff and tail plume on a young cat; a Tiffanie coat will not be fully developed until the cat is mature (2 years plus)

Australian Mist

The Australian Mist is a friendly and generally amiable cat and is happy to be held while assessed. However if the cat is unhappy it will be best to assess it on the table while being firmly held by the steward. The coat has a quite unique texture that is dense and resilient with some degree of undercoat. Top coat feels smooth and silky displaying a glossy shine indicative of good health and condition. It is a patterned cat that comes in spotted and marbled patterns. Look at the pattern from both sides, the spotted pattern is formed of symmetrical spots of any size or shape covering the sides, flanks and tummy. The marble pattern should not be confused with the classic pattern in other breeds and should show swirls and streaks giving the impression of marble. In dilute colours the agouti invasion in the pattern may diffuse the clarity of the pattern so stepping slightly back from the cat may help. To assess the balance of the tail it can be extended gently around the body and should reach the shoulder.

Bengal

Bengals are very vocal. This does not mean they are aggressive.

Give them the opportunity to walk out of the pen on to the trolley. Bengals can be territorial especially entire males so take particular care to avoid them seeing their neighbours at close quarters.

Do not grab them. They can express their displeasure in a very loud voice which is upsetting to cats nearby. If they show any signs of aggression towards you, do not judge.

Always check the underside. Groin lockets are not uncommon and these are a withholding fault

Birman

Whilst most Birmans have a calm and equable temperament, some may show anxiety or nervousness by displaying 'huffing and puffing' behaviour. It is advisable to complete your appraisal of the cat as sensitively and quietly as possible, before returning the cat to its pen.

The foot markings can be observed when the cat is standing on a flat surface, lifting each limb to see both the front and back of each paw. A more detailed examination of the paws to determine the exact size and shape of the gloves, socks and gauntlets, can be obtained with the steward holding up the cat securely in front of the judge. The fur on the paws should be stroked the direction of the fur growth. When the cat is in this position, the judge should also be able to check for white patches on the chest. It is not advisable to tip up male cats onto their back.

The tail should be checked with the cat standing on a flat surface, Birmans are more likely to be relaxed in this position.

Good type is of paramount importance, and is preferable to a cat of moderate type, but with a set of almost perfect foot markings.

British

Always ensure that you know the SOP for each pattern/colour within the British Section - The British can be a large cat to handle and is famous for liking all 4 paws on firm ground. The following points may be helpful. Obviously, some of these points may apply to other breeds. And of course, many British are easy and simple to handle – but understanding those that may be out of sorts on the day will be important.

Attitude whilst approaching the cat on the show bench is important 'Sweet talk' them while getting them out, even if they start out a bit grumpy.

- Some Male cats will get upset at the sight of other males so if possible, use your body to block the sight of any 'rival males'

Try to turn cats away when removing them from the pen and remove them back end first. And always have hands supporting them. Don't dither, get on with it and hold them firmly

Keeping calm is very important. If you are nervous most animals will pick up on it.

Make sure you leave the pen door open so you can get them back quickly if you need to

Keep the big boys' back legs firm, a full hand under the chest. They can panic if they don't feel secure.

The British like all their feet on the floor so get them on the table so they can regain their composure as soon as you can. Some like to 'talk' to you but just talk back in a reassuring tone to them while getting on with getting them out.

Stewards should present the cat to the judge sideways first – when a cat tries to impress another cat, they will walk sideways to show their strength – this will help with confidence. When presenting to the judge do not shove them right forward – this may create an offensive situation for the cat

Handle them as little as possible - stand them 4 legs on the trolley facing the open door of the pen so they can see their "home" Be quiet and calm.

When looking at pattern stroke the coat flat so the pattern can be seen. If you need to check tummy, the steward should leave the back feet on the table and quickly lift front legs to show the judge the tummy, avoid lifting them to lay on their back.

Firm but sympathetic handling, plenty of respect and don't take liberties. Listen carefully to messages from the cat - watch out for ears back, narrowing eyes and /or threatening sounds.

Definitely NOT to be stretched or in any other way handled like Siamese/Oriental etc. The British need to be stable is important to them and they like to be able to feel something solid under their feet, not be hoisted up in the air

If necessary, after checking on bite etc. they can go back as you can easily assess soundness of coat etc. in the pen.

We advise against a last stroke when putting back into the pen unless the cat is obviously very friendly – many a British will take a swipe - after judging!

