

Swift Success

What would a house be without a cat in it? By posing that question to the readers of this magazine I am sure I would be flooded with a variety of answers, all reflecting the love that we have for cats.

During my childhood there was only a short period of time that I can remember when there was not a cat in my life. I have always felt a great connection with cats and animals in general. Not even a spider would be denied appreciation from me. When I was thirteen our family was having the only 'cat drought' I can remember. My friend's cat had had kittens and my sisters and I convinced our mum to visit them.

We went round to see the kittens when they were still little bundles of fluff in the garden with their mother. Our family arrived and the soon to be named Cuddles came lolloping up to me with her blue-grey kitten eyes and tabby fur. How could I resist such a welcome?

A few months short of twenty years passed by and sadly my dearest companion, Cuddles, was put to sleep. She was a best friend; we had a special connection and it was so sad to have to let her go. Remembering her and writing this article a year on still brings tears to my eyes and causes a lump to form in my throat. However, I have a new man in my life and he has brought so much joy to me that I can barely explain.



For some reason I had a desire for an Abyssinian cat. I'm not sure where that desire had come from; as I don't remember anyone I knew having an Abyssinian cat. I had read a lot about different breeds; the physical appearance and temperament of the Abyssinian cat really appealed to me. Having decided that I was settled enough to get a cat I had to convince my partner, Ben, a dog lover, that it would be a good thing.

I informed Ben of all the wonderful traits of Abyssinian cats and how they are known to be active and quite dog like in some of their habits. He liked the look of the Abyssinian cats that I showed him and the next thing you know I was sourcing Abyssinian kittens on the Internet. We decided that if we could get a kitten in December then I would have a couple of months to spend some quality time with it during my holidays. This decision was to cause some problems; all the Sydney breeders that I contacted didn't have any kittens available for the time that we wanted. I did a wider search and finally found a breeder in Queensland who had a little tawny male that would be ready before Christmas. He looked very cute on the Internet and Ben went to Queensland and visited him. We were sold; enter Cenglow Swift.

The next few weeks were long but it gave us time 'to set up house' for a new kitten. Within our small apartment we wanted the best that we could provide for the new arrival, which included tracking down a two metre high scratching post and a wonderful array of toys. Finally, the day had arrived. We travelled out to the airport to welcome the latest member of the family, Swift. He was so little and had been on such a big journey and still seemed happy to see us.

Swift was a pet cat. I'd never been to a cat show and had never really thought about showing cats. When I was ten we had had a retired show cat as a pet but he was a big fluffy cream Persian. I remember looking through his box of ribbons and rosettes that the breeder had given us, thinking about how beautiful they were.

Our breeder mentioned to us that Swift was a show quality cat if we did want to show him. So after settling him in, in December, we went to the

first cat show of the new year in New South Wales in January, the Federal Cat Club Kitten Show, to see what shows were all about. I guess the first impression was that they are held a long way from home. Secondly, there were a lot of cats and people and not much room to move and lastly, the summer heat permeated through a hall that had no air-conditioning. When it came to the kittens we looked at the other Abyssinian kittens in the Group and thought that Swift was easily as beautiful as them. Of course we had little knowledge of the factors affecting judging but we were sure that Swift would be all right to show.

We left the show thinking that perhaps we would enter Swift in a show and see how he'd go. We decided that the Royal Easter Show in Sydney would be ideal because it wasn't too far away, it was during the holidays and we'd get to see the Easter Show as well. We did some research and realised that he needed to be entered within the next week. We mentioned our thoughts to our breeder and she said we had to get the ball rolling because he wasn't registered in New South Wales and we didn't have his papers. Luckily, we managed to get it all sorted in time.

I wondered what you were supposed to do to show a cat. We didn't know anyone that showed cats apart from Swift's breeder who lived in Queensland. She mentioned that we needed to find out cage sizes for cat show curtains in New South Wales. She also said that Swift would need to be washed two days before the show and his claws should be clipped. Curtains and cages, did I have to buy them, make them; what about the size and colour? When washing a cat what should I use? Is there cat shampoo? Claw clipping, do I take him to a barber's shop? Where do you find out all this information? I couldn't believe that there were so many things that we had to find out about. We were complete novices! I found some kitten shampoo on the Internet and also some cage dimensions so that I could make the curtains. Did I need to buy the cage? There were a lot of e-mails flying between Sydney and Queensland for this period of time. I visited a pet shop and bought some claw clippers. How would Swift react to all of this?

