The American Curl

BREED SEMINAR
TICA 2019  BY  GRACE RUGA
Introduction

- History and origins
- What influenced us as we wrote the American Curl Standard
- Defining the American Curl Core Identity Traits
- Understanding American Curl Ear Types
This is what MORNING SICKNESS looks like with Warm Cat Treatment!!
Shulamith’s first grandson, Master Luke
Litter from first Curl to Curl breeding
The American Curl was born!
To assist us, in writing the Breed Standard for the American Curl, Jean introduced us to a book, called The Book of The Cat. In the early 1980’s this volume was considered the most accurate text available, presenting a short biography of each recognized breed with detailed drawings, some photos, a section on coat and color genetics, and basic cat care information.
We were told in order to develop a breed we needed to choose a recognized breed similar in type and structure to the American Curl to use as our “outcross” breed.

At the same time we were to write a Breed Standard for the American Curl describing our structural ideal and the traits that made the American Curl unique from all other breeds.
Writing the American Curl Standard

Choosing Terminology to reflect the breed identity and essence

Here are a few of the pages from The Book of The Cat with visuals and/or vocabulary words we borrowed from a few of the breed’s descriptions in that volume.
The Angora is one of the most ancient breeds of cats, with its origins rooted in the history of its native Turkey. It is undoubtedly also one of the most beautiful, with its elegant body and long, silky coat. It was probably the first type of long-haired cat to reach Europe, yet until quite recently was completely overlooked both there and in North America by the much more powerfully built Persians.

The original Angora: Although there have been suggestions that the Angora traces its descent from the cruel, or Palla’s cat (Felis siberica, see p.34), most zoologists agree that fundamental differences between the two make this impossible. A more likely explanation is that the gene for long hair (see p.34) was introduced into — or spread to — a group of cats with the fibre-like build known to cat breeders as foreign cats (see p.34). Limited opportunity for breeding outside the group allowed the long-coat characteristic to become fixed, so that a new-breeding long-hair cat with foreign body build evolved.

When, in the 16th century, Angoras from Turkey were taken to France and England they were much admired, yet it was not until the mid-19th century that attempts were made to introduce the differences between them and other long-coated cats coming from Persia and Russia. An English writer of 1868 described the Angora as a beautiful variety with silvery hair of fine texture generally longest on the neck but also on the tail. But the breed had to compete with the Persians and Russians, and eventually the Persian became the preferred variety. Any resemblance to the Angoras was lost upon by cat fanciers. By the 20th century the breed was virtually unknown outside Turkey.

In their homeland, Angoras were (and still are) seen in many colours, each with its own descriptive name. Among these areinnamon (red tabby), blue (silver tabby) and Askanci (red-eyed white). Other colours are brown tabby, black, red, tortoiseshell, and white. The whites are often fawn, as is the case with whites of most other breeds (see p.33), but they are great favourites with tourists and there are some cat fanciers who claim that the white Angora is the only variety that is truly the pure native breed. It has been stated that the Ankara Zoo has a breeding programme for the recording and conservation of the pure white Angora, but this is discounted by others.

An interesting aspect of Angora history is that, while Angoras were named after the old city of Angora (now Ankara), there developed a true-breeding variety within the breed in the area of the great Lake Van. This is now known in Britain as the Turkish cat, though there and in some North American cat associations it is also called the Turkish Van. These cats are red and white (the British show standard describes the red colour as amber), but with a coat pattern very rare in cats: The red colour is restricted to areas around the ears and on the tail. (This has come to be known as the Van pattern.) In their native region it is not only their beauty for which they are renowned but also practically for the habits of swimming in the nearby lakes and rivers.

Angoras and Turkish cats today: Although the Angoras of Turkey thrived in their homeland, they were extinct in the Western world until after World War II. But in the 1950s and 1960s, cats from Turkey were taken to North America, Sweden and Britain to form the foundation stock for the pedigree Turkish Angoras of North America and the European continent and Turkish cats of Britain.

The odd-eyed white Turkish Angora, known in its native country as the Ankara breed, is one of the white varieties considered by some to be the only true Angora. The CFA show standard for the breed states that it should give “the impression of grace and flowing movement.”
We highlighted terminology from the following breeds:

- **Turkish Angora** - “Wedged head; body relatively slim. Tail long and bushy. Coat fine, long and silky

- **Somali** – Long-haired Abyssinian. Medium-long body and head. Soft, dense coat...Tail bushy.

- **Abyssinian** – Lithe, muscular body with long head, but neither are so extreme as in Siamese. Long legs....