Burmese

Burmese should not be 'stretched' like an Oriental or Siamese. When the tail is brought gently round the side of the body the tip should reach the shoulder.

Cornish Rex

Do not spit on your hands and then wipe the excess down a Rex coat! A Rex coat can be assessed by feel with the eyes closed.

Devon Rex

Do not spit on your hands and then wipe the excess down a Rex coat! A Rex coat can be assessed by feel with the eyes closed. Type always first as it's the 'naughty' look that makes a Devon! The ears, which should be large and low set, help achieve the typical Devon look. A stop can be viewed in profile and easily felt by lightly running your fingers along the bridge of the nose.

Egyptian Mau

The Egyptian Mau has no breed-specific needs in terms of handling, although they can be wriggly! To assess the pattern effectively, you will need to encourage them to stand on the trolley, although some may respond to being held up briefly (not stretched by being pulled out!). The pattern should be distinct from the ground colour with spots that can be large or small, round, oblong, or of irregular shape. Spotting pattern on each side of the body need not match it is the clarity that is more important. It may help to step back from the cat to assess pattern if it isn't clear and while the cats body can be gently extended to assess pattern Maus can be intimidated by vocal neighbours at shows, so please make sure they face away from their neighbours when out of their pen.

When stroking the coat, a Smoke should feel silky, whilst silvers and bronzes should have resilient texture; a soft texture like a Bengal's, is incorrect."

Mau's may be chatty but are generally good natured.

Exotic

An Exotic will be happy and feel secure to lie over your arm with legs falling either side. Exotic eyes should dominate the face they should not need encouragement to open them Allowance should be made for seasonal changes in coat texture and pattern

Korat and Thai

The breed is vocal but this does not mean aggression. If you meet an exhibit expressing strong opinions then talk back confidently and be positive in your approach. Experienced judges expect Korats and Thais to have something to say, indeed there are sometimes comments on lack of 'attitude' when they don't! However, what has to be realised is that Korats believe they should be the only cats at the show. Meeting new people is OK, but other felines are lesser beings. Therefore it's sensible when handling Korats and Thais to keep their attention focussed on the judge and steward and away from other exhibits.

Once lifted the best spot for our breeds is on the table. They like the security of four feet touching base and it's far easier to provide that on the firm surface. Some like to climb and will aim for the shoulder, but beware of a rapid take off from such a position. Korats and Thais are lithe, muscular athletes so maintain firm contact throughout the judging process.

There is emphasis in the SOP on coat colour because the silver sheen is a key feature of its historic description. It's essential to catch the light to visualise this, so the cat may need to be lifted as the judge takes a step back. to view. Overall silvering, being free from shading (uneven colour), or tabby markings, is what is important for both

the Korat and Thai Lilac. Thai Blue Points show silvering too, particularly on the points, and their coats may be shaded to tone with the points, so a sheen may also be evident. Soundness to the roots is irrelevant for all, so stroke fur down to provide the smoothness and gloss, rather than fluff up or part the hairs. Plus such petting is appreciated and makes the experience enjoyable.

Please remember tails are sensitive, no squeezing or tweaking or bending round. It's important that it gives overall balance rather than is measured against the body. When done return gently to the pen with no sudden surprises.

LaPerm

The coat can be pushed both backwards and forwards to assess density and texture and blown into, but if a judge blows on a LaPerm coat it should be a gentle breath and not towards the cats face so as not to startle the cat.

Maine Coon

To get out of the pen get a good grip, one hand under front legs on chest and under rear legs, lift and bring out backwards. They can be heavy cats and do not appreciate being folded in two to be brought out. These are large cats and should be assessed on the trolley, not in mid-air.

Do not pull the brow back to see the profile, gently feel for it. Likewise, it is best to feel for the muzzle squareness and breadth.

Yes, chins need depth but also need width to balance to match the muzzle. Type should take priority over pattern and colour.

Do not bend the tail over the cat to assess length. Run hand down spine from shoulders continuing along the tail to check it balances with the body.

Norwegian Forest

The NFC is a large and elegant cat who should be firmly and confidently handled, they do not appreciate being bundled up and most do not wish to be cuddled or held upside down. To get out of the pen get a good grip one hand under front legs supporting their chest and the other under rear legs, lift and bring out backwards.

The breed is best presented to the Judge held out, to demonstrate the elegance and length of body. To do this get a good grip with one hand under the front legs, with the heel of the hand resting under the chest and the other hand under the pelvis to enable you to present the length of body and tail. With the larger exhibit's placement on the table for further examination is a good idea! Not all cats will "stand" on the table and they should be allowed to rest on the table in the way that is comfortable for them.

