

Behavior Restrictions With Designer Cats

In recent years there has been an unfortunate move to accept novelty or, as they are sometimes called, designer cats. By choosing to select some of these animals as breeds (to the disadvantage of the animals) the health and welfare of the cats have been put in jeopardy, and the physical changes have not been -without behavioral cost. These changes have occurred mainly in two ways. **Selecting Extremes** The first is by gradual selection towards exaggerated extremes, in large part caused by awarding points for extremes at the show bench. This has produced the modern Persians fuller, flatter face, build and heavy coat. It has also formed the thin, snippy, contemporary Siamese. The most exaggerated form of the flat-faced Persian is the Peke-faced Persian, although the ultra-types' in Britain are not far behind. In veterinary terms they have maxillo-facial compression, with a predisposition towards respiratory, pharyngeal and eye diseases. The contorted passageways and change of build with the full coat make exertion less attractive to the cat. Persians generally are recognized as being more lethargic; while they can and do run and play on occasion, their activity profile is more sedentary. However, this activity reduction cannot be attributed fully to a long coat, for Northern longhairs such as the Maine Coon are active, with much patrolling activity over their territories. The change from the traditional standard-shaped Siamese to the thinner form has produced more restlessly active cats. These modern Siamese are light in build, but they have also undergone a change in the shape of the skull, which has been extended and narrowed. However, there have also been suggestions that the behavior change may not be due entirely to build differences. **Radical Change** The second change in recent breeding practice has been a greater acceptance of radical appearance changes arising from mutations. A number of these are controversial, not least because of their behavior implications. The Scottish Fold, with its ear deformity, must be out crossed to avoid horrific cartilage and bone deformations. The Fold's ears are permanently flattened in a defensive look. The American Curl from California similarly has ears permanently distorted back which may seem to another cat to be signaling aggression. Even if they are not read in this way, the inability to move the ears deprives the cat of a major means of communication. The American short-legged mutation called the Munch kin has been selected purely as a novelty. It cannot jump and climb in the normal way, and lacks the lithe balanced movements of other cats. Its grooming behavior is also restricted because of its short leg length. Normal behavior is similarly affected in the Sphinx. Its lack of fur affects its ability to control its temperature; consequently its free access to the outside world in cooler conditions should be curtailed.

About the Author

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