

Abyssinian - Information Sheet



ORIGIN - The history of the Abyssinian cat is a little obscure, although it is fairly certain that the wife of an English Army officer, a Mrs Captain Barrett-Leonard, brought the original specimen back to Britain from Abyssinia in 1868. Other members of the army may have also brought these cats back from what is now known as Ethiopia around this time. It is known that the first mention in a book was in 1874, the breed was recognised in Britain in 1882 and the breed was shown at the Crystal Palace in 1883. The first Abyssinians to arrive in North America were probably exported in the early 1900's. It is also possible that very similar cats were brought to Britain from Southeast Asian and the Indian Ocean coast, and genetic studies may indicate that the modern Abyssinian is closely related to cats that are found in these areas. The early Abyssinians were crossed with British Shorthairs, and later with oriental breeds. In America the Abyssinian tends to have a more rounded and shorter head shape, and efforts are being made in Britain to prevent further lengthening of the face so that there is not too much of a foreign appearance. Long haired Abyssinian kittens have been found in litters for many years, and since the 1970's they have been developed as a separate breed, the Somali. Since 1957 the Red or Sorrel colouration has been recognised as a breed, and the Blue Abyssinian was recognised in 1975. Other colours have since been developed, and more are being recognised.

DESCRIPTION - Abyssinians are medium-sized cats. They are very elegant, regal-looking cats with strong, lithe bodies and long, slender legs. Their paws are small and oval. They have round, wedge-shaped heads with distinctive tufted tips to the ears which are large and pointed and set wide apart. Their eyes are large and almond-shaped and they have short, close-lying coats with at least double ticking. Their tails are fairly long, broad at the base and tapering to a point.

COLOUR - Usual or Ruddy is the best-known and most common coat colour in Abyssinians. Also, seen is sorrel, blue or fawn. Silver Abyssinians are a separate group which includes black silver, blue silver, fawn silver and sorrel silver. Not so common colours are tortoiseshell, red, cream, chocolate and lilac.

COAT LENGTH – Medium.

AILMENTS - Although most Abyssinians are healthy cats there are a few hereditary diseases which are known to appear in the breed. Progressive retinal atrophy has been reported, and may be detected from a few months of age in some cases. Cats with symptoms of PRA should not normally be used for breeding. Neurological storage disease has been reported in this breed and renal amyloidosis, a form of kidney disease, has also been seen. There is also some speculation as to whether the Abyssinian is prone to developing psychogenic alopecia, a stress related disorder which leads to hair loss through over grooming.

PERSONALITY - The Abyssinian is intelligent and curious, but this is tempered with a cautious streak. It is extremely loyal, and will become very attached to its family; in fact it will pine if deprived of their company. The male will generally tolerate other cats well, but the female may be a little prickly and prefer to be the only cat in the family. Both sexes can form strong attachments to dogs. The worst thing that you can do to an Abyssinian is deprive it of human company, and it is important that it lives in a household where people are usually at home. It also hates

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being confined, and needs plenty of space. It is a good climber, and will appreciate a garden full of trees and high places. This cat is not much of a talker, but will still let its owner know exactly what it wants. It is playful and inquisitive but also sensible and will not rush into situations recklessly. After a game it will be happiest sat on its owners lap being stroked and petted.

ENERGY – High

NOISE – Low

CHILD SUITABILITY – Medium

COMPATABILITY WITH CATS – Medium

OTHER ANIMAL COMPATIBILITY - High

FEEDING & GROOMING

UPKEEP - The Abyssinian's coat is relatively easy to care for. Brush and comb through the coat occasionally and then polish with a damp chamois leather to bring out the shine. When moulting, use a rubber grooming mitt to remove the dead hairs from the coat.

SHEDDING - Little