

MY IDEAL ABYSSINIAN

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I first showed Abys in the early '70's, but my stock dwindled while I was at college. A cat disposed of the remainder. Several years working away from home made cavy keeping impractical until recently. 18 months ago visits to cavy shows resumed and, very soon after, some breeding stock was obtained. It's great to be showing Abys again, striving to breed my ideal Aby.

So what is the ideal Aby? Obviously it is a cavy which conforms to the breed standard. It's easy to pick out the pigs with a double or out of line saddle rosettes. Steps, twists and runs in the collar or back ridge are also fairly obvious.

For me it is the positions of the collar and back ridge together with the shape of the Aby that determine if it is a good'un or not. The current standard has some guidance notes on this - a checkerboard pat-

tern is what is required when you look down at an Aby. A checkerboard is made up of squares and for me that means that the distance between the collar and back ridge should be short enough for the saddle rosettes to be almost square. Many Abys on the show table give the impression of having long rectangular saddle rosettes, which indicates that either the collar is too far forward or the back ridge too far back - sometimes both.

In my opinion, if the collar is set well back, the three ridges which divide the saddle rosettes should meet the collar. I've noticed some Abys with side ridges that peter out before they reach the collar, resulting in an area of flatness behind the collar. In the Aby standard flatness is top of the list of faults. If the collar slants towards the ears when viewed from the side, it compounds the problem. When I

look at an Aby from the side, I like to see the collar and back ridge parallel and vertical.

The correct shape of cavy can do much to enhance the collar. Too few Abys today have the shoulder that I remember seeing when I first went to shows - wide at front, giving the appearance of a brick with the corners knocked off. A good scruff in front of the collar can also assist in holding the collar back. There are some good size Abys around but some tend to be more triangular than rectangular.

Then there is the back ridge. To achieve the desired saddle this needs to be well forward and fall straight down in front of the hind feet. I've seen some Abys that have taken top honours, with back ridges that come down to the side ridge, then curl forward almost under the belly. This makes the side rosettes of the saddle more triangular and results in hip rosettes which are rather bold.

Get that lot right, on a pig with a good, thick, harsh coat, a sharp up-standing mane and ridges, clean pinpoint centred rosettes and that's my ideal Aby. All I've got to do now is try to breed one and hope that judges agree with me.