

While the standard used in this presentation is that of of The International Cat Association (TICA), this text has been peer-reviewed by members of several associations. The standards vary somewhat in terms of points allotted to specific features and descriptive words used, but the overall ideal for the American Curl is, for the majority of breeders and exhibitors, as indicated herein.

The author would further note that this presentation has been reviewed by judges, one of which noted a tone of frustration towards the same. Later in this presentation we include comments actually heard by judges, comments that are clearly in contradiction of the standard. We realise that the American Curl is a minority breed, and some judges will rarely have seen one. As breeders and exhibitors, we understand that each judge will have his or her own interpretation of the standard, but we do ask that our breed be fairly evaluated in accordance with (and not contradiction of) the written standard and that the judges indeed know the standard. Hopefully this presentation will serve towards that end.

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American Curls

The story of
An American Original

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History

Meet Shulamith - the foundation cat from which all American Curls must descend. Unfortunately there are few pictures of her, but you can get an idea of what she looked like.

“Shu” was a domestic cat from California that showed up on the doorstep of Joe and Grace Ruga and quickly adopted the family as her own. They were soon smitten by her sweet personality, intelligence and of course - those unusual ears.



Note that the standard was written for a FEMALE.

Shulamith herself was used as the model on which the standard was based - although certain “improvements” were included. For example, Shu had a weak chin and her ears were not as nice as her offsprings’ who had larger, more tightly curled ears. Those ears were the basis of what today is considered ideal.



Shulamith was not a large cat, but had medium, refined boning and a long, slender body. When presenting her to judges for evaluation, they unanimously compared her to a Turkish Angora.

Her head was a nice modified wedge, longer than wide, with smooth transitions. Her profile was not straight, but had a gentle change of direction.

Her coat was semi-long with little to no undercoat.

Although a "plain" black cat, Shulamith gave us many interesting colors right from the start. When bred to "plain old" domestic cats, she or her offspring produced chocolate, colorpoint and Burmese colors (mink).



Development of the Breed

When Shulamith delivered her first litter of curly eared babies, no one involved knew anything about the cat fancy, selective breeding or how to go about developing a cat breed. They did realize what a special thing they had on their hands, so they proceeded to seek guidance from some breeders involved with other breeds. The first advice given was to contact a geneticist, to be certain that the mutation did not carry any harmful effects. After careful study, it was determined that the curl gene gave no indication whatsoever of having deleterious effects on the health of the cats.

The next step was to write a standard for this new breed of cat. Shulamith herself was used as the model for the standard and most of the text used in the written standard was based on the standards of other breeds which presented similar characteristics. For example, her profile most closely resembled that of an Abyssinian or Egyptian Mau, so the profile description in those standards served as the basis when drafting the first American Curl standard.



The early breeders then had to choose a suitable breed to use as an outcross. Several pedigreed breeds were considered, but all were discarded for a variety of reasons. In the end, a decision was made to honor the domestic heritage of Shulamith and use only domestic cats as outcrosses.

In the first years – and due to the inexperience of the earliest breeders – some chose outcross domestic cats with inappropriate “type”. Many in the cat fancy believed - and some continue to believe – that it was a mistake to use domestics as it would be too difficult to ever set the type of the breed. However, when outcrosses are properly and carefully selected, even first generation offspring can be fine examples of the breed and have been shown with excellent results in the showhall. They also ensure a wide genetic base so vital to the health and vigor of any breed.

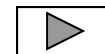
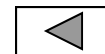


Outstanding example
of an ideal domestic outcross



When looking at the earliest Curls, it is easy to note the striking variance in the physical attributes of the different cats.

Some early Curls



Fortunately, in recent years breeders have made enormous strides towards reaching a homogenous look in the breed and their efforts have been noted and praised by judges and breeders alike. The vast majority of the Curls one sees in the show hall today are quite similar: a medium-sized cat (5-8 lbs. for females, 7-10 for males), with medium, refined boning, a body and head 1 and ½ times longer than wide, walnut shaped eyes and of course those lovely curled ears.



Some common misconceptions about the American Curl



Misconception number one:

The American Curl is a “natural” breed and, like Maine Coons or American Shorthairs, should be a large, solid cat.

The original standard was based on Shulamith, unanimously described by all judges who saw her as “Turkish Angora type”.

The early TICA standards even listed weights: 5-8 lbs. for females and 7-10 for males (the CFA standard still includes these weights). Despite some changes in the standard and the fact that the current standard states that proper conformation is more important than size, the American Curl should still be a medium and refined boned cat, rather than a heavier-boned “natural type” breed.

Most breeders have been making great efforts in recent years to “downsize” their cats and achieve cats that meet the standard in terms of size and boning. Nevertheless, despite the requirements of the standard, one can still hear judges make such frustrating comments as how Curls should have “heft” or be a “large, solid cat”.



Furthermore, according to the standard “conformation being more important than size” should also fairly be taken into consideration for smaller cats as well as larger ones. Smaller cats fitting the standard should not be penalized for their size, although extremes on either end (oriental or cobby) are unacceptable.



The size dilemma and variation goes back to the very beginning of the breed. Those who knew Shu describe her as “very petite”. While the author never had the privilege of meeting her in person, by all accounts it appears that she was indeed a very small cat, more foreign than semi-foreign and “small to medium” rather than medium.

The standard was written with her as the example, however today’s standard requires a “medium” cat, most likely larger than Shulamith herself. This creates a bit of a problem - those who knew Shu (primarily West Coast breeders) continue to breed towards cats that resemble her - which for some breeders is smaller and much more refined than the current standard calls for.



Misconception number two:

More tightly curled ears should be given preference over more loosely curled ears.

Show quality curled ears must be “third degree” ears. For show purposes, the concept of third degree covers a wide range. The cat pictured left depicts a loose 3rd degree, the kitten on the right is close to the maximum. “Showable” ears can range anywhere in between, from loose up to *almost* but not really touching the back of the ear.



Any ears falling within the range indicated and without ear faults should be given the same consideration when judging the cat, i.e. there is no “preferable” degree of curl in and of itself - all are equally valid and equally “good”.

Balance plays a significant role in choosing the “better” ear. A cat with short (tightly-curved) ears and a long head will look unbalanced, as will a cat with a shorter head and taller, looser ears. However, it must always be remembered that ideally the head should be longer than wide (preferably 1 and 1/2 times longer than wide).

Summing up: the degree of curl may range from a loose third degree to tightly curled (but not touching) and all are equally valid. The key concept is one of balance with the rest of the head, a smooth pleasing arc and personal preference.



Examples of balanced heads / ears

Longer head with taller, more loosely curled ears, achieving a pleasing balance.



Shorter head with shorter, more tightly curled ears - again, nicely balanced.

(NOTE that this is a mature jowled male.)



Misconception number three:

Ears are the most important feature of the American Curl and hence a cat with the better ears is the better cat.



Yes and no..

Ears are certainly the distinctive feature of the breed and account for a large percentage of the standard.

However... we must never forget that the vast majority of points are allotted to the rest of the cat that is behind those ears. When judging by the standard and the points allotted, a cat with acceptable show quality ears and excellent overall type should always be placed above a cat with magnificent ears and mediocre type.

**Always remember:
There is MUCH more to an American Curl than ears.**



Misconception number four:

Ears with a good or proper degree of curl will always point to the center of the base of the skull.



Again, yes and no.

According to the standard:

When AmCurls are alert with their ears swiveled toward the front, lines following through the curve of the ears should point to the center of the base of the skull.

This refers to the **PLACEMENT** of the ears on the head, not to degree or type of curl. It also refers to the “curve” of the ears, not the “curl”. Many show quality ears - whether loose or tight - will not have lines that actually meet at the center base of the skull if the lines are followed from the tips of the ears.

Likewise, this note refers to ears swivelled toward the front. Curled ears are mobile, and when listening to something beside or behind, the curve of the ears will not point to the center of the base of the skull and if only one ear is swivelled, ears may appear mismatched.

This will be considered in detail further on.



The Standard

Let us now go through the standard, section by section.

More consideration will be given to breed-specific areas or those areas where exhibitors feel there is a lack of understanding. Simple, more general areas (for example “strong chin”) are well understood and will only be discussed briefly.

