

HANDLING AND ASSESSING CATS

The following notes have been compiled from a range of comments kindly provided by experienced exhibitors, judges, stewards and GCCF Veterinary colleagues to assist stewards and judges in approaching the handling and assessment of cats with consistency, and due care.

1. Taking a Cat out of the Pen

Cats should be taken out of the pen backwards taking great care to avoid any contact between the cats back and the upper edge of the pen door. Please also try to ensure that the cat's claws are not caught in bedding or on the bars of the pen.

For large cats it may help to remove the litter tray and place on top of pen before removing to avoid knocking the tray and spilling the contents. If the tray contains faeces the stewards should inform show manager who will arrange for the tray to be cleaned by someone wearing disposable gloves. Stewards should NOT clean trays themselves to avoid risk of transferring infection (e.g. FeCoV). The cat should be placed, on the trolley immediately in the case of some breeds (see breed specific recommendations below), close to but facing away from its own pen door. Many cats will struggle to return to the safety of their own pen if they can see the way back.

Never place the trolley close to the door of the adjacent pen. Cats are often upset by close proximity to cats they don't know and there is also risk of airborne infection.

2. Assessing the Cat on the Trolley

In all cases the cat should be in an upright position on the judge's trolley with four feet firmly placed. This is necessary to be able to assess the overall conformation and body shape of the cat. Cats like to be held securely not tightly. They appreciate minimal restraint necessary to avoid escape.

Never forget to look at and feel the cat's underside otherwise faults such as lockets and veterinary defects such as hernias and sternal deviation may be missed. The underside of a cat should be inspected by lifting the forelimbs off the trolley with your hand supporting the cat's chest or by placing both hands to support the elbows. The hind paws should remain firmly on the trolley.

When assessing tails, bites and other faults listed in the preface of the Standard of Points please remember that it only takes minimal handling as follows:

BITE: To check a bite accurately the cat should be standing on the trolley with his head level. The lips only should be gently lifted. Do not try and push the head back so it is tilted skywards. If the cat resists examination at the start try leaving the bite check until the end. By this time many cats will have relaxed and be more amenable to having the bite inspected. In case of real difficulty with bite assessment consult the duty vet. Sometimes it helps to have another person lift the lips while you check the bite.

PROFILE: On a young cat where the type is still developing, don't just look at the head sideways to check for break – actually feel for it with your thumb on the bridge of the nose. Sometimes a young cat's profile can go from great to a bit straight but if the break can still be felt it should come back. Equally, some cats can have fur that sits in a way that makes them look like they have a break when there's no change of direction in the underlying boning.

TAIL: Do not squeeze or rotate fingers round the tail to see if there is a defect. Simply slide the finger and thumb, loosely from base to tip, once only in both planes (ie vertical and horizontal). Never "twiddle" the tip or manipulate the tail in any way. Do not pull the tail round the body to measure length – smooth down the back and along the tail to assess balance.

SEX: Always check the sex is correct. This is absolutely vital in title and breed classes. Most short hair breeds can be checked visually. Long haired breeds may require a light examination with the fingertip to confirm the testicles are present in entire males. Never grip or squeeze the testicles.

Although vets should check the sex against the entry details at vetting-in this can be overlooked and clerical/owner errors can occur. If any doubt about a cat's sex always summon the duty vet.

3. Returning a Cat to the Pen

Before returning a cat to its pen ensure that the bedding and tray are placed so that the cat is comfortable. Notify show manager if bedding, pen or tray are soiled or wet with spilled water or urine. If a cat was found hiding under a blanket it may be kind to return the cat under the blanket.

When returning a cat to its pen also please be on your guard as some cats become playful or even show aggression at this point.

**ALWAYS TAKE THE GREATEST CARE NOT TO SHUT PAWS OR TAIL IN THE PEN DOOR AS
SERIOUS INJURY CAN RESULT.**

**NEVER FORGET TO DISINFECT YOUR HANDS AND ENTIRE TROLLEY SURFACE THOROUGHLY
AFTER HANDLING EACH CAT**

BREED SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

On a young cat where the type is still developing, don't just look at the head sideways to check for break/stop – actually feel for it with your thumb on the bridge of the nose. Sometimes a young cat's profile can go from great to a bit straight but if the break can still be felt it should come back. Equally, some cats can have fur that sits in a way that makes them look like they have a break when there's no change of direction in the underlying boning.

Asian 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; some lines take up to four or even five years for the coat to fully mature. Texture and flow of coat is more important in a young cat. If there's too much undercoat on a youngster, there will always be too much undercoat.

Bengals

Bengals are 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 so take particular care to avoid them seeing their neighbours at close quarters. They can express their displeasure in a very loud voice which is upsetting to cats nearby. Always check the underside. Groin lockets are not uncommon. Inward deviation of the xiphisternum is also occasionally seen in Bengals and is a withholding fault that is easily missed. Always contact the duty vet if you suspect any abnormality of the sternum or rib cage as these are serious faults related to Flat Chested Kitten Syndrome.

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/orientals 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

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 every time

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

Maine Coons

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 exhibits 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.

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

Always type over coat.

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.

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 you need to lift them out do not bring out head first always turn them around.

Stand them 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.