- **Havana Brown** – Smooth brown coat. Intermediate foreign body type with unique muzzle shape. So called Havana of UK is really brown Oriental Shorthair.
American Curl profile: nose, straight, slight rise from bottom eyes to brow, gentle curve to top of head flowing into neck, without a break.
All vocabulary was taken from breeds in the foreign or semi-foreign categories.
Recognizing we already had a style of our own in evidence, with the encouragement of the geneticists, we decided to do what no other breed had done, and declare “domestics” as our only allowable outcross.
Even though, The Book of The Cat, had become our primary resource for chosen terminology in writing the American Curl Standard, the first functional American Curl Breed Standard was written in TICA, with guiding counsel from:

Gloria Stephens, Judging Administrator at the time (author of Legacy of The Cat), who patiently assisted me in writing the original definitions for American Curl Terminology in 1987.

Dr. Solveig Pflueger, Genetics Committee, actually provided our eye shape description. She told us to go home look at all our cats’ eyes, crack a walnut, trace the shape, compare. We did. It was exactly the one word term we needed.

Carol Brown, another TICA judge, who wrote the book “How to Build a Cat”, was also very influential. Her mantra was, “Build your barn before you paint it!” Always focusing on structure, she was one of several who strongly advised putting all undesired traits, particularly undesirable ear types, into Penalty or Disqualify.
These leaders explained, for new breeds, this helps build uniformity more quickly, because, breeders will be less likely to breed traits that will not provide them positive attention in the show hall. It provides judges a point of reference for how serious a young breed takes its ideals. This creates boundaries, and is a protection for every breed’s genetics and identity.

Some say a breed should not be too ‘restrictive’, or it won’t ever get finales. Another way to say ‘restrictive’ is ‘selective’. Selective creates clearly recognizable breed uniformity. Isn’t that the purpose of a Breed Standard? It becomes the goal. And achieving the goal, is the journey.
These early TICA pioneers helped us learn how to use as few words as possible to get an accurate description in the Breed Standard; to provide vocabulary that the judge was able to ‘see’ on the dimensional cat on the table.

The definitions of specific terms, would be listed in the Glossary of Terms, with longer more detailed explanations.

For example, they advised us to NOT use the word ‘medium’ in the American Curl/American Curl Longhair Standards, because ‘medium’ has no definable definition, and is a word applied loosely in the majority of breed standards. We chose to use the word “intermediate’ instead. (Thank you Havana’s!)

*Notice how the term ‘intermediate’ stands out from the crowd!
THE BREEDS OF CATS

Angoras and Turkish cats

The Angora is one of the most ancient breeds of cats, with its origins traced in the history of its native Turkey. It is undoubtedly also one of the most beautiful, with its elegant body and long, silky coat. It was probably the first type of long-haired cat to reach Europe, yet until quite recently, it was completely overshadowed both there and in North America by the much more powerful British Persian.

The original Angoras

Although there have been suggestions that the Angora traces its descent from the oriental, or Pall's, cat (fifth named; see p. 52); most zoologists agree that fundamental differences between the two make this impossible. A more likely explanation is that the gene for long hair (at q; *j*; dilated) — or spread to — a number of other countries from Turkey, that is, it is a breed that borders on brevity (see p. 43). Limited opportunities for breeding outside the group allowed the long-coat characteristic to become fixed, with a mini-breeding long-haired (or with foreign body) bred evolved.

When, in the 16th century, Angorians from Turkey were taken to France and England they were much admired, yet it was until the mid-19th century that attempts were made to control the differences between the various and other long-haired cats. Angoras were first described as a breed in 1869 by a French zoologist, and from then on the breed was virtually unknown outside Turkey.

In their homeland, Angorians were (and still are) seen in many colours, each with its own descriptive name. Amongst these are: silver (silver tabby), golden (golden tabby), blue (blue tabby), tortie (tortie and white), and the white (white). Other colours are brown tabby, black tabby, and white. The whites are often deaf, as is the case with the white cats of other breeds (see p. 43), but the true white Angoras are not. There are some cat fanciers who claim that the white Angoras are the only variety that is truly the pure-bred breed. There has been a suggestion that the pure white Angoras have a breeding programme for the recording and conservation of the pure white Angora, but this is discouraged by others.

An interesting aspect of Angora history is that, whilst Angoras were named after the old city of Angora (now Nigde), there developed a true-breeding variety within the breed in the area of the great Lake Van. This is now known as the Turkish cat, though there and in some North American cat associations it is also called the Turkish Van. These cats are red and white (the British show standard describes them as having a red coat with black), yet with a coat pattern very rare in cats: The red colour is restricted to areas around the ears and on the tail. (This has come to be known as the Van pattern.)