It must also be indicated that some images were chosen to highlight a ***particular feature*** of the cat. Hence - and as an example - an image may present a cat with a lovely chin but straight profile. Every effort has been made to clearly indicate the feature to be focused on, but remember that not all of the pictures used are of cats that are ideal in every aspect.

For comparative purposes, reference is made to other breeds. Please note that these are **American type breeds** (this is especially important if this presentation is used for educational purposes overseas).



TICA Standard (2002)

AMERICAN CURL BREED GROUP (AC/AL)

The AL (American Curl Longhair) is a medium-built, well-balanced semi-longhair cat, semi-foreign in type.

The AC (American Curl Shorthair) is a medium-built, well-balanced shorthair cat, semi-foreign in type.

HEAD (40)

Shape	6
Ears	20
Eyes	5
Chin	2
Muzzle	2
Profile	5

BODY (30)

Torso	10
Legs/Feet	5
Tail	5
Boning &	
Musculature	10

COAT/COLOR/PATTERN (20)

Length	5
Texture/Undercoat	10
Pattern/Color	5

OTHER (10)

Balance	10
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Category: All

Division: All

Colors: All



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The American Curl is the result of a spontaneous ear mutation in the domestic cat population of the United States. The first such cat was found in Southern California in 1981 and named "Shulamith". The distinctive feature of the American Curl breed is their unique, attractive curled ears. American Curls are a well-balanced, moderately muscled, medium built cat. They are alert and active with gentle, even dispositions.

ALLOWANCES*

Allow for stud jowls in males. Allow for proportionately larger size in males.

Conformation:

OTHER

Balance/Proper Proportion is more important than overall size.

WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS

Tail faults of any kind.

Other WAA and DQs are considered in their corresponding section.

***NOTE** that the standard was written for a female.



HEAD (40 points)

Shape (6 points):

Modified wedge without flat planes; approximately one and a half times longer than wide.

Head - General considerations

Right is a picture of a cat considered by many to be an ideal domestic outcross for the breed. Notice that her head is a modified wedge, about 1 and 1/2 times longer than wide. She has smooth transitions, with a smooth straight line reaching towards the back and top of her head. This cat's head length may be considered a bit extreme (too long) by some breeders.



Examples of good head shape









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As we have seen in the examples, “one and one-half times longer than wide” is not as extreme as it may sound and provides a nice balance with a body length that should also be one and one-half times longer than tall.

In any case, head length must be longer than wide and **not** an equilateral triangle.

When evaluating head length, **consideration must be given for jowling in whole males.**



Eyes (5 points):

Walnut in shape; oval on top and rounded on bottom. Moderately large in proportion to head. Set on a slight angle between the base of the ear and the tip of the nose - one eye width apart. Color clear and brilliant with no relation to coat color, except that blue eyes are required on all colorpointed cats.



Correct "walnut"
eye shape



Eyes - General considerations

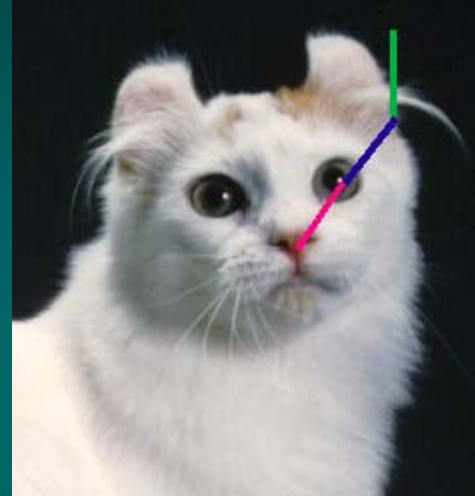
Eye placement should be midway between the nose and the ear and slanted upwards towards the outer edge of the ear. An ideal Curl should have a head with three equal "thirds": one third from the nose to the center of the eye, the second from the eye to the outer base of the ear, and the third being the ears themselves. The picture to the left demonstrates this.



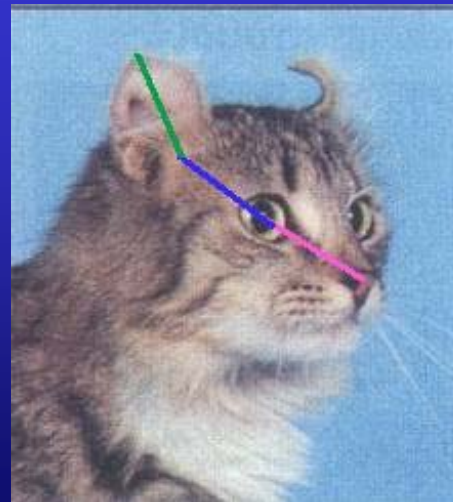
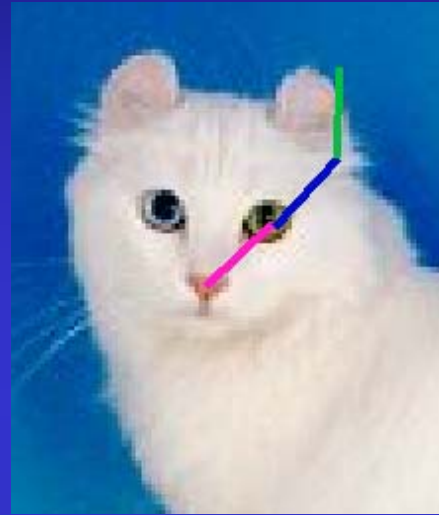
Examples of good eye shape and placement



Examples of good eye shape and placement



Examples of good eye shape and placement



Examples of good eye shape and placement



Chin (2 points):

Firm, in line with nose and upper lip.



Muzzle (2 points):

Rounded with gentle transition; no whisker break.

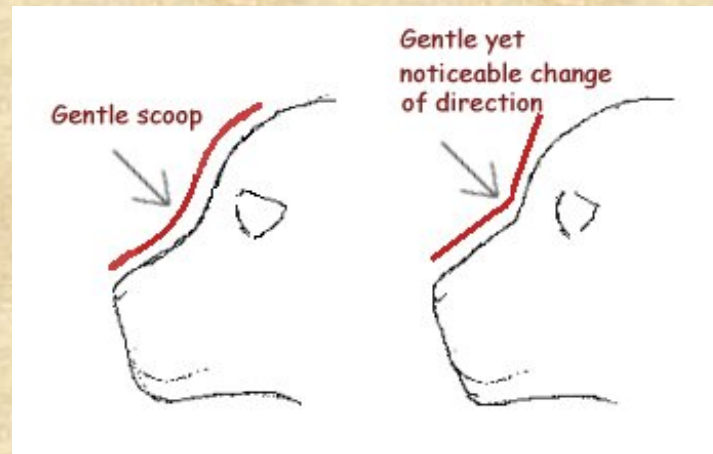


Profile (5 points):

Straight nose with gentle rise from bridge of nose to forehead which then flows into arched neck without a break.

PENALIZE: Deep nose break

There are two schools of thought or interpretations among breeders as to what constitutes the ideal profile. According to the standard, both should be equally acceptable.



Straight profiles or breaks are unacceptable.

The drawing right was the original used when drafting the original standard.

Note the head length (one and one-half times longer than wide) and change of direction.



