

# The Abyssinian cavy, or *Beyond the doubles*

By Simon Neesam (2002)

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## Introduction

The Abyssinian is truly unique. No other species in the animal kingdom can boast such an intricate pattern of rosettes, ridges and whirls as the Abyssinian cavy.

The Abyssinian (often shortened to 'Aby') has a complex genetic makeup that sets it far apart from any other breed of cavy; even its nearest relative - the Peruvian - has a number of genetic differences apart from the obvious length of coat. This makeup is easily upset by the introduction of other genes; as a result the breed has largely escaped out crossing and thus has a number of features and characteristics not otherwise found in the wider cavy population.

The Abyssinian is one of the 'original' breeds of cavy, present when the cavy fancy was first established. Reference is made in books from the Victorian era to a rosetted guinea pig, and the Abyssinian Cavy Club (ACC) was established over a hundred years ago.

Perhaps it is the breed's uniqueness and long history that has resulted in the circulation of so many myths or oldwife's tales surrounding the Abyssinian cavy, its appearance, and its management. Some of these are true, some are based unknowingly on fact, others are pure nonsense, serving only to enrage Abyssinian connoisseurs. I would like to start this article on a positive note by attempting to dispel some of these myths.

1/ *"Abyssinians bite..."*

Rubbish! In over 21 years I have never been bitten by one of my Abys and, when judging, have found them to be far more reliable than a number of other breeds. They are a spirited breed and do have a bit of life about them - this is an essential part of the breed's make up, necessary to display their rosettes and ridges to full advantage, but they are not vicious. There are a number of reasons why they might be misconstrued as being so: they are often not handled with confidence, many arrive on the judging table having had their harsh coat flattened into their body, breed classes are likely to contain a significant number of boars, and they have an uncanny ability to spot someone who does not appreciate their beauty.

2) *"Abyssinians are easy..."*

Abyssinians are certainly not easy. A good strain might produce about one in four showable exhibits, but top winners are far less frequent, perhaps one in fifty. Nevertheless, it is by no means a lottery, and they do respond well to selection in the breeding pen, i.e. the fancier can, over generations, see the fruits of his/her work.

3) *"Abyssinians do not require any show preparation..."*

Such a claim would be guaranteed to make you unpopular with Aby fanciers. Show preparation is considered in more detail below, but it is suffice at this point to say that good wins are not achieved by exhibits whose ridges are glued together with grease, and many a good cavy has been relegated to the runner-up position on account of its owner ignoring the shampoo bottle, or mistiming the preparations.

During the remainder of this article I hope also to disprove claims that Abys are *"difficult to judge"* and to show that a good Aby is more that *"eight in line rosettes and no doubles"*. I also hope to demonstrate the many plus points of the Abyssinian.

## History

When writing this section, I realised how little of the history of the Aby I know. With help from a number of senior fanciers I am attempting to compile a history of the breed; however, this will have to form the basis of a future article. In the meantime, I will attempt to provide a brief, potted history of the breed and note some of the most influential breeders. I would of course welcome all comments and information to help fill the (many) gaps.

Key players in the early and middle part of the last century included: Sam Heard who's stud was established in 1924 and who was the ACC's secretary for a number of years; Sid Taylor, a past

President of the ACC, Harold Baddock, Thomas Brierly, and Frank Barnes. Most present day strains of Abys can trace their ascent to the bloodlines developed by the Farmer Brothers.

The majority of modern strains of tort and whites descend from Roy Farmer via Nina McBeath, who enjoyed considerable success in the 1980s, winning three Young SS and an Adult SS, and on to such current fanciers as Tina Tennant (Wildfell Stud).

Brindles found a route from the Farmers, via Derek Pike and others to Jackie Raynor, and Roy and Lesley Barber in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, the Barber's cavies were passed to Andrew Sparkes, who in turn supplied the basis of many of the present day studs (including the foundation for Roy and Lesley current stud in the late 1990s). A further line passed from Derek Pike to one-time ACC secretary Pete Atkins, and in turn to formed the basis of Phil Riley's strain.

