

# Show Stopper

In the world of cat showing there seems to be an underlying whisper of fewer breeders and people willing to show cats, and less young people enjoying the hobby. Why is this and will it mean an eventual decline in the showing of cats?

It is an interesting question and one that I feel I can contribute to as I have only recently been introduced to the world of cat shows. Before having Swift I knew that people showed cats because my family had owned an ex-show cat. I must admit I do not ever remember seeing any advertising for cat shows in Australia and I hadn't thought about showing a cat until the breeder of Swift mentioned it to me and my partner, Ben.

Living in a major city is expensive and space is scarce unless you are a millionaire. For us getting a pet cat was an issue because we were worried about the lack of space in our apartment so breeding cats would have been out of the question. Most of my friends at this time in their life are married and having kids; these are two all consuming activities that leave little time and money to give to a pet let alone to an intense activity like animal showing and breeding.

Cat showing involves travelling, a car, petrol and money for entry fees. They also require giving up a whole day of time that could be spent relaxing, playing sport, shopping or socialising. Then there is the preparation time involved with washing and grooming the animals. When Ben and I started showing Swift last year (2005) we were amazed by the distant locations the shows were held. I can understand why shows are held where they are but they are not always in the most accessible of places or places that are close to our home. I also know that cat clubs rely heavily on their members, volunteers and donations to get through each year of showing. You

have to be passionate about cats and the show scene to continue year after year.



Photo: Swift with his 2006 show ribbons.

I find at shows people expect you to know what to do and where to go. Early on we often got looks and comments from vets, stewards and show personnel that were almost condescending and did not help us in our situation. Where are the information tables and breed signs at shows? Remember we are trying to inform the public as well as people new to showing. There is no one distinctive approachable person you can go up to at a show to ask questions. Although, I do remember approaching a steward at our first show who was very helpful and friendly and made us feel worthy of his time.

It is also interesting to note that the year we started showing Swift there were about five other new and fairly young people showing group 3 neuter cats that we got to know. We all tried to help each other with the ins and outs of showing. Of those five people two faded from the show scene fairly quickly, perhaps due to a lack of success. The other three people (not including us) showed an interest in breeding. One has stopped showing and as far as I know is not breeding cats for monetary and personal reasons, another

has been trying to get a breeding program started but has had trouble finding cats to breed from and has not been showing for the last six months, and the last has managed to find a female to start her breeding program. We were lucky to find a beautiful girl to start our program but what we didn't realise was the trouble we would have trying to find a stud to mate her with.

Welcome to the world of cat breeding. Cats with breeding restrictions on them, cats that are too closely related, a cat whose type does not appeal to the breeder, finding an interstate stud and sending your female off to him or purchasing your own stud; these are just a few of the things you need to consider when trying to find a stud for your female. We thought about all of those options and ended up settling for the last. In our view it was the best option for our female and having purchased a property with more land recently we were able to house a stud in the cages we had built in the backyard.

I love cats and I love where we're positioned with our breeding program but it has not been easy to get to this stage; perseverance is a must. Just look at my statistics and the issues that have meant new people to the show scene no longer even show their cats let alone get into breeding. New breeders need support and guidance as well as the time and dedication to give their beautiful animals.

I'm not sure how you get the younger people of our society more involved but a lot has to do with education and exposure. If you don't know about showing how can you participate in it? As a teacher I am around young people all the time and when they have news I also tell them my news, which may include Swift's show results. This year in particular I have had a group of students who love animals, and I was able to give information to a few of them about showing animals. One girl has just

started showing her guinea pig and was thrilled with the ribbons her guinea pig was awarded after her first weekend of showing. I hear she is off to the Christmas show; I hope she stays interested and thank you to her mother for allowing and helping her daughter to follow her desire to show her pet animal.

Cat showing is a wonderful hobby or should I say passion that I really enjoy. I am also lucky enough to have a partner who is involved fully in all aspects of the cat scene and we are able to experience the events together. To think that if we didn't have such a beautiful Abyssinian cat and a breeder who planted the show seed of thought we would never have shown him. In less than two years we have gone from a cat-free apartment to cat breeding household.



Photo: Ben, Billie and Wendy  
Photo courtesy of George Kennedy

I have looked back on the events that lead me to showing and breeding cats and have come to the conclusion that we can all do our part to help inform and educate the public about showing animals. What we cannot help with are the time, money and space issues that will continue to affect young people and particularly those who live in major cities.

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