

● Judging Havanas

Terry Fender, ARBA Judge

The Havana is definitely not the most popular breed in Ohio, but the numbers have increased over the past several years. It is a truly flashy breed when in prime condition.

It is easy to automatically consider the Havana a fur breed, but let's start off discussing the one single area that carries the most points...general type with 45 points. That is almost half of all points allotted in this breed. Of these 45 points, 25 are given to the body. Many of us may be more familiar with the Florida White than the Havana; both body types are basically the same although the Florida White places many more points on it than the Havana does. An interesting note, however, is that while many consider the Florida White to be a better meat-type rabbit than the Havana, the Havana actually carries a half pound higher maximum weight limit on both juniors and seniors. The body on the Havana is to be rather short and compact and is to taper slightly from the hindquarters to the shoulders. This means that if you're standing behind the rabbit, the body should transition from a wider hindquarters to a slightly more narrow midsection and yet to a slightly more narrow shoulder area. But in my mind, I kind of look at it the other way...the body should start getting wider the farther back it goes starting at the shoulders and proceeding to the hindquarters. The top body line (or arch) should start at the base of the ears, rising gradually to a high point over the center of the hips, and then smoothly curve downward to the tail's base. Some common body faults we need to keep an eye out for are flatness (dips) over the shoulder, pinched hindquarters, long body type, and narrow mid-sections. The head of the Havana should be medium short and broad, and the cheeks should be well filled. Keep an eye out for those narrow (snipey) heads. Experience has taught me that for whatever reason many animals possessing narrow, snipey heads may also be finer in bone than we want to see.

An area that can affect the appearance of type is posing. It seems the popular thing to do today is "shove" the animal together to give the appearance of a very tall body type...meaning lots of depth. I guess you could call this artificial depth enhancement. Granted, I would personally rather see an animal slightly over posed than under posed, but we do need to practice the posing required in the Standard of Perfection. If we refer to page 32 of the current Standard of Perfection, it lists the proper posing for the compact type breeds. It specifically states that an excessively "tucked" position is strongly discouraged. To correctly pose the Havana, the front feet should be directly under the eyes and the toes of the rear feet should be aligned with the front of the hips. As with just about any other posed breed, how can we properly evaluate type if the animal is posed incorrectly?

Following general type, the next most important area is color with 25 points. Remember, Havana's do not have sheen...they have luster and gloss...but regardless, they are a very shiny rabbit when in prime condition. Think dark when thinking of Havana color. The blacks, blues, and chocolates all call for a very "dark" shade of color. Keep an eye out for rustiness and stray white hairs when evaluating color. All colors, but especially the chocolates, may show a sunburned tinge primarily in the summer, and this is a fault. The Havana's newest variety, the broken, allots 20 of its color points on actual color, and 5 points on the pattern. As usual with broken varieties, both ears must be colored; and there must be color

around the eyes and on the nose area. And here's something to remember...color exceeding 50% in the judge's opinion is a fault...while color less than 10% is a disqualification.

Ok...here's the area that varies a lot on the Havana...and that is fur. Twenty points are allotted to fur. In some discussions one listens to you'd believe that fur is the only thing that matters in the Havana. Twenty points on fur...that's the same amount of points that my Californians have on fur, and we don't think of them as being a fur breed. So let's not concentrate on thinking a majority of the points are on fur, but instead let's look at the uniqueness of the Havana fur instead. When judging Havana's, if you were to close your eyes, you'd probably feel a wide variance in the texture and possibly length of the coat. You would probably feel coats ranging in texture from that of a Florida White, to a Satin, and yet to the true Havana. True, there may be some similarities to Satin fur, but Havana's do not have Satin fur. Havana fur is a flyback coat. Havana fur is to be "soft, dense, and lustrous with medium length." The hair shaft is to be rather fine. The guard hair is to be slightly coarser in texture than the undercoat. The coat should be the same length over the entire body. When judging we do find Havana's with coarser coats. We need to fault these because they don't meet the "softness" issue as listed in the Standard. But there are varying degrees of harshness...and we need to keep in mind the points allotted to fur and remember how they relate to the points placed on type, color, and condition.

Last but not least are the ten points given to condition. We want the Havana to be smooth and firm in flesh and carry a well finished coat. As I like to say, condition is the icing on the cake.

As a side note, when judging always remember to give all four varieties equal consideration. It is very easy to go the popular route and almost automatically make the blacks BOB and BOS. But please never forget that there are three other varieties that need to be given the same care and consideration as the blacks.

In review, it takes an animal well balanced in type, color, fur, and condition to be the ideal specimen that the Havana standard describes. As a fellow Havana breeder once told me, "You've got to build the barn before you paint it." What he was trying to say was that without type, fur and color can only carry the animal so far. Never forget to look at the big picture.