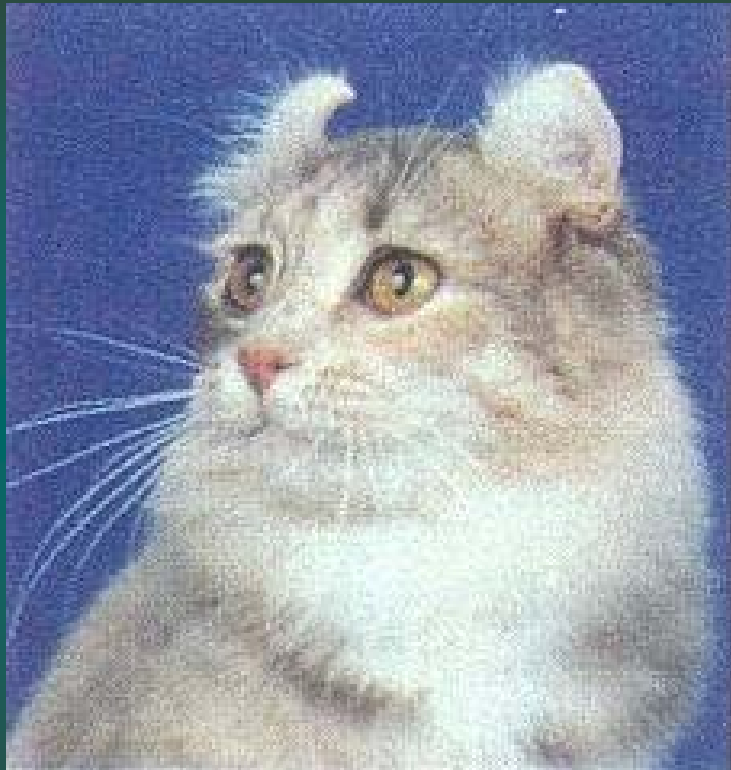
Examples of good profiles



Examples of good profiles



Examples of good profiles



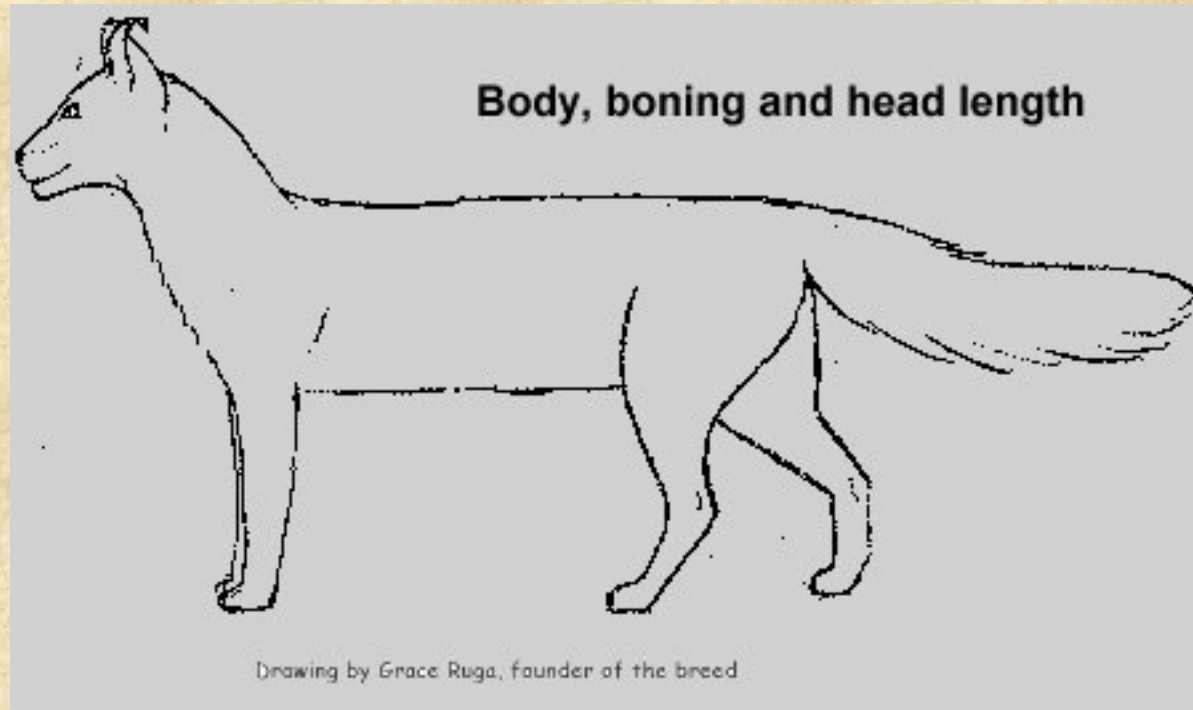
Body and boning - General considerations

The American Curl should be a long, slender, medium-boned, refined, semi-foreign cat. Their body should be 1 and 1/2 times longer than tall, measuring height from the front foot to the top of the shoulder. Earlier TICA standards and general breeder consensus is that ideal weights should range from 5-8 lbs. for females and 7-10 for males. Weights can be deceiving: “feel” and boning is usually a better measure, but the weight indications give an approximate of the size being sought by most breeders.

Some people feel that the Curl should be larger than this, and in fairness the Standards do say that proper conformation is more important than overall size. This is a small point of contention among some breeders and perhaps could be considered a bit of a contradiction in the Standard. Today most breeders feel that ideally one should breed towards the weight indications given, and only consider showing a larger sized cat if it were a fine example of the breed. It must also be noted that just as larger cats are allowed, so are smaller cats and the latter should not be penalized.



Curl tails should be in proportion to their body, ideally as long as the body. You may note that in the picture below the cat's tail is too short for the body. This is simply because they ran out of room on the piece of paper used to originally make this drawing.



BODY (30 points)

Torso (10 points):

Rectangular; length to be approximately one and one-half times the height at the shoulders.

Legs and feet (5 points):

Legs:

Length medium in proportion to body; set straight when viewed from front or rear.

Feet:

Medium and rounded.

Tail (5 points):

Flexible, wide at base and tapering; equal to body length.

Boning/Musculature (10 points):

Medium; neither fine-boned nor heavy-boned. Moderate strength and tone.

PENALIZE: *Excessive size without proper conformation.*



General considerations

Legs, feet and tail are self explanatory and require no additional comment.

Body and boning

When judging body type / boning, always remember that Curls are a **semi-foreign** breed. For comparative purposes, other semi-foreign breeds include the *Egyptian Mau* and *Havana*.

General body shape / type should most closely resemble a Turkish Angora, although that breed has a foreign type. Hence, in a nutshell, an American Curl should ideally resemble a “*semi-foreign Turkish Angora*”, i.e. a medium-sized cat with a long, svelte body and an elegant and refined appearance.

Musculature.

Different cats / lines may have a different “feel” to them. Some will have “hard bodies”, others will be “softer”. Given that the standard calls for “moderate strength and tone”, both types are acceptable as long as the cat is in good condition and does not fall within extremes at either end.



Examples of good body length / type / boning



COAT/COLOR/PATTERN (20 points)

Length (5 points):

AL: semi-long with tail coat full and plumed.

AC: short with tail coat same length as body coat.

Texture/Undercoat (10 points):

AL: Fine, silky, laying flat. Minimal undercoat.

AC: Soft, silky, laying flat, resilient without a plush dense feel. Minimal undercoat.

Pattern/color (5 points):

PENALIZE: *Heavy undercoat/Heavy ruff. Coarse, cottony or fluffy coat texture. Dense or plush coat.*



Coat and Colors - General considerations

Curls are accepted in all colors, with the only limitation being that pointed cats must have blue eyes. Lockets and buttons are **ALLOWED** and NOT penalized.

It must also be remembered that pattern/color account for **only 5 points** (even less in other standards).. While ideally silvers will never be tarnished and browns will always be warm, the point consideration applied to this area is minimal and cats should not be penalized for less-than-perfect pattern or color.

Coat texture is a bit more of a dilemma at this point. The Standard calls for "minimal undercoat" and a "flat-laying coat". Some breeders and judges interpret this to mean that a minimal undercoat is allowed, but that the goal should be to reach no undercoat. Others feel that a minimal undercoat is called for.

Example of good longhaired coat



Example of good longhaired coat



A shorthair coat should be soft and silky to the touch and have resiliency. It should only be single coated, which helps with the silky feel. The coat should not be "painted on" but rather always have a bit of spring or bounce to it

It should also be noted that SH Curls will always be somewhat more "extreme" looking, as they do not have the longhair to soften their features and morphology.



Now let us look at ear faults. Some are quite easy to understand, others more difficult for those unfamiliar with the breed.

We will begin with ear faults that are not specifically penalized, but which do stray from the ideal.



Ear faults **not** penalized, but straying from the ideal.

The cats below do not present a “*smooth curve*” to the ear as required by the standard. In “breeder speak”, the cat on the left presents a “flat-top” ear, having more of a right angle than smooth curve to the ear. The cat on the right presents an “upside-down U” ear with an arc that is too tight and closed. He also has ears that are too small.



“*Abrupt change of direction rather than a smooth curve*” **is** specifically penalized and judges must use their discretion when evaluating each cat.

Ear faults **not** penalized, but straying from the ideal.

Ideally, curled ears should be “*wide at base and open*”.

