

The Bombay

Black is beautiful

by Charlene Beane

"I'D LOVE to own a panther." This oft heard comment piqued the imagination of prominent breeder, Nikki Homer, of Shawnee Cattery. Knowing that most people could never - and **should** never - own a real black panther, she set out to create a mini-panther.

For Nikki Homer, the road to Bombay has been a long one. 'She says: "I'd never create another breed again." She started in 1958 by breeding a black American Shorthair and a Burmese. The results failed to fulfill her fantasy. The kittens grew up to look like black American Shorthairs with thick American Shorthair coats, rather than parlor-size panthers. They were neutered or spayed and sold as pets.

But the dream persisted. Years of searching, buying, breeding and showing went into creating the perfect Burmese and black American Shorthair upon which to build her basic stock so she could start again. Finally, she chose a Grand Champion Burmese and a black American Shorthair with eyes so copper that any cat geneticist would suspect Persian blood somewhere in the dark corners of its pedigree. This time the experiment was a success: Mini-panthers were born.

But would they breed true? Would they find public acceptance - and acceptance within the cat associations to enable them to compete for championship status? Were they different enough from other black shorthaired cats to justify their establishment as a separate breed?

Many years of selective breeding followed that first litter. Hundreds of kittens not quite qualified to stay in the breeding program were neutered and spayed and sold as pets.

Nikki Homer began getting answers. The Bombays did breed true. She consistently got totally black cats with huge copper eyes, short, shiny coats and Burmese head and body types. They were decidedly different from any other black cat.

Acceptance from people who had Bombays as pets was enthusiastic -- but it takes a long time to win over other breeders and the governing cat associations. However, in 1976, eighteen years after the first Bombay experiment, the Bombay was recognized for championship status in the Cat Fanciers Association.

If you live in the West -- even if you follow the cat shows -- you probably have not seen the Bombay. Nikki Homer calls herself the originator and protector of the Bombay, so show quality Bombays have not been widely circulated. However, now that they have gained recognition, they will undoubtedly become more popular. When you do see one, here is what to look for:

The Bombay is the only cat that judged fifty-five percent on color and coat. The color is jet-black to the roots, the coat texture is fine, very short, close-lying and satiny, with such a high sheen that it looks like patent leather. Of course, the nose leather and paw pads are also black. The eye color may range from golden to deep copper; however, copper eyes are considered superior and the depth of eye color would be a deciding factor in judging two other-wise equal Bombays.

If you ignored the coat, a Bombay would look, like a Burmese -- rounded head, wide-set eyes, short muzzle. In profile, there is a visible nose-break and the eyes seem to protrude. The wide-set ears are rounded and medium in size.

The show standard defines the Bombay as a medium-size cat. Specifically, the average adult female weighs 5-7 lbs., and the males are about 7-9 lbs. The tail is of medium length and straight -- no kinks allowed!

As always, the show standard tells how to look at a cat, but not how to live with one. Bombays are for people who have always wanted a panther, a dog and a monkey. They are extremely smart and agile. They are easily leash-trained, fetch naturally, and love to guard the house. Their short, tight coats make them desirable as totally indoor cats.

Horner says that the hybrid cross of, the Burmese and American Shorthair has made the Bombays hardier and less vocal than the Burmese. (Burmese breeders will get their chance for rebuttal in an upcoming article on their breed.) Also, there have been no reports of allergies in the Bombays.

Although Nikki Horner breeds Persians, Siamese,

Himalayans, American Shorthairs, Burmese and Bombays, she chooses the Burmese and Bombays as her personal house pets.

The average Bombay litter is four to eight kittens, although Horner had one Bombay super-mother who gave birth to thirteen kittens.

Although there have been several Bombay breeding pairs sold to other breeders throughout the country, Shawnee cattery is still the main proponent of the patent leather cats with the copper penny eyes.

Nikki Horner says that the mini-panther look appeals to men and that she has probably sold more Bombays to men than to women.

The Bombays will be an interesting breed to watch now that they are qualified to compete in the shows. Their appeal to breeders and pet owners still remains to be seen on a nationwide scale, but their beauty, short coats and active personalities will no doubt make them very attractive to prospective owners when they are more available. After all, what cat lover wouldn't secretly love to have a panther!

This article originally had two photos inserted in it, but the photocopy that I had access to had been copied some many times that the pictures were unusable. If anyone has an original copy, I would appreciate a scanned copy of the photos!!