

ACBA: Breeds and Varieties

## **RAISING & SHOWING CORONETS AND SILKIES**

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### **THE ADDICTION**

When one first sees a long hair such as a Coronet or Silkie, they can be taken back by the breath-taking beauty of long sweeps covering a show board and a mane which proudly arches over their crown. The sight soon can become an addiction and true lovers of these breeds are forever hooked. It takes a special kind of exhibitor to raise these beauties. The dedication of daily, weekly, and monthly grooming & conditioning is paramount. Anyone can purchase a nice long hair baby, but it takes time and effort to present the long hair to its' greatest potential. So once your eyes have been fixated on these beauties, where do you start?

### **THE STANDARD**

First off, purchase a Standard of Perfection from your local club. If you show in Ontario under the Ontario Cavy Club or the Dominion Rabbit & Cavy Association, then purchase the Standard of Perfection published by the Ontario Cavy Club. Both of these clubs use this Standard for judging purposes. If you show in the United States under ARBA Sanctioned Shows; then purchase the ARBA Standard of Perfection. These standards are different and therefore it is advised you purchase the Standard for the club you will be showing under.

The next step is to go to a few shows and watch the long hair exhibitors present their cavies. Do you really want to get addicted to these breeds?

Watch their preparation, presentation and then bundling them back up to take home. Look and see how much equipment is carted with them. As a long hair exhibitor it takes me at least twice as long to cart in all my equipment compared to the short hair exhibitors. From regulation show boards, grooming supplies, and custom designed carriers; there is much to think about before you pack these beauties up before a show.

Also, you cannot at the last minute decide who you are taking to a show; you must plan ahead and prepare them for the impending show. Are you willing to accept the fact a long hair breed has a short life span as a "show cavy"?

Most long hairs begin to come into their own at about 5 months of age and then peak between 7-9 months. After that, they may begin to lose their texture and there is not much point showing (varies between blood lines). There are always new cavies coming aboard and your 10 month old cavy who is losing texture will easily be defeated by a 7-8 month old who is in their "prime".

Once your cavy has been "cut down" for breeding, that is it! No more show career, it cannot be coated back out after a litter. Again, I stress - the show career of a long hair is short compared to their short coated cousins. This is difficult to get used to and as much as you may want to prolong their show career, you cannot. Everyone must learn when to cut down their show cavies. This varies between exhibitors, but the more successful exhibitors just "know" when it is time. They can feel the cavy reach its' prime and then they can feel when they are losing their "edge". Still interested?

### **GROOMING**

This is the most arduous task of raising long hairs. By the time they are a month old, you should be taking your young show prospects out every few days. During this time out, they are getting use to being handled and trained to stay quiet on their show board. A small baby brush can be used to get them familiar to the idea of their future grooming rituals.

Once they are 3-4 months of age, you can usually get a small wrapper in their rear sweep. It will probably fall out many times during the day, you must persevere and place it back in. Once the coat gets a bit more length, you can pass this junior coat stage and move on. I find this is the most difficult stage; it takes a lot of patience!!! Once the wrapper settles in and stays put you are well on your way. By this time, your cavy is used to being handled, you are not pulling out your hair every time a wrapper jiggles loose and now the fun begins!

Every second day from this point forward, your cavy should be taken out and wrappers checked. Re-wrap if necessary and if their coat gets a bit gummy from pee stains, etc., either (a) wash their bottom and re-

wrap or (b) wash the entire cavy. From my experience, trying to wash their bottoms, the wee one squirms into the spray of water and gets wet, so he/she gets an entire washing!

Are there any secrets to grooming? Simple answer, NO! the only tip which is very essential is dedication. If you see a wrapper coming loose, it is time to re-wrap. No matter how busy you are - it really only takes a few minutes of time, if you are organized. Have your grooming station organized with prepared wraps, elastics, brushes, combs, and your table set up with a board. Then simply take your cavy out, and with all your supplies at your finger tips, you can re-wrap within minutes.

### **CARTING OFF TO A SHOW**

Well ! good luck here! This is one moment I do wonder why I raise long hairs -LOL! From customized carriers to multiple show boards and grooming equipment, it takes forever to pack the car. Customized carriers you ask? Yes! Holes are 12" x 12" to give ample room for a senior cavy in full wraps. Do they need that much room? As far as I am concerned, simply put, yes!

In the Fall of 2000, I was showing a 52 oz boar with full set of wraps sticking out of his sides. In this 12 x 12 hole, he \*just\* had enough room to turn around. Quite often I travel far distances to get to a show, and if the show cavy is in a carrier for the entire weekend (2-4 days); I want to make sure he/she is as comfortable as possible. These carriers also have a hay compartment, places for food dishes and water bottles; all within the carrier itself, such that the bottles and dishes cannot be knocked loose in a busy show room. Also, I have made covers for the carriers, not to keep them warm, but to keep their "hotel rooms" quiet and private. This keeps the show cavy more at ease while they are away from home and their familiar surroundings.