The cats below are 0 or 1st degree Curls, which means one should never see them in the show hall. However, here our consideration is the small size of the ears and ear base of the brown tabby. The kittens pictured are also 1st or 0 degree, but maintain the wider ear base we like to see (although their ears are somewhat low set on the head)



Penalize:

“Depressions or ripples on the surface of the curled portion of the ears.”

This is relatively self-explanatory. Curled ears will have the normal ear convolutions at the base and interior of the ear. However, a curled ear should have a smooth texture and not appear dimpled or corrugated on the upper 2/3rds of the ear.



Notice the dimpling or corrugation on this cat's curled portion of the ear.



Penalize:
“Low set ears.”

Curl ears should be set equally on the top and side of the head. The pictures below show **correct** ear placement. It is this setting referred to in the Note: *When AmCurls are alert with their ears swiveled toward the front, lines following through the curve of the ears should point to the center of the base of the skull.*



Penalize:

Vertical/horizontal crimps

Vertical Crimp is defined as:

Beginning at the base of the ear and continuing along some or all of its height, the outer edge of the ear bends or rolls vertically in toward the center of the ear giving the outer edge of the ear a pinched or crimped aspect.

Notice the outer edges of both of this kitten's ears turn inward towards her face along a crimp or pinch running vertically from the base to a good way up the ear (this can vary).

Vertical crimp can often straighten or loosen a curled ear, but by no means are all 1st or 2nd degree curls due to this fault.

VC also tends to appear suddenly in a kitten, even from one day to another.



Vertical Crimp

Notice the outer edges of the ears turn inward towards the face along a crimp or pinch running vertically from the base to a good way up the ear.



Horizontal Crimp is defined as:

*Excessive width of both edges of the base of the ear distinguished by the ear continuing beyond a vertical curved ridge that one would have expected to be the natural outer edges of the ear, giving the ear a splayed appearance. A horizontal ridge of cartilage is also visible in the center of the ear above the canal. (**Splayed**: Spreading outward, broad and flat.)*

Horizontal crimp can affect ears with any degree of curl and can affect one or both ears. It can range from quite mild to severe. Kittens who display HC when young have been known to “outgrow” it. As it is no longer visually apparent, this cats can indeed be shown (although their breeding is not recommended).



Mild HC



Moderate HC



Severe HC



Below is a kitten with horizontal crimp in one ear. Compare the difference in the width and “flattening” of the ear base. In her case, the “normal” ear was of lovely show quality, and both ears were nicely matched in terms of degree of curl. Hence, horizontal crimp does not necessarily affect the degree or matching of curl.





Amadeus, the first kitten identified
with horizontal crimp

Development of HC
in a kitten



4 weeks



7.5 weeks



10.5 weeks



Note: In short, vertical and horizontal crimp are two opposite and undesirable extremes affecting the base of the curled ear, the former causing the base to appear too narrow, the latter causing the base to appear too wide.

Compare the three kittens below and notice the undesirable faults.



Vertical Crimp



Correct ear shape



Horizontal Crimp



This image shows two cats with different ear faults. The cat on the viewer's left presents moderate horizontal crimp. The cat on the right has *"Depressions or ripples on the surface of the curled portion of the ears"*.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Straight or severely mismatched ears.

Self explanatory.

It is worth noting that the WAA refers to “**severely** mismatched ears”. If one looks closely enough, almost every example of the breed will have at least a minimal mismatch, just as no two human ears are exactly the same on the same person.

Ideally, any mismatch should be minimal enough so as to be unnoticeable - or barely noticeable - during judging.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Lack of firm cartilage in base of ear.

For any American Curl to be a showable member of the breed, the base of the ear **MUST** be firm to the touch. Straight-eared (normal-eared) Curls do exist and can be a valuable part of a breeding program, but they can not be shown as American Curls.

The cat to the right shows one curled ear. Neither ear was firm to the touch and to date there has **never** been an example of a Curl with cartilage in one ear only.

A cat with soft yet curled ears - whether one or both - will most likely have suffered ear mites or injury, but is **NOT** an American Curl as we know it. Curls will either have firm cartilage, or “normal” soft ears - never soft yet curled ears.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Extreme curl in an adult cat where the tip of the ear touches the back of the head or the ear itself

Self explanatory.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Ear tips that are not flexible.

Self-explanatory.

The height of the cartilage may vary from cat to cat, but it should never reach the top of the ear, causing the tips to be inflexible. Indeed, a cat with cartilage reaching the tip of the ear would most likely have 0 or 1st degree ears and would not be considered show quality.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Ears in which the lower portion of the ear is abnormally flattened, has compressed ridges of cartilage and does not have a normal, visible ear cavity.

Basically describing **horizontal crimp**.

When the ear is flattened or splayed, the natural cup-shaped ear cavity will not be apparent.

Note how this kitten's normal ear (to the viewer's left) has a cup-shaped ear cavity, a kind of "catcher's mitt", while the ear with the flattening effect of horizontal crimp does not.



This does not affect the health of the cat or that of their ears.



Unfortunately there is a bit of a conflict in the standard in this area.

The term and definition of horizontal crimp is included under **penalizations**. However, the description *“Ears in which the lower portion of the ear is abnormally flattened, has compressed ridges of cartilage and does not have a normal, visible ear cavity”* is also a fair description of HC and is included under **withholdings**.

In any case this will hopefully be a moot point as breeders should recognize this fault and not present such cats in the judging ring.



Judging and Handling American Curls



Prelude

There is an old saying in the fancy that “smart cats make lousy show cats”.

As a pet owner, one of the greatest charms of the Curl is its extreme intelligence. As an exhibitor, this very same trait can prove quite frustrating.

Some breeders have chosen to breed for show temperament and are consistently achieving cats that are very amenable to handling and showing.

Others chose to maintain the intelligence and “spark” they find so endearing in Curls, realising they may end up with lovely, fun companions that do not enjoy the show hall.

When judging/handling a Curl, it is always best to assume that you are in the presence of a cat breed that has been known to turn on lights to get attention, purposefully change the TV channel and that kittens as young as 4 weeks have been caught trying to figure out how the door handle works.



No judge can be expected to know the point-by-point breakdown of any breed. However, they should know the general weight given to each area.

Let us look once again at the points allotted to each section. While ears fall within “HEAD”, we will consider them as a section apart given their importance and high point value, and divide the head points into two. Therefore, by point weight and from the highest to the lowest, the cat can be divided into the following sections:

Body	-	30 points
Ears	-	20 points
Head	-	20 points
Coat/Color/Pattern	-	20 points
Other (balance)	-	10 points



Judging American Curls

Suggested handling of the BODY:

It goes without saying that every cat is an individual and every one will behave and react differently to handling. However, we can make some generalizations.

Curls tend to be “four on the floor” cats. It is therefore recommended that the judge stretch the cat while taking it to the judging table, or when at least the hind feet are on the table. When in a standing position, with cat facing you, lift front legs and stretch out body upwards as if viewing stomach, then turn from side to side stroking back of cat to tail.

Most Curls are amenable to being stretched and the judge can thus get a good view of body length. Others will have to be “stretched” while all four feet are on the table.



Judging American Curls

Suggested handling of the HEAD:

HEAD LENGTH / SHAPE:

When looking down at the top of the head from behind, place thumbs behind the ears and forefingers along the side of the head down to the nose, forming a triangle with your fingers. The head (triangle) should be approximately one and one-half times longer than wide. There should be no flat planes or whisker break.

PROFILE:

When running the index finger from the tip of the nose to the base of the eyes, you should be feeling a flat nose without a bump. At the base of the eyes, you should then feel a slight change in direction, or rise which continues smoothly up over the forehead, between the ears, flowing into the neck. This is all in one continuous smooth transition from tip of nose to neck. This is also a good time to assure that the chin is firm and in line with nose and upper lip.



Judging American Curls

Suggested handling of the EARS:

Let us begin by saying what **NOT** to do when judging curled ears.

PLEASE DO NOT OVERHANDLE THE EARS!!!!

Almost all ear faults *can be seen*. Ninety-five percent of what needs to be evaluated on a curled ear is visual and can be seen with the eye alone.

Please:

Do not try to uncurl or bend the base of the ear.

Do not stick your fingers into the ear.

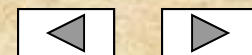
Do not try to force the ear into an unnatural position.