NFC's are very curious cats and to get their attention and see the true alert expression and ear set the use of a twizzle stick can be very useful.

The most important criteria of the breed are type; coat quality & conformation, there are no points for colour or pattern.

Ocicat & Aztec

Many Ocicats and Aztecs do not like hearing a tannoy and can often be wary of strangers, so chat them up a bit first by talking to them in a calm manner before making physical contact. Getting them out of the pen rear first is a must whilst keeping them well supported front and rear.

Aztecs/Ocicats, especially males, are powerful but gentle cats who like high places. They can move with a graceful fluidness, which is surprisingly fast. If he or she starts looking round at pen tops or shoulders, move around the cat to distract them.

Please remember, these cats are heavier than they look and like most breeds, a full male may see another full male as a rival.

The Ocicats/Aztecs will settle better if stroked and talked to and respond best to firm and confident handling. They can be expert wrigglers, very heavy to hold and (whether showing signs of nerves or not) it is best to support the cat around the chest and across the rump with their feet remaining on the trolley. Their flight instinct is strong (more so if nervous) so it is beneficial to access them on the trolley and avoid holding them up or stretching them out.

Always judge type before spots or pattern. When assessing the pattern and especially for dilute colours, they are better judged at a distance when held out. Tummy spots and coat pattern can be assessed by gently lifting the cat up at the front while leaving the back legs on the trolley, but not at the expense of possibly losing or distressing the cat. The pattern on both sides of the cat should be assessed to allow comment on how well both sides of the cat match. . The tail should never be bent round to the shoulders, just a hand swept along the full body and tail should be adequate to assess the tail length for balance.

Keeping the pen open with the cat mainly pointing towards the pen (rather than its neighbours!) will allow the cat to feel more secure during judging.

Please leave checking their mouth and bite until just before returning them to their pen

Oriental

Do not overstretch to assess length. They are not elastic bands! It is unnecessary and extremely uncomfortable and can also make sternums 'pop out' if care is not taken. The breed is naturally long bodied, and the body needs to be firmly supported

Persian

To display the cat for the judge and also the public, the cat can be slightly tipped forward and shaken very gently to allow the coat hair to fluff out and then held up to be viewed.

One can say coats are seasonal but some cats' seasons are upside down so don't mark down an excellent type Persian with less coat in the winter just because there might be a mediocre cat with a huge coat.

The forehead should be smoothly rounded like a peach, not just break then slants back, even if smooth. It is easily felt through the fur to establish bone structure.

Always type over coat.

Remove the cat from the pen preferably with the cat facing towards the back of the pen by placing one hand under the chest and using the fingers to hold the forelimbs and then supporting the rump as the cat is slid out. If the cat is not in the right position for removal, the blanket could be turned round with the cat on top, if possible.

Depending on the judge's preference, hold the cat up or put it down on the trolley.

If holding up, let the judge see the front view and side view held at the judge's eye level. Cats should not be cuddled or held close to the body. No stroking of fur forwards or backwards and the less the coat is handled the better.

When the cat is put on the trolley, it is to be gently held. Bites and tails to be assessed with the four paws on the trolley.

Handling for Best in Show

1. Best way to remove the cat from the cat box is for one steward to hold the cat and the other to remove the cat carrier backwards away from both.
2. To hold the cat for display at best in show the cat is to be rested across one forearm for support having the cat's legs straddled across the arm and holding the paws with the fingers and the other arm to support the cat's hind quarters.

Ragamuffin

To get out of the pen get a good grip, one hand under front legs on chest and under rear legs, lift and bring out backwards. Neutered males are often heavy cats and do not appreciate being folded in two to be brought out. These are large cats and should always be assessed on the trolley, not in mid-air, especially when examining their mouth and bite.

Type should always take priority over pattern and colour.

Their coats are not overly long and flowing but should be dense and plush with allowance taken for entire cats, kittens and will vary with the seasons.

Do not bend the tail over the cat to assess length. Run hand down spine from shoulders continuing along the tail to check it balances with the body.