Angoras and Turkish cats today

Although the Angoras of Turkey disappear in their homeland, they were exported to the Western world. Angorians from Turkey were taken to North America, Sweden, and Britain to form the foundation stock for the pedigree Turkish Angora of North America and the European continent and Turkish cats of Britain.
The American Curl and American Curl Longhair, now had a standard that reflected the ideals of their unique identity.
At a TICA Judging School in 1986, is when we saw THESE pictures drawn by an early TICA judge, Marge Hanna, for the first time, American Curls were used for training.
Marge drew these, using only the words of the TICA American Curl Standard, without ever having seen a Curly ear of any kind. She was verbally told that the Curl was opposite of a Fold.
Kitten present at the 1986 Judging School, some thought was the model for the drawings by Marge Hanna. It was not!
1987 adjusted drawings with corrected head shape and muzzle transitions. Profile and chin are incorrect.
Current AC/ACL:

- Priorities
- Importance of Penalizations
- Clarification of Definitions of Terminology
- Balance & Proportion
- The Ears
- Questions
Note: Standard written for the female

General Description:
"...elegant, well balanced, moderately muscled, slender..."

EARS: “CURLED”, “LARGE”, 90 DEGREE ARC OF CURL- NOT TO EXCEED 180 DEGREES"

HEAD: “MODIFIED WEDGE”- “1-1/2 TIMES LONGER THAN WIDE”

EYES: “WALNUT”

PROFILE: “NOSE STRAIGHT...SLIGHT RISE FROM BOTTOM OF EYE TO BROW...”

BODY: “SEMI-FOREIGN” (Longer body), "INTERMEDIATE", “5...TO 10 LBS” WHEN FULLY MATURE.

COAT: (Longhair) “SEMI-LONG”, “MINIMAL UNDERCOAT”, “SILKY”, “TAIL FULL AND PLUMED”.

COAT: (Shorthair) “SHORT”, “MINIMAL UNDERCOAT”, “SILKY”.
From General Description:
“…slender…elegant…”
Ears: Curled, “…large...erect...90 degree arc of curl, not to exceed 180 degrees...”

GCH and SCH Sandybears Im A Buddy 2
The Penny Test!
Male kitten 5 months old, ear looks good.

As a mature adult, no longer passed the Penny test.
Correct 90 degree Arc of Curl
Ears: Erect...minimum 90 degree arc of curl
Correct Ear Size to Head Length
Ear Size: In proportion to head length
Ear size on a 6 month old kitten,
Same cat as an adult.
Correct proportion
Head:
“Modified wedge – 1½ times longer than wide”
Modified Wedge - Correct

Equilateral Triangle – Incorrect
Eyes:
“Walnut”,
“Moderately large”
“Nose: straight…"

“Slight rise from bottom of eyes to brow…"

“Gentle curve, to top of head…"

“Flowing into neck without a break”
PROFILE
Profile: Nose moderate in length, slight rise from bottom of eyes to forehead, gentle curve to top of head flowing into neck without a break.

*Longhair gives impression of a ‘scoop’; bone is actually two straight lines meeting at the bottom of the eye. From the brow, it should be a gently curving line over the top of the head.
Body:
“Semi-foreign” (1-1/2 x’s height at shoulder), “intermediate”, “5-10 pounds”
Body: Rectangle, Length...1-1/2 times height at shoulder.
Coat – Longhair:
“semi-long”,
“minimal undercoat”,
“silky”, “Tail full and
plumed”
Coat – Shorthair:
“short”,
“minimal undercoat”,
“silky”
BALANCE (ACL): Proportionate in all physical aspects with a graceful, slender appearance. The combination of the long body, legs and tail, with neck, head and ears, should look like they fit together and give an impression of gentle flowing motion.
Correct Balance and Proportion, semi-foreign, slender, elegant, modified wedge head, Walnut eyes
Flaw: Ears have Horizontal Crimp
Head length, Body length, Tail equals body, Semi-Long coat
Appropriate, specific, handling of the ears is essential to the evaluation of every American Curl in competition.

Assessing the ears

Correct curvature vs. incorrect curvature

Size

Cartilage texture

Cartilage thickness

Cartilage flexibility
How to appropriately handle AC/ACL ears for evaluation
Ears are 20 points
Fifty percent of the points on the head are the ears. This requires accurate evaluation. This is done by letting the ear slip between the thumb and fore finger, without using pressure, from the base of the ear to the tip. All American Curls should be accustomed to this procedure. Correct AC/ACL ears are hardly thicker than non-curled ears. AC/ACL ears feel very similar to human ears; firm, but, flexible. This simple action will confirm, “firm cartilage from ear base to one third of height...smooth tips, rounded and flexible. Wide at base and open.”
How to appropriately handle AC/ACL ears for evaluation
PROPER EVALUATION
To correctly identify a number of Penalty and Disqualify Traits listed in the American Curl Standard, appropriate touching is required. This is done by letting the ear slip between the thumb and forefinger without using pressure, from the base to the tip. All American Curls should be accustomed to this procedure.