In contemporary times, three studs have dominated the stock shows: those of Jackie Raynor, Phil Riley and Andrew Sparkes. Between them they have accounted for nine of the last ten ACC Adult Stock Shows. In particular, Jackie has enjoyed considerable success in recent years, winning the last two Adult SSs, as well as Best in Show at a number of championship shows and, of course the 2002 Bradford Championship Show - her brindle boar being the first Abyssinian to win this prestigious award. However, there is certainly no monopoly and in recent years most opposition has been provided by Lesley and Roy Barber (who won the other Adult SSI), and Tracey Howell. Other current Aby fanciers who have been active for a number of years include Tina Tenant (Wildfell Stud), Daphne Beardsley, Sheila Hendry, Elizabeth Hudson (more often present in the guise of father George), and Simon Neesam.

The ACC is also proud to number amongst its members, fanciers who still maintain studs of Abyssinians that were founded many decades ago, including Chibb Chamberlain, Harold Laycock, Miss Bartholomew (a past Vice President), Pat Voce (Ebor Stud), Jonathan Billing (a past Chairman), as well as our young President, Brian Cutting.

### **The Abyssinian Cavy Club**

The Abyssinian Cavy Club has much to offer its members. Its programme of events includes:

#### ***Stock shows***

The club holds annual Adult and Young stock shows. Here members are able to compete for trophies (many with histories dating back to the early part of the last century) for the best of each colour, as well as best juvenile, and best novice exhibit. Many of the trophies have histories dating back to the early part of the last century. A Best in Show win in the Adult Stock Show is considered the pinnacle of achievement by most members, and only a select number of fanciers have their name on the roll of honour.

#### ***Members' show***

A more recent development has been the launch of an annual members' show. Thanks largely to the generosity of Fred Holmes and his team, the club is able to stage a show purely for Abys. A different judge judges each of the age groups, and the judge and members are encouraged to discuss the reasoning behind the placing in each class; nevertheless, the judge's decision is always final! Fred provides a meal and refreshments throughout the day. It is hoped that the concept might be extended to include a members' barbeque show in early summer.

#### ***Points competition***

Tina Tennant runs a well-supported points competition on behalf of the club. The aim of the scheme is to encourage competition amongst members, particularly those in the more remote regions who might not always be able to attend the main stock shows. The competition runs from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December, and eight mini stock shows are held; each member is provided with a schedule and programme at the start of the year. All shows are judged by ACC panel judges. Points are awarded in each of the 15 breed classes (five in each age group), and the novice classes, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> place. In order to avoid one exhibitor 'dominating' the scheme, if an exhibitor has more than one exhibit placed in a class, only the points gained by the highest placed exhibit will count towards the competition. At the end of the year, perpetual trophies are awarded to the exhibitors who have gained the most points in each of the colour groups, novice classes and juvenile classes.

### *Certificate of merit*

A further competition is also run throughout the year. Local club secretaries are able to apply to the ACC for pen cards to be issued for the best adult, 5-8 month and 3-5 month Abyssinian exhibit at each show (provided there are five or more exhibits in each age group). Members are able to exchange the pen cards for Certificates of Merit. At the end of the year, the member with the most certificates receives a shield to keep.

### *Championships*

The ACC awards championships to individual cavies that have won five breed classes (with at least five entrants) at open shows, under three different Abyssinian CC or National CC judges, four of the wins must be in adult classes.

### *Other information*

The club holds an Annual General Meeting and a biennial ballot to elect its executive, committee and judging panel. At present this comprises: President - Brian Cutting; Chairman - Simon Neesam; Secretary - Andrew Sparkes; Points Secretary - Tina Tennant; Committee - Leslie Barber, Brian Emmett, Tracey Howell, Jackie Raynor, Phil Riley, Steve Wooliscroft and Pat Voce; and Judging Panel - Avril Allen, Lesley Barber, Brian Cutting, Brian Emmett, Peter Gammie, Fred Holmes, Tracey Howell, Ros Lockwood, Simone Lowery, Simon Neesam, Andrew Pearson, Jackie Raynor, Phil Riley, Andrew Sparkes, and Tina Tennant.