Please note that **curled ears are not especially sensitive, nor are the particularly fragile**. They do not break easily. They are however made of cartilage, and forcing or bending them could be painful to the cat.

Keep in mind that **NO cat likes to have its ears handled**. None of them like ear drops, none of them like to get their ears cleaned and none of them like to have someone stick fingers into their ears (especially with long nails - ouch!). American Curls are no different.

Now let us suggest a good way to judge curled ears. The following **4 steps** are recommended. These steps can be done in any order, depending on the judge's preference and the cooperation of the cat. In simplest terms, we evaluate the ears from the front, back and sides, followed by minimal handling.



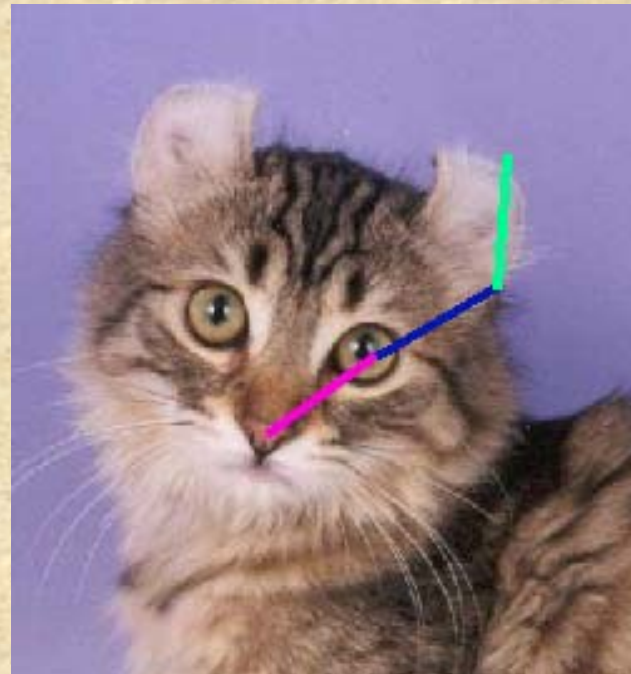
Judging curled ears - recommended steps

Step 1:

Viewing from the front.

Look at the cat face on, either while the cat is still in the judging cage or once it is on the table. Evaluate the balance of the head. (This is also a good time to evaluate eye shape, size and placement).

Is the head (including ears) pleasing to the eye and divided into 3 relatively equal thirds?



Step 1 continued... Viewing from the front

Is there a good balance between head length and ear height / degree of curl?

Longer head with more loosely curled ears, achieving a pleasing balance.



Shorter head with more tightly curled ears - again, nicely balanced.



Step 1 continued... Viewing from the front

Check for ear faults.

Is there evidence of horizontal or vertical crimp?



Vertical Crimp



Correct ear shape



Horizontal Crimp

Are there Depressions or ripples on the surface of the curled portion of the ears?

Is the ear suitably wide at the base and open? Does it have a visible ear cavity?

Is there a noticeable or severe difference in size between the two ears?



Step 2: Viewing from the back.

Turn the cat away from you and look at the back of the head.

Are the ears correctly set on the head?

In other words, when the cat is alert with ears swiveled toward the front, do lines following through the curve of the ears point to the center of the base of the skull?

To assess the proper direction in which the ears are pointing, they should be in a normal, relaxed, forward position. A pheasant feather held high and rather still will provide a good view from the profile and rear. A good “second look” can be made after returning the cat to its judging cage as it looks up at you.



Step 2 continued... Viewing from the back.

Remember that curled ears are mobile - noises can make the ears swivel towards each other giving an entirely different impression. If the cat is not listening to the front, the ears will not point to the center-back of the head, even when the setting is correct.



Indeed, ears swiveled outwards with the tips pointing inward allow for another opportunity to evaluate how equally matched the ears are. When in this position, they should form a sort of “heart” shape, which will vary depending on tightness of curl.



Step 2 continued... Viewing from the back

Are the ears equally matched in terms of degree of curl?

Remember, just like in human ears, if one looks closely enough there will always be some differences. However, any mismatch in either degree of curl or size of the ears in a show quality Curl should be minimal and ideally unnoticeable during normal judging.

Do the ears fall within the 3rd degree range required for show quality Curls?



Loose 3rd degree



Tight 3rd degree



Step 2 continued... **Viewing from the back**

Check for ear faults.

Are there depressions or ripples on the surface of the curled portion of the ears?

Are the ears straight or severely mismatched?.

Are the ears low or badly set on the head?

Is there a noticeable or severe difference in size between the two ears?



Step 3: Viewing from the side.

There are some traits and/or faults that are best evaluated by viewing the ear from the side, although they can usually also be evaluated from behind.

Do the ears curl back in a smooth, graceful arc?



Step 3 continued... **Viewing from the side.**

Check for ear faults.

Is there an abrupt change of direction rather than a smooth curve?

Is there an extreme curl in an adult cat where the tip of the ear touches the back of the head or the ear itself?



Step 4:

Handling the ears

At this point, almost all traits and faults of the curled ear have been evaluated. Ears need only be quickly handled to check for two faults:

- 1) *Lack of firm cartilage in base of ear.*
- 2) *Ear tips that are not flexible.*

Neither of these should ever appear in the showhall. The first would not be a true curl-eared American Curl traceable to Shulamith but rather a cat with past injury or disease or perhaps a new, different type of mutation. The second would be extremely unusual and should it occur, the cat would most likely have 0 degree (i.e. unshowable) ears.

To check for these faults, gently run or swipe the flat part of your thumb and/or forefinger up the ear, from the base to the tip. This process should only need be done once and should be quick, taking only a second or two. Gently feel the TIPS of the ears in the direction they are going.

Do NOT try to uncurl or bend the ear. Do not stick fingers or thumbs into the ear cavity itself. Do NOT “fiddle” with the ears.



Step 4 continued... **Handling the ears**

Check for ear faults.

Is there a lack of firm cartilage in the base of the ear?

Are the ear tips flexible?



A note regarding kittens

Curled ears sometimes appear to “shrink” as the cat matures. Thus some kittens may appear to have oversized ears for their age.

Kitten



Adult



In Review

We have seen how to judge and handle an American Curl. Let us now have some insights on the most frequent comments and complaints heard by exhibitors and breeders. These comments were gathered from a multi-association American Curl breed list. While there may be some point variation in the different Standards, the overall ideal for the breed is shared by the majority of breeders and exhibitors.

Actual comments heard from judges are included and their misunderstanding explained. These are not issues which can be considered a personal interpretation of the standard, but are rather those comments heard which are in direct contradiction of the same.

These issues can be divided into two areas:
knowing the standard and **handling the cats**.

Breeder Concerns - the Standard

1) Size and Boning

Comments heard:

“I like a Curl with a heft to it like a Maine Coon”

“Curls are a natural breed and should be large, strong cats”

“I don’t like those scrawny Curls, I like them nice and big”

What the standard says:

A medium, semi-foreign cat. Some standards actually give weight indications of 5-8 lbs. for a **mature** female and 7-10 lbs. for a **mature** male and most breeders aim for this range whether or not the standard of their association of choice includes this requirement. Weights can be deceptive and impossible to actually judge when handling the cat, but they do indicate that the breed should NOT be large. (As can be seen by the weights indicated, males are often substantially larger than females but they should still not be “large” cats).

1) Size and Boning continued

Breeder insights/comments:

Mother Nature and hybrid vigor tend towards larger rather than smaller. As breeders, it is extremely frustrating to hear the above-mentioned comments when they have been diligently selectively breeding towards cats that meet the standard.

The standards do allow that proper conformation is more important than overall size, but it must be remembered that it is “allowed”, **NOT** ideal.

American Curls should be semi-foreign cats, similar to the Egyptian Mau or Havana.

2) Coat, color and pattern

Comments heard:

“It’s too bad your cat has a locket, otherwise I really liked it”

“If you want your silvers to do well, you need to get rid of the tarnishing”

“I like a longhair to have a nice, thick longhair coat”

What the standard says:

Lockets and buttons are **ALLOWED** and **NOT** penalized. They should not be taken into consideration at all.

Likewise, the point allowance on color is very low (1 - 5 points depending on the standard) and should not be a significant factor when judging the cat.