Two days before the Royal Easter Show it was bath time for Swift. To our surprise he seemed to take the tub, the water and shampoo all in his stride. He was relaxed as we clipped his claws and brushed his coat until it shone. None of it seemed to faze him.

Finally, show day had arrived. We had to leave home early to get to vetting on time. What would the vets do, what would they be looking for and did we really need to be there that early? We parked the car and headed towards the streams of people with animal cages and joined the queue. We were surrounded by cages, cats and people, who all seemed to know what they were doing. Eventually, we made it to a little room with a collection of people looking over the animals. I lifted up the cage and let Swift out to be inspected. His entry was signed and then we were shuffled in to the next room that happened to be the exhibitors' hall. We stood there for a little while wondering what we were supposed to do. Everyone looked very busy. Apparently Swift was given a number on the signed slip that corresponded to his cage so we wandered off to find his cage. Once we had located it, we lay down his towel and put him in. Food, litter trays, water, toys are these allowed with him at all or did we have to wait until the judging was over? Swift lapped up a final brush and a few biscuits and then we left him to it. Poor little thing being left alone in a small cell. What were we thinking! One good thing was the public was separated from the cages by a barrier so at least he wouldn't get lots of people poking their fingers at him.

Then it was 'clear the floor' time. There was only one other neuter Abyssinian kitten in the show and that was Katuja Skeeter who was housed below Swift. Their paws became acquainted and



they were ever alert as stewards and judges walked by. What is a steward? Who are the judges and how do you know who they are and

which ring they are judging? What do all the classifications mean: class, section, breed, group? How are they different? We had no idea. What were the other breeds of cat being shown? There seemed little information for the public about all the beautiful felines on display at the show.

We didn't really know what to expect. What would the judges do with the cats and what would they say? Would Swift perform like a show cat should? It was a very interesting time, as we did not understand much about the standard and what all the classifications were. What did Best of Breed mean, how was that different from Best in Section? It was all rather confusing. The first judge picked up Swift and looked him over and put him back in the cage. The second judge spent more time with Swift and dangled a glitzy stick in front of his face. He seemed to revel in the spotlight and he looked *purrfect* to us.



The ribbons came out and Swift received two Best in Section ribbons; we were so excited. Then he was given a beautiful pink and lemon ribbon that had bright yellow writing stating 'Reserve Best Desexed Kitten Group 3 Ring 2'. Did this mean what we thought it meant? Swift had come second out of all those kittens! What a great start to his show career and I guess one of the reasons why we carried on showing him. We went to six more shows that year and Swift always managed to get into the Top 5 at a show. He seemed to love the limelight and we enjoyed the learning experience. At each show we learnt something new about showing, Abyssinian cats or cats in general.

Swift is a gorgeous cat who brings us so much pleasure and we hope that we have provided him with a stimulating life that he enjoys. We adore him and Ben is a total cat convert; we cannot imagine our lives without him being a part of it. Our lives have changed so much in the short time that we have had him. Having got through a year of showing we contemplated what it would be like to breed cats. Breeding is something we wouldn't be able to do in our little apartment.

Another year on and Swift has had a very successful year of showing becoming a New South Wales Silver Double Grand Champion and now he is working towards his Gold and Coordinating Cat Council of Australia titles. He is the best desexed Abyssinian cat and 10th exhibit in The Abyssinian Breeder Awards for 2006 as well as fifth Group 3 neuter cat in the New South Wales Cat Fanciers' Association Awards. We sold the apartment and bought a house with a little bit of land to build a stud run. Our breeding program is in its infancy with our queen, Nile Runcible Cat (Billie) and our newly acquired stud, Tijah Dakota Red. Thanks to all who have helped us with our journey so far and we look forward to another exciting year of cat antics with you.

Wendy Newton