More recently, the ACC has entered the digital age thanks to the efforts of Helen Hopkins. Point your browser at [www.abycavyclub.co.uk](http://www.abycavyclub.co.uk)

### **The Standard**

The first standard for the *Abyssinian* (along with those for the *Short Hair* and the *Peruvian*) was adopted by the newly formed National Cavy Club in 1888, and first published in the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1888 issue of *The Rabbit Keeper and Show Reporter*, later to be renamed *Fur and Feather*.

<i>Abyssinian</i>	<i>Points</i>
Condition	3
Length of fur, not to exceed 1½ inch	5
Wiry coat	8
Well rosetted	10
Head well furnished	5
Size	5
Shape	4
Colour	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>

Although some of the details of the standard may have changed over the years, the overall concept and aims and objectives remain the same, and can be summarised by the supporting text that accompanied the 1888 standard:

*Should be large and broad at the shoulders. Fur must be rough, wiry, and well rosetted, and well furnished about the head.*

The Abyssinian standard was last revised in 1992, and now includes rather more words than the 1888 version:

Ridges	20
Rosettes	20
Coat	20
Shape and size	10
Mane and head furnishings	15
Colour	5
Eyes and ears	5
Condition	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Judging**

Most exhibitors believe that their breed of cavy is 'hard done by' on the judging table; however, in the case of the Aby it is probably true! I am always amazed at the number of people who claim to find judging Abys hard, when in reality it is all there before them: nothing is hidden.

One of the problems is the sheer range of quality that is likely to be present before the judge in a big class; a problem not experienced in most other breeds. At a good show it is quite possible to have multi-champions capable of winning Best in Show at prestigious events sharing the bench with also-rans that should have been sent straight to the pet shop.

Before discussing judging it is prudent to mention stewarding. It is not by chance that Aby breeders make the best stewards! There is nothing more disheartening than to see your big hope's coat being squashed before it has even reached the judging table. Much of the problem, I suspect, stems from the myth that Abys are vicious. Any cavy will struggle unless handled with confidence and the Aby is no exception. Stewards should lift an Aby from its pen with one hand beneath the cavy so that it sits on the palm of the hand; the fingers of the other hand should be placed in front of the collar in order to steady the cavy. If Abys are the first cavy to be judged, shavings should be omitted from the judging stalls unless absolutely necessary, since the shavings can easily get caught in the ridges so spoiling the appearance of a well presented exhibit.

To aid the judging of Abys (and to provide guidance for breeders and exhibitors), the Abyssinian Standard is accompanied by a series of remarks and notes. These are included in parenthesis, and expanded upon in the following paragraphs.

To be judged fairly, the Aby MUST be sat squarely on the table or judging stool. It is impossible to assess the layout of an Aby when it is sat on your hand. The slightest movement or inclination of the hand can make the difference between the exhibit appearing short coupled or long cast. Similarly, a large cavy held in a small hand will appear to be longer cast than a small cavy held in a large hand.

To start with, the judge should give each Aby the benefit of the doubt as regards layout, and should gently 'tidy' or straighten-up the exhibit, pushing collars (usually back) and back ridges (often forward) into their optimum position. If genuine faults are present they will soon become evident as the animal moves and the ridges start to creep back into their natural arrangement.

### ***Shape, the overall effect***

The Guidance to judges and exhibitors notes that 'The overall effect is most important. An Abyssinian should be cobby and thick set with a dense harsh coat, giving the ridges their erectness. When the ridges are straight, a checkerboard pattern is formed. The Abyssinian should be short coupled; this is achieved when the collar is well set back behind the shoulders and the back ridge well up in front of the hipbones. This gives a compact animal with deep centred cup shaped rosettes.'