Longhaired Curls should **NOT** have a thick or fluffy coat. The coat should lie flat against the body and have minimal undercoat.

2) Coat, color and pattern continued

Breeder insights/comments:

Simply that judges better understand and realise the weight of the values given to this area.

3) Degree of curl

Comments heard:

“I like this cat better because it has more tightly curled ears”

“This cat has better type, but I like this one’s ears better and since ears are so important in the breed, I’m making him BOB”

What the standard says:

Show quality curled ears must have a minimum 90 degree arc up to a maximum of 180. (This is best understood by reviewing the pictures included in this presentation.) All ears falling within this range are equally valid.

Ears are indeed important in the breed, but they account for only 20 points. The majority of the points are allotted to the rest of the cat.

Breeder insights/comments:

There is always room for personal preference when judging a curled ear and that is understood. However, more tightly curled ears are NOT “better” and all ears falling within the range allowed should be given equal consideration.

Breeders realise the importance of ears in this breed, but getting good show-quality ears is basically a question of luck. After working hard and selectively breeding to achieve a cat with excellent overall type (and hoping for good ears), it is frustrating to see a cat with excellent ears but poor type that clearly does not meet the standard being given preference over a cat with acceptable, showable ears and excellent type according to the standard.

4) Assorted

Comments heard:

“This cat has lovely round eyes”

“I love the nice straight profile on this cat”

“This cat has a nice body, not too long”

Breeder insights/comments:

Basically, we only ask that the judges know the standard. Curls should not have round eyes, but walnut shaped eyes. They should not have a straight profile and their bodies are supposed to be long.

We realise that the American Curl is a minority breed and many judges see them infrequently. When in doubt, please do not hesitate to pull out the standard and review it.

Breeder Concerns - Handling

This has been discussed but merits reiteration.

PLEASE DO NOT OVERHANDLE THE EARS!

We breeders and exhibitors have been witness to very excessive handling of the ears. Judges try to bend and fold them (“if this were a Fold, the ears would go *like this*”), they stick their fingers inside the ear, play with them, etc. etc. Some judges spend up to a minute “fiddling” with the ears.

The only reason to touch the ears is to assure that there is firm cartilage in the base of ear and that the ear tips are flexible. It is EXTREMELY unlikely that one will ever be presented with a cat in the showhall that has a lack of firm cartilage in the base of ear or ear tips that are not flexible (in fact, it is extremely unlikely that any true American Curl would ever present either of these faults at all).

So please remember, a *quick* (one or two seconds) *gentle* handling of the ears is more than enough.

Conclusion

The American Curl is one of Mother Nature's gifts to cat lovers world-wide. We have discussed a bit of the history and development of the breed and have gone into detail on what to look for when judging an American Curl. To briefly sum up:

The gene responsible for the American Curl's curled ear is a natural mutation first identified in 1981 in a domestic found in California. The gene carries no harmful effect for the cats. On the contrary, Curls tend to be robustly healthy cats, good birthers and excellent mothers. To date there have been no breed-related health problems whatsoever.

The American Curl is a medium-sized, refined cat with an elegant appearance, neither too large nor too small. They should be long and slender, with a moderately long head crowned by those amazing ears.



The curled ears of the breed can vary considerably, even while falling within the definition of “show quality”. Any ears with a 3rd degree curl (from loose to almost touching the back of the ear), which are balanced with the rest of the head and free from ear faults should all be considered equally valid - although of course there will always be a place for personal preference.

In terms of personality, the breed tends to be extremely intelligent and capable of solving complex problems. They are delightful companions and a joy to live with no matter what their ears look like - tight, loose, wide, narrow or straight-eared.

In short, with their devilish yet sweet expressions and elegant beauty, American Curls are simply....

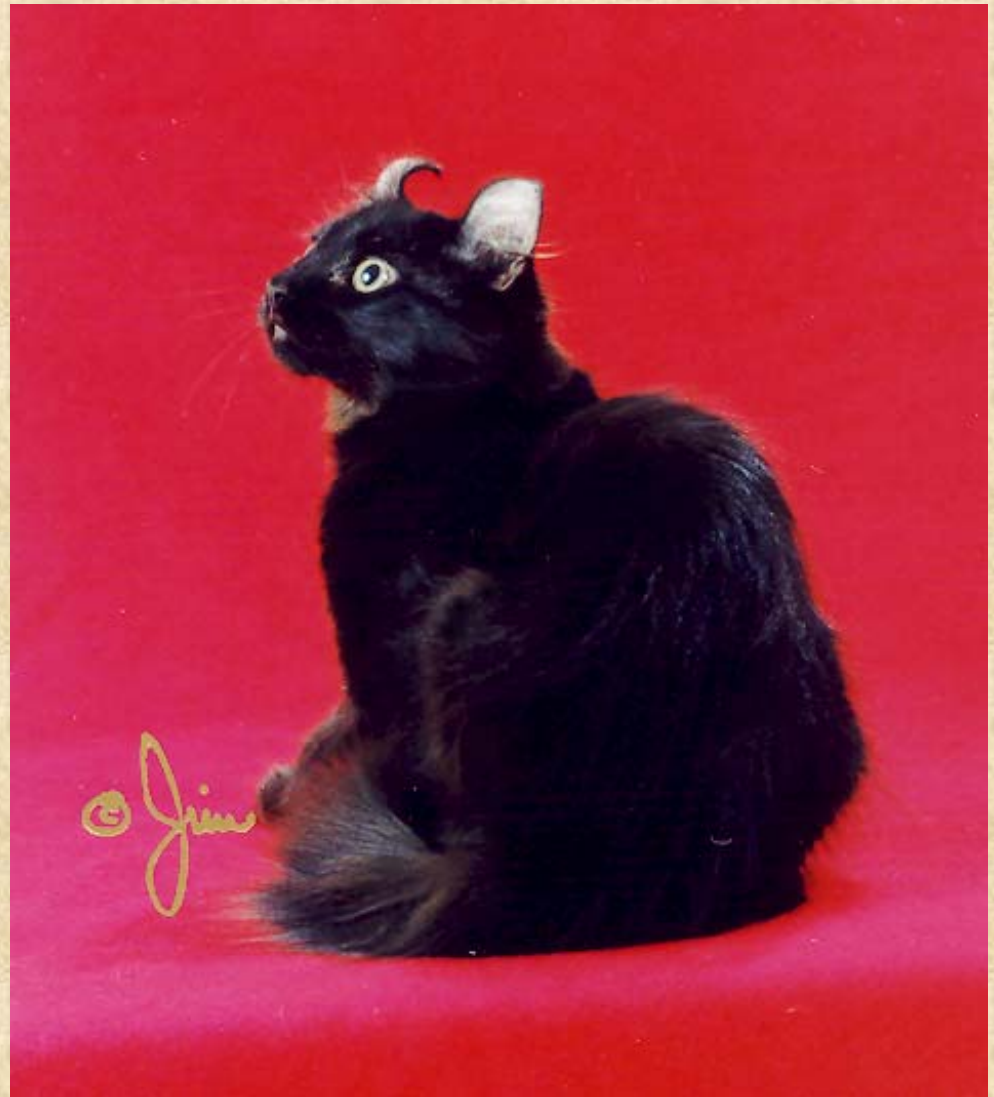
“Ear” resistible!