Ragdoll

The Ragdoll is a medium to very large substantial cat that appreciates firm, confident but gentle handling. Before opening the pen door do make eye contact with the cat first. If the cat is asleep do take care when waking the cat. Do not go in and pick the cat up without waking it first. To remove from the pen place one hand under the front legs on the chest and the other hand under rear legs, lift the cat and bring out backwards. Try not to let the cat's head hit the top of the pen door frame. The perfect place for assessment is on the trolley. However some Ragdolls do slip on the trolley and become very nervous. They also have very good, long memories of such incidents. If this is the case put a blanket on the trolley. The overall impression of the cat can be assessed by this method. If the cat is still nervous then pick it up and hold closely and firmly to your body for the head to be assessed. A quick check on bite by gently lifting the lips of the cat is all that is necessary. Tails must be checked but please do not bend the tail back around or over the cat to assess. Run hand down the spine from the shoulders continuing along the tail to check it balances with the body. Type and pattern are vitally important when assessing a Ragdoll. All pattern types must be checked carefully to ensure they conform to the SOP. When checking the profile it is important it has a dip and not a stop or break. This is best assessed by running a finger gently up the nose to feel for a stop. To assess a flat plane on the top of the head this is best done by hand. The muzzle/head conformation can be checked from behind and above the cat looking downwards between the ears. The muzzle should not appear boxy and stuck on. It should gently taper from the head. When returning the cat to their pen please ensure the tail is safely inside before closing the pen door

Russian

"Never rush a Russian" has always been quoted and with good reason!

Russians are rather quiet, gentle cats who like to be approached slowly rather than pounced on and appreciate a kind word first. Gently turn the cat so that it comes out rear first and then stand it on the table holding it firmly, but gently and calmly.

Most dislike being turned on their backs. Some, but not all, like shoulders and with these cats it can be easier to assess bite etc when they are cuddled into the steward's shoulder.

Never stroke them over the top of their heads as they will then 'obligingly' drop their ears and please don't stretch them in mid-air as they find this uncomfortable. Don't "smooth" the coat down – It's supposed to stand away from the body!

Selkirk Rex

The Selkirk Rex is a gentle cat and should be held, not gripped to bring out of the pen. Stand the cat on the trolley to judge.

Siamese

Do not overstretch to assess length. They are not elastic bands! It is unnecessary and extremely uncomfortable and can also make sternums 'pop out' if care is not taken. The breed is naturally long bodied, and the body needs to be firmly supported

Singapura

Singapuras hate being in the air - they go rigid!

If possible, let them walk out onto the trolley, they are amiable people & will usually oblige. If not then just gently & calmly lift them no more than an inch or two off the ground & straight onto the trolley.

Somali

Talk gently to the cats before getting them out. If shy, avoid direct eye contact as cats regard that as confrontational. Somalis are friendly and affectionate but do not like strangers talking loudly and using extravagant hand gestures.

If you need to lift them out do not bring out head first always turn them around. Somalis should never be lifted and stretched - they need to feel the security of feet on the trolley. Somalis love to stand proud.

Always type over colour PLEASE. Heads should have gently rounded contours, never pinched or "foxy". Somalis must always have a smile & ticking.

Sphynx

When handling Sphynx they are great climbers and might try and sit on your shoulder!. They like the closeness of security of human touch

Wrinkled skin may appear particularly around the muzzle, between the ears and around the shoulders. Wrinkles are not a problem in the breed and not a fault in the Standard of Points. Awards should only be withheld or a cat placed in a lower position if the skin shows signs of infection.

Tonkinese

Tonkinese should usually be easy to handle, but if a cat is less than relaxed coming out of the pen it should be placed securely on the judging table straight away. Judges and stewards should be aware that Tonkinese, in particular the males, are usually heavier and stronger than they look. Please do not bend the tail over or around the cat to assess its length; just run your hand down the spine from shoulders continuing along the tail to check that it balances with the body. It should be noted that the modified colours (chocolate, cinnamon, lilac and fawn) will show more distinction between the torso and points colour over the neck and shoulders.

Order of priority for judging:

- 1 Type,
- 2 Coat-Pattern,
- 3 Colour.

Turkish Van and Vankedisi

Turkish Vans should have a well-adjusted temperament, but may not be as tolerant as some other breeds and will let you know if they are unhappy. They will feel most comfortable with all four feet on a firm surface, but when held they should be kept close to the body in order to impart a feeling of security and protection. Do not tip a Turkish Van onto its back, since this will make them feel vulnerable and less in control.

For the above reasons, Turkish Vans may not enjoy being "stretched" along an arm or suspended in mid-air.

Keeping the cat's rear feet on the table whilst lifting the front feet may be more acceptable to the less confident cat, when assessing body length etc.