A good Aby is more than eight rosettes in straight lines with no doubles. Just as a good Black should have the mysterious 'glamour', so the Aby should have good shape. Such a quality will only be achieved in an exhibit is well coupled, and that has good furnishings, a wealth of coat, and deep, cup-shaped rosettes displayed on fit, cobby body with plenty of size, and width. Shape is best judged as an initial impression, before the assessor's opinion is clouded by more 'trifling' details. It is relatively easy to breed short-coated exhibits free of rosette faults, and it should be the judge's first task to undertake an preliminary assessment of the class in order to spot those Abyssinians that have that extra quality.

### *Ridges*

Having assessed the cavy's shape, an appraisal should be made of its ridges. The Standard notes that ridges are 'To be straight and erect and stand well up, and placed as follows: the centre ridge running along the backbone from collar to rear; two side ridges running parallel to the centre ridge on either side; a collar ridge running over the shoulders at right angles to the centre ridge; and a back ridge running over the hips and parallel to the collar. The ridges to be so placed as to give a neat close-coupled effect.'

#### *Collar ridge:*

This is the single most important feature. No good Abyssinian has a poor collar. It should be deep, erect and straight, and well placed behind the shoulder.

Faults in suggested order of seriousness:

- pushes forward on one or both sides to give flat shoulders and a long saddle
- twists or steps
- collar in correct position when viewed from the top, but with the lower portion pushing forward when viewed from the side
- twirls at the point where collar and mane meet

On patched exhibits, care should be taken to ensure that an alignment fault actually exists and is not just a visual illusion arising from a change in coat colour

#### *Back ridge*

The back should be straight and contain plenty of coat, and be placed high up on the cavy's rump in order to produce a short-coupled saddle.

Faults include:

- flatness - resulting in a long saddle, and a dished profile when viewed from the side
- steps in the ridge
- twirls at the point where ridges meet

#### *Hip ridge*

When viewed from the above, the hip ridge should extend at right angles to the body of the cavy, so accentuating the width of the body. When viewed from the side, the ridge should be straight and vertical. It should not start at a point close to the collar and then veer diagonally to meet the back ridge, so causing triangular shaped lower saddle rosettes. Worse still, it should not be flat, lying close to the body, forming indistinct hip rosettes. avoid:

#### *Centre, side and rump ridges*

When felt between the thumb and forefinger, these ridges should contain a wealth of coat. The side ridges should be placed well down the side of the exhibit to prevent the upper saddle rosettes appearing too narrow.

### *Rosettes*

If an exhibit's ridges are in the correct position, and of good depth, the chances are that it will also have a good layout of rosettes. The Standard notes that rosettes are '*To be well formed, of good depth and radiating from a pinpoint centre. They should be distributed evenly over the body and each rosette to be clear and distinct from each other and placed as follows: four*

*rosettes in direct line across the body forming the saddle and side rosettes, a rosette on each hip in line with each other and two thumb shaped rosettes with equal centres. Shoulder rosettes optional.* The Guidance to judges notes that *'Rump rosette centres are normally two thirds of the way down the rump, but should not be too low.'* and perhaps most importantly that *'A double, lifter or split rosette on an otherwise good exhibit should not be heavily penalised. Open centres and guttering are often wrongly penalised on dark coated or light coated Abyssinians with dark skins.'*

Despite tales to the contrary, all Abys have a full compliment of rosettes, albeit that some may occasionally appear hidden by flat ridges.