Discussion of examples present

Male (neuter)
DOB May 16 1997

Pictured at 3.5
months





Male
DOB Sept 20 2000
Pictured at 6 months

Male
DOB March 23 2002

Pictured at 5 months



Photos for discussion

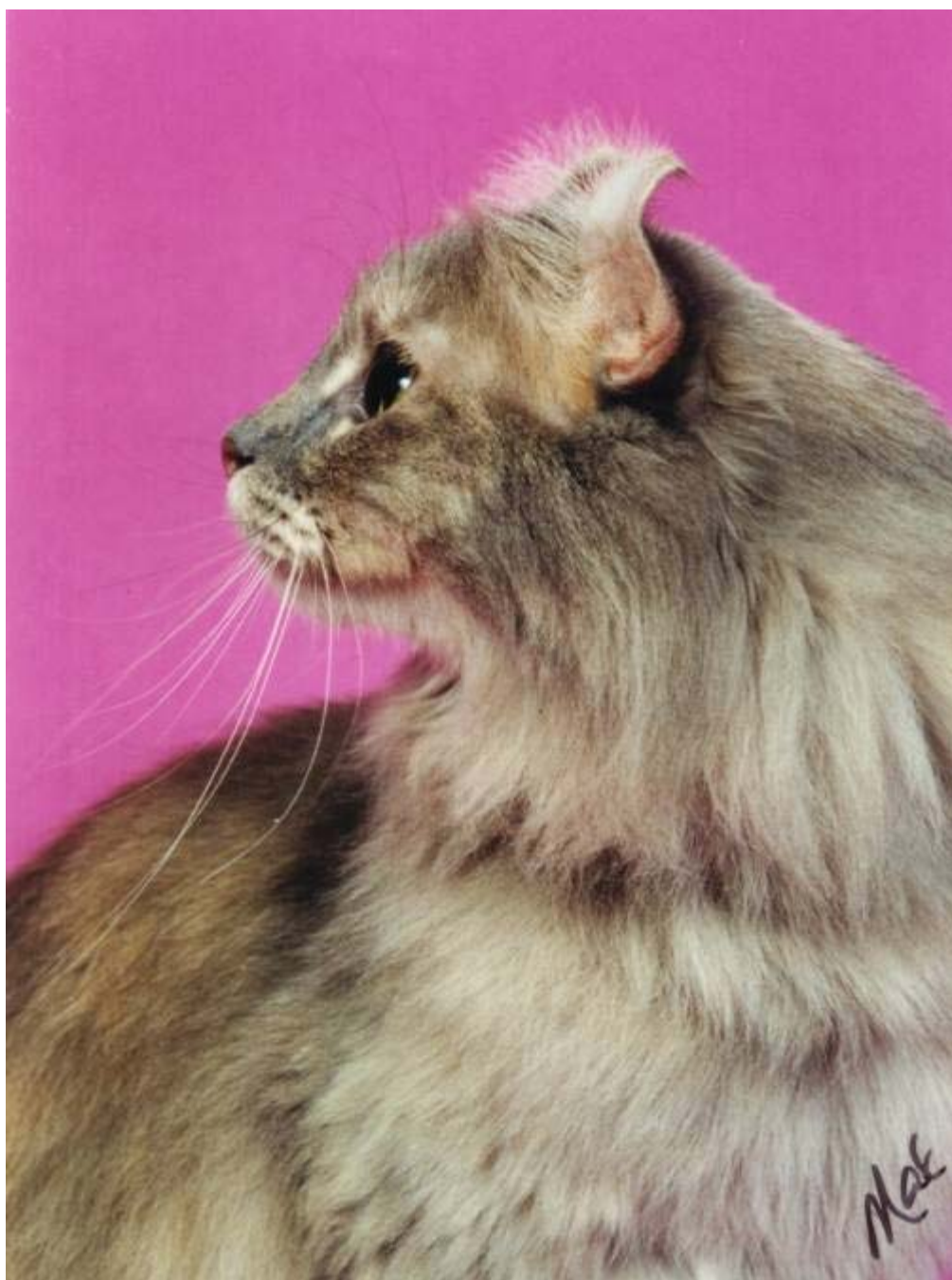




















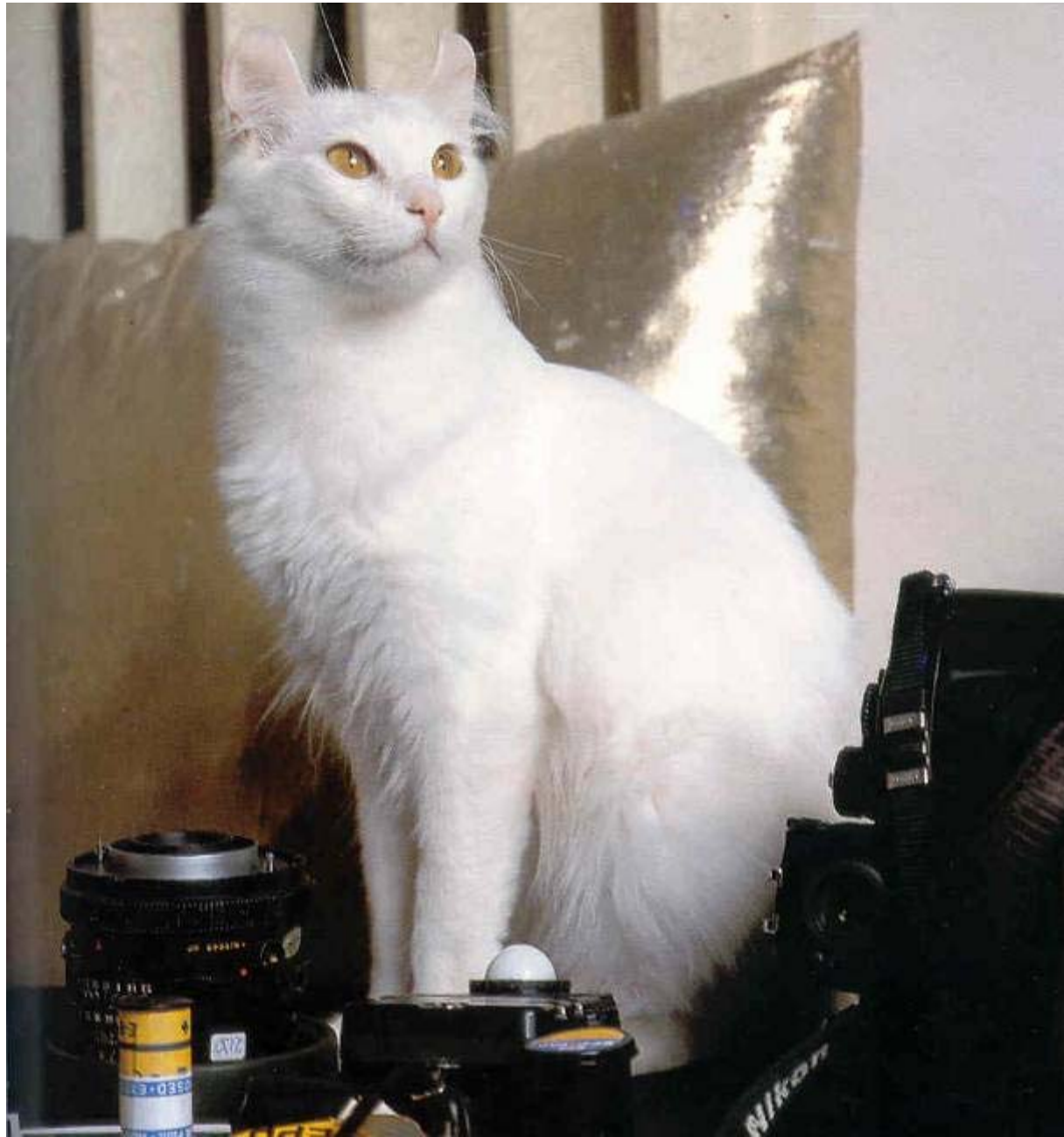












And last but certainly not least...



EARS!



Ears (20 points):

*The overall appearance of the AmCurl ear should be one that is aesthetically pleasing to view. Minimum 90 degree arc of curl. Firm cartilage from ear base to at least one-third of height of ear. Wide at base and open; curving back in an arc when viewed from the front, side or rear. The surface of the curved portion of the ear should be smooth. Tips rounded and flexible. Moderately large in proportion to head. Erect, set equally on top and side of head. Furnishings are desirable. **Note:** When AmCurls are alert with their ears swiveled toward the front, lines following through the curve of the ears should point to the center of the base of the skull.*

Penalize:

Vertical/horizontal crimps. Depressions or ripples on the surface of the curled portion of the ears. Low set ears. Abrupt change of direction rather than a smooth curve.



WITHHOLD ALL AWARDS:

Straight or severely mismatched ears. Lack of firm cartilage in base of ear. Extreme curl in an adult cat where the tip of the ear touches the back of the head or the ear itself. Ear tips that are not flexible. Ears in which the lower portion of the ear is abnormally flattened, has compressed ridges of cartilage and does not have a normal, visible ear cavity.

The curled ear has many facets. Here we are going to attempt to describe the “ideal” ear and then follow with those which veer from the ideal.