Photo to right:
Checking for Penalized Traits – Vertical Crimp, Horizontal Crimp, “depressions or ripples in the cartilage,” “abrupt changes of direction” (any cartilage that isn’t smooth).

Photo to left:
Checking for Disqualifying Traits – “Lack of firm cartilage in base of ear” Severely mismatched ears, Ear tips that are not flexible, Ears in which the lower portion of the ear is abnormally flattened, has compressed ridges of cartilage, does not have a normal visible ear cavity.
EAR PLACEMENT:
“....NOTE: When Curls are alert with ears swiveled toward front, lines following curve of ear through tips should point to center of base of skull.”

INCORRECT EAR SET:
Because the ear placement on the head is not correctly facing slightly outward, the “tips” (or any other part of the ear) cannot create a Vee with the lines meeting at the base of the skull.

PROPER EVALUATION:
This photo displays proper method of handling the ears. Without using pressure, this check is to confirm there are no listed DQ or Penalize traits. Most Horizontal Crimps must be identified in this way, as well as corrugated cartilage. DQ Trait of “Thick cartilage” must be identified in this way.
Checking for Mismatched Ears
PENALIZE

“Ears...Vertical Crimps”

A Vertical Crimp is seen when the outer edge of the ear (near the jaw) appears to have been folded forward, as if trying to close the ear canal opening. This gives a stronger vertical line of cartilage, sometimes interfering with the correct curvature of the ear. This trait is also one that is commonly masked by long hair, but, is blatantly visible on a shorthair cat.
Vertical Crimp
American Curl Longhair: Vertical Crimp
Vertical Crimp

Abrupt Change of Direction
Abrupt change of direction

Displays a ‘Flat Top’ - “ABRUPT CHANGE OF DIRECTION”.
The ear bends abruptly and then stays ‘flat’ rather than curving in a smooth arc. This ear type does not conform to the “90 degree ARC OF CURL...” required in the Breed Standard.
PENALIZE:
“Ears...Horizontal Crimp”

A Horizontal Crimp is located near the base of the ear, usually just below the hairline. As the cartilage comes out of the skull, it forms a heavy horizontal ridge going totally across the width of the ear. This opens the ear, flattening it out, so the natural cupping of the ear base is deformed, giving the ear a very wide, inside-out appearance. The ear begins its curvature from this unpleasant ridge, rather than the normal base of the ear. Often the cartilage is uneven or bumpy.

Severe expressions of Horizontal Crimp can be bent back, so the back of the ear is almost against the head. Sometimes this trait can affect the curvature of the ear. Sometimes the cartilage texture is so rough and thick the opening of the ear canal is affected.
Normal Ear vs. Horizontal Crimp
Severe Horizontal Crimp
Mild Horizontal Crimp

Can be hidden under long hair
It has also been suggested that Horizontal Crimps be moved from Penalize to a Disqualification in the interest of genetic protection for the future of the American Curl.

Some breeders with cats displaying the mild expression of this undesirable ear trait object since longhair usually hides the trait, they have been able to title many cats with this ear type.

Looking back, to the time judges were suddenly instructed to stop handling American Curl ears in their evaluations, we see a pattern that potentially certain breeders did not want this trait identified on their cats. AC/ACL ears must be correctly handled to confirm mild expressions of HORIZONTAL CRIMP.

As many of you know this is a topic being addressed currently. The current AC/ACL Breed standard, lists HORIZONTAL CRIMP under Penalize.

Then, the last item listed under Disqualify, describes a Severe HORIZONTAL CRIMP.
Straight ears – American Curl ears, if not curled need to be LARGE!
Boning:
American Curl LH
1 year old male
Excellent “semi-foreign” structure
Great “semi-long” coat length with “minimal undercoat”
Excellent bone size – to maintain mature weight under 10 pounds.
Straight legs
BONING
With American Curl Body Structure identified as “Semi-Foreign”, “Elegant...slender rather than Massive...” Size: “Intermediate”, Females weigh 5-8 pounds, males weigh 7-10 pounds.” Breeders are using bone measurements at home to insure consistency in the Show hall, to present only the cats that as adults will meet the above criteria and stay within the stated weight guidelines of no adult American Curl being above 10 pounds at maturity.

Right: LH Female 1 yr
Below left: LH Female 1 yr  Below right: LH Male 1 yr