### **Coat**

The Standard calls for *'A wealth and depth of thick, harsh coat. Not to exceed 1½ inches (4cm for those of us that do not remember inches) in length.'* Again, features of the breed are inter-related, and if a cavy has good ridges, it is likely to have a good wealth of coat; check in particular for weaknesses in wealth in the side ridges and the back ridge. The coat should be as harsh as possible, although not at the expense of cleanliness. Harshness is best assessed by gently pushing the palm of the hand down onto the ridges in order to judge resistance; whilst an allowance must be made for age (it is not until six months that the adult coat develops) soft, silky coats that do not support themselves should be avoided. The Guidance to judges notes that *'Boars are most commonly shown in adult classes as they have harsher coats, but sows should not be unduly penalised.'*

Harsh coats are produced in the breeding pen, and are certainly not achieved by keeping stock in cold conditions. I find they are affected by all extremes of weather and often at their softest in January, just in time for Doncaster...

### **Type and size**

As noted above, good type and size are vital if an Aby is to have good shape; the Standard states that the exhibit should be *'Thick set, cobby, broad at the shoulders and large throughout.'*

### **Mane and head furnishings**

The Standard states that *'The mane harsh and erect. Head well furnished with hair and a good moustache.'* The Guidance to judges notes: *'The head is greatly enhanced by a wealth of mane and moustache, which is formed by the hair growing forward from the jaw line meeting the hair from the nose. Shoulder rosettes are optional, but improve appearance when displayed.'*

### **Colour**

Colour is considered in more detail below, but the Standard requires that it is *'clear and bright with plenty of lustre'*

### **Eyes and ears**

The Standard notes *'Eyes, large, bright and bold. Ears large and well drooping'*.

### **Condition**

Again, good condition is essential to achieve good shape, and the Standard notes: *'Flesh firm and hard when handled. Clean and healthy.'*

To summarise, the Standard includes a useful list to prioritise some of the more common faults:

- 1/ Flatness anywhere, especially on back and runs to collar or flat sides
- 2/ Weak, thin or twisted ridges
- 3/ Double or split rosettes, open centres, open centres, lifters or guttered rump rosettes'

### **Colours**

#### **Brindles**

The brindle comprises a mix of red and black hairs in varying ratios, resulting in a spectrum of brindles from light (where the red hairs predominate) to dark (where the black hairs are more

numerous). There is no specified pattern to conform to and to be precise this colour should be referred to as brindle/tortoiseshell since either pattern (or, as is usually seen, a combination of the two) is accepted. However, the colours should be rich and bright, and carried down the hair shaft.

Most of the big Abyssinian winners have been brindles. I am not aware of any genetic linkage between the brindle colouring and depth or strength of coat, and suspect that this is largely due to the number of brindles kept. Notwithstanding this, it is no accident that what is a rare or unknown colour pattern in other breeds should be so successful in the Aby, since the mix of colours displays the rosettes to best advantage.

### Roans

The majority of roans are basically brindles with white hairs scattered throughout the body (but not the head or feet) in varying degrees. When in combination with a self red Aby, a *strawberry roan* is produced, and when coupled with a self black the result is a true *blue roan* (many roans based on a dark brindle appear to be blue roans at first glance). Again, roans have had much success on the judging table and like the brindle, the mix of colours shows off the rosettes to good effect. It is interesting to note that the roan pattern has long been known in the Abyssinian, and was only developed into a smooth variety by Jonathan Billing in the 1970s. Mature roans do have a tendency to become 'woolly coated', and I think there is a case for a genetic linkage here, albeit accentuated by the white hairs, which can appear to 'float above' the darker hairs. Any Aby exhibiting an area of roaning is classified as a roan. White blazes are allowed and are inherited with the roan gene. White patches on the body are also permissible, although, personally, I believe they detract from the attractiveness of a roan.

The roan factor is semi-dominant; like roan hamsters, horses and merle dogs, the homozygous phenotype has a lethal factor. Most roans are bred through roan x brindle or roan x self matings, as such, approximately 50% of the offspring should be roan and there is no likelihood of producing white, partially sighted, microphthalmic babies. The Abyssinian Cavy Club does not promote breeding two roan animals together.

### Self reds

The red factor is a simple recessive to the brindle. When present in a double dose (homozygous) it has the effect of covering up any black hairs, so producing a self red. The red colour should be as deep and rich as possible.