Some of the ear faults discussed later are cause for penalization or the withholding of awards. Others simply stray from the ideal.

It is worth mentioning that ear faults in American Curls are **aesthetic only** and do not imply any health concerns.

Let us begin with good show quality ears.



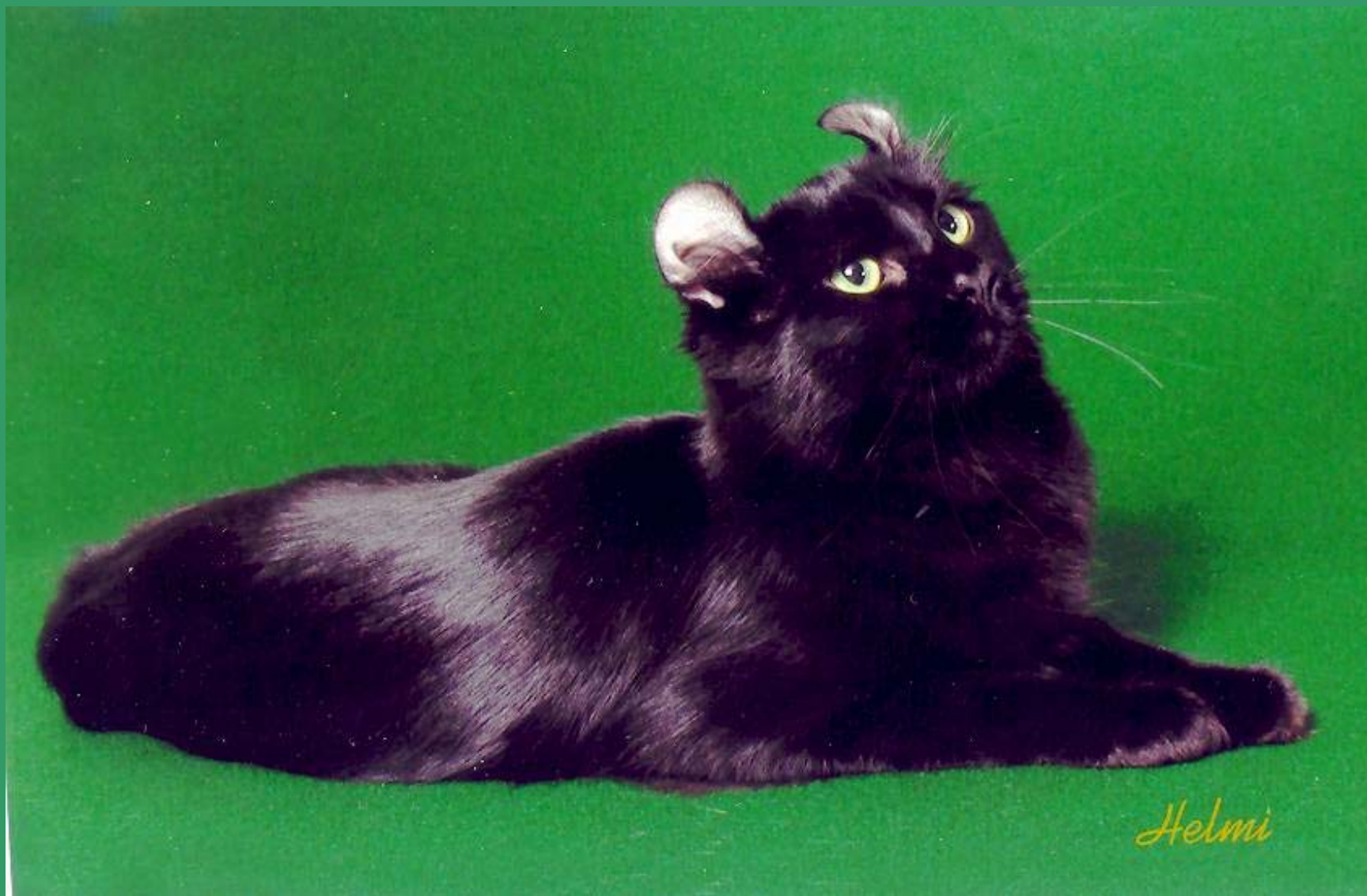
Pictured to the right is a cat considered by many to have “perfect” ears. Notice the smooth arc and pleasing effect.

However, as previously mentioned, show quality ears can cover a wide range - from a loose 3rd degree to almost touching.



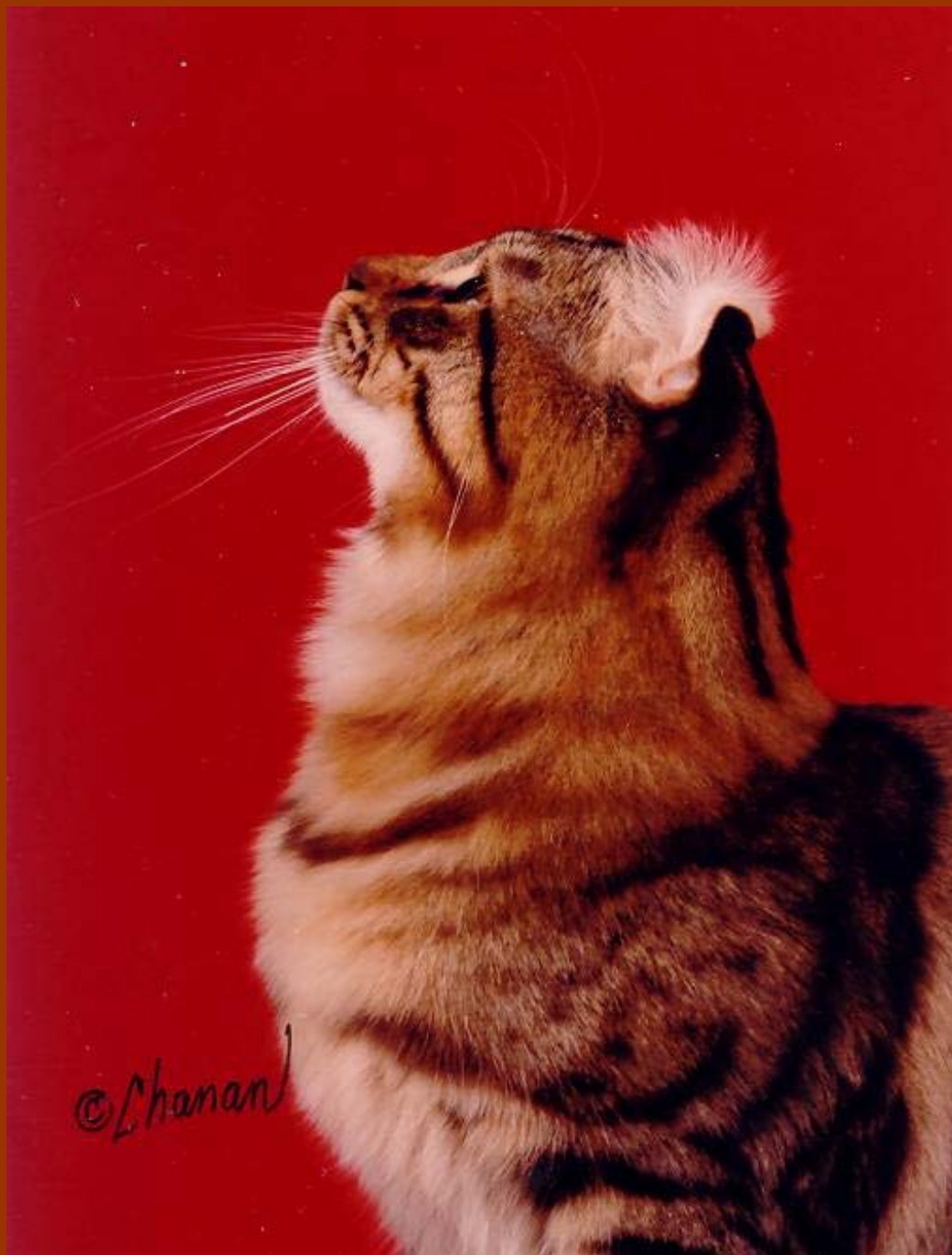
Following are pictures of cats - all with show quality ears.





Helmi





©Chanan



















4 month old kitten







* 4 month old kitten