When traveling, it is most important to pack up a cooler just for the cavies. Yes, a cavy cooler. I travel with a Thermos filled with our local water supply (supplemented with Vitamin C); a Tupperware container of Romaine lettuce and a Tupperware container of Carrots. Note: the carrots are only given after they have finished being shown - Beta-Carotene stains on their chins do not improve show presentation - LOL!

After you have finished packing up the cavies and their gear; is their room for your gear? Probably not, so pack light ! But, it is all part of the game. What I

do pack up for personal use, is definitely a cart. This makes loading in all your equipment much less painful. I also pack up two folding chairs for my husband, Anthony & I - as many show sites do not provide seating arrangements, and the day can be very long indeed!

Comfort for cavies and yourself is the key to making a show day more enjoyable. I pack as light as I can. I used to bring a grooming stand to the shows, but have learned, it is an unnecessary piece of equipment. You can stack your show boards on your carriers and still groom properly.

### **FINALLY - THE LINES**

You have made it. You have accepted the fact that raising Coronets and Silkies involve a lot of organization, time and patience - but you still want to go for it! You have studied the Standard of Perfection, you understand grooming is a dedication, you realize that your car will be packed to the hilt with cavy related supplies and you are limited to one suit case. Now, you need a show cavy to join the realms of the long hair crazed enthusiasts.

Where do you find your show cavy? Again, go to a few shows and see who is raising what. But remember one thing, lines do differ and offer different traits - what do "you" want? Pick a line and stick with it - do not get "this and that" and try to blend them in all together. It simply would take years to create your own line and basically, mixing and matching doesn't work.

If you really like a line - go full steam with it, buy a trio and breed them together. If you do want to outcross then do it VERY slowly and very wisely. If you see another exhibitor showing a different line and you say "hey! I want that look in my line" - do not think for one minute you can purchase "one or two" cavies of that line, breed it in and you will get those traits. Usually, lines are tightly bred and when you outcross you can lose a lot from both lines.

If you like another line better than your own, then choose what you really want to do. From personal experience, I had an opportunity to acquire a line that I have dreamed of owning for years. I slowly bred the line in and continued acquiring the line until now - whereby greater than 90% of my current line is based on this particular blood line. I knew I simply couldn't "do it" with one or two animals, so I kept on bringing the line in and phasing my older line out.

This was a very expensive task and it took a lot of effort on my part to achieve. But, it is basically comes down to how committed you are in keeping a line tight. If you want "new blood" or an "outcross", still stick with the same line, but try and find a more distantly related boar or sow - BUT! most importantly stay within the line itself.

One thing I have learned through the years of raising Coronets; is you must be dedicated to your line and stick with it. It is so easy to purchase a cavy which you think will "benefit" or "improve" your line, but simply stated, it is more beneficial to your line if you stay with it and are completely dedicated to it. If you like qualities in a line better than your own - then infuse the new line and weed out the old. That is the best advice I can give to you.

### **BLINDNESS**

As a final summation to this article on "Raising Coronets & Silkies," do not mislead yourself and do not become "caviary blind" - where you think you cannot improve what you have, as you have the best out there. No matter how long you have been in the fancy or how long a breed has been established, all breeds and lines can be improved upon. In my opinion, there is no perfect breed or cavy out there.

We as breeders/exhibitors, have a Standard of Perfection - and why do they call it that? Because, we are all striving to attain the perfect cavy -that is why we breed in the first place. There is a challenge in this fancy and the challenge is to always remain objective and to continue to improve upon the lines you have. If you think you have all wonderful stock; i.e.- they are all have outstanding density, texture, and body conformation - then look again. Take that

second look - be critical and see realistically, where you can improve.

I currently own an outstanding boar - his name is Iroquois. He was shown 8 times and took home 7 Best of Breeds which led to either a BIS or RIS win. He was totally amazing on the show tables - sat there like a Prince and let the judges oooh and ahhhhh over him.

Was he perfect? NO! I know where he needs improvement, but that is between Iro and I. He was outstanding, I will give him that - but not perfect. He was "point" judged at the Toronto - Royal Winter Fair between (3) different judges (after his BIS win); and he averaged out at 94.0/100. Where I found his faults, others did too. Was I disappointed? Of course not - it is reality.

The big boy Iroquois is currently in the breeding shed now. He has six babies on the ground already. Are they perfect? Of course not. Will they be like their sire? Doubtful. Iroquois was an extraordinary show Silkie, one that comes along once in a while. IF I can ever duplicate him, I would be thrilled - but I am a realist - I do not "dream" my days away thinking that every baby from him will be awesome. I can only hope, persevere, and coat out his young descendants. It is all part of the challenge, and IF it were so easy, there would be no more challenges, and if that occurred - well! time to move on to a new hobby ...

### **CONCLUSION**

Well, that concludes my story on raising Coronets and Silkies. It stems from my experiences and as always, the written word is subject to interpretation. But, if it has helped one person in the fancy, then it has served its' purpose.

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