A red must inherit a red gene from both parents. For two brindles to produce red offspring, both parents must carry the red factor; in this situation, *c.*25% of the litter should be red. A red carrier crossed with a red should produce *c.*50% reds. Red x red matings will produce only reds. Many, but by no means all, strains of brindles carry the red gene in varying strengths. Thus some studs produce many reds, some few, and some none. I think (although I am not one hundred percentage certain) that it is possible to spot red-carrying brindles and roans by their predominance of red hairs, particularly in the cheeks and jowls.

Many modern strains of Abyssinians comprise examples of each of the above colours. This enables a single stud to consistently produce examples of brindles, roans and selfs and so, at bigger shows, enter up to three of the usual five breed classes in each of the age groups.

### Other selfs

The only other self seen in any number is the black, and even these are quite rare. The black factor is dominant to brindle (although not completely, and those that blacks that carry a brindle gene may exhibit occasional red hairs or patches). The black is not the easiest colour to assess, particularly in poor lighting, the lack of contrasting coloured hairs can make the ridges appear indistinct. Coupled with this, the contrast between dark hairs and lighter skin can make rosette centres appear open. Self Abys may be shown in any colour defined by the English Self CC. In the past, self chocolates were seen, and Ian Cinderby developed a line of lilac Abys in the 1970s - unfortunately they inherited the lilac temperament and thus did not have the charisma of a true Aby and the project was not continued. Whites are occasionally seen, but these are usually over-white tort and whites. Again, all the colours should be rich and carried well down the hair shaft.

## Tort and whites

Tort and whites comprise a mix of black and red patches on a white base. They are in fact brindles or tortoiseshells combined with the white spotting gene. The white spotting gene has the effect of breaking the colour up into clear, solid patches, hence 'brindle and whites' are rarely seen. Although the resulting pattern is largely random, it does show a predisposition to the pattern required in a Dutch cavy, a pattern observed in cattle, cats, dogs, etc. Like all these animals, the last place to 'lose' the colour is the cheeks. The gene has also been shown to have a slight sex linkage, with sows displaying, on average, very slightly more white.

Historically, tort and whites were one of the most popular and successful colours. However, the 1990s were not a good decade for this colour and they lost much ground in terms of quality and size. Notwithstanding this, a number of good quality tort and whites have been produced in recent years to suggest an upturn in their fortunes. It is good practice not to mix tort and whites with other colours, and as a result tort and whites often display different strengths and weaknesses to brindles; for example, tort and whites often have superior head furnishings. However, many of the 'new' tort and whites can claim a significant proportion of brindle blood in their recent past. Roan x tort and white is not recommended. Not only does it produce aesthetically challenged offspring, but also a tendency to reduce the markings to circles around the eye. Thus it is not possible to tell whether or not the offspring are roaned. This could of course lead to unpredictable and possibly distressing breeding results.

## Any other colours

At the present time, there are few AOCs being exhibited. The most common are chocolate/red/white tricolours (most descending from Brian Cutting's stud) where the chocolate acts as a recessive to the black of a tort and white. 'Golden' agouties are also seen, these have the advantage in the breeding pen of being dominant to most colours, and thus a cross to a good brindle should produce agouties in the first generation. Recently, largely due to the efforts of Tina Tennant, silver agouties have started to make an appearance. Red and whites, and black and whites are occasionally seen. Although these are often miss-marked tort and whites, some breeders do maintain pure strains.

## Breeding

Good Abyssinians are bred in ones own shed, and not acquired as a result of trawling pet shops on wet Tuesday afternoons. As I noted at the beginning of this article, the Aby comprises a complex mix of major and minor genes, which, together, produce a breed with a significant number of features. As such there is a lot that can go wrong with an Aby! I believe that it is vital that all the desired features of the breed should be present somewhere in the stud, failing this, the cavies must be capable of producing the missing factors. Ideally, these features would all be displayed on one or two animals....

The aim of your breeding programme should be to promote the positive features and eliminate the undesirable to produce a strain of consistent winners, not surprisingly this is not easy! Your individual interpretation of the Standard, with the inevitable emphasis on what you consider to be important, and what you believe can be sacrificed, will in turn result in the success or otherwise of your individual strain. Some fanciers seem to breed Abys for many generations seemingly without progress. With any breed it is easy to get in a rut where by the offspring are very similar (i.e. have similar genetic makeup) to the parents. This is fine if the strain is producing winners but if not, can be difficult to get out of.

As with most breeds, breeding stock should be as near to the standard as possible. This is not to say that all showable Abys make good breeding stock, or that non-showable cavies should be excluded from the strain. For what it is worth, I believe in selecting stock that has achieved good size and substance, has a good wealth and depth of coat, and is well furnished. In particular, I would avoid the use of cavies with collar faults, long cast saddles, or short, flat coats (no matter how neat they appeared). In return, I will accept doubles, lifters, out of line centres, etc. (it is worth noting that doubles appear more pronounced on deep, short coupled Abys). Doubles tend to come and go in a strain, but once depth of coat is lost from a bloodline it cannot be salvaged. Again, get the ridges right, and the rosettes will take care of themselves.

## Showing



Young Abys need to have lost their soft baby coat and the new coat needs to have gained sufficient depth before they can be shown. Often this is not until they are well over 12 weeks. In 3-5 month classes, sows can compete equally with boars, and in fact a 4 month old sow can often carry more substance and look more impressive than her brother. However, this does not last and there are few sows that can hold their own in a competitive 5-8 month class. This situation can be seen as very much to the Aby fancier's advantage - there being no need to make difficult decisions regarding whether or not to risk breeding from a sow. Possibly because of their more streamlined shape, difficult births and such conditions as toxaemia are rarely experienced. By the time they are adult, the vast majority of sows simply do not have the depth of wealth of coat to make it worthwhile omitting them from the breeding programme. Those few that do have sufficient qualities should definitely be put straight back into the breeding pen!

Stock should not be over shown, particularly when young. As with all cavies, the aim should be to produce a cavy capable of winning as an adult

To achieve show success, preparation is essential. A periodic bath is required to rid the coat of grease, hayseeds, loose hairs, etc., and particular attention should be paid to keeping the back ridge clean. This will need careful timing as it is likely to put the recipient out of action for a number of weeks; undertaken too near a show and the coat will be too soft. Regular brushing/combing will keep the coat of loose hairs.

In the run up to the show, in addition to the usual good husbandry to produce the cavy in top condition, training is required to ensure that he shows himself of well on the table and does not become upset or stressed - both conditions that are likely to result in the cavy's coat going fluffy and thus impossible to assess.

Immediately prior to the show, the grease spot will need cleaning and the feet washing. It is quite an art to prevent the rest of the cavy from getting wet!

## Conclusion

If you wish to keep a breed of cavy that has a unique and fascinating appearance, that is a challenge yet responsive to selection in the breeding pen (sometimes!), where every individual is different, and, most of all, that has plenty of character, then look no further than the Abyssinian.

I will end this article with a quote from Miss Gertrude Armitage Southam (*'...a thoroughly practical breeder of cavies...'*), writing in 1888. *'We all know the smooth-coated guinea pig, with its compact little body and short, sleek fur. Many people seem to think that there is too much of the 'rat' about this breed to make it attractive, and certainly one smooth-coated cavy I once possessed so much resembled a rat with its long, lean body and glassy pink eyes, that some people could hardly suppress a shudder when it approached them'*.

Comparing them to the smooth coated cavy, Miss Southam describes Abyssinians as *'much handsomer and more imposing-looking cavies, with perhaps just a touch of ferocity about their appearance, slightly disconcerting to the novice, but which is quite inconsistent with their amiable disposition'*.