

BREEDS IN FOCUS: THE CHINCHILLA

The Lovely Chinchilla by Sue Ford

This month's Breed in Focus is one that has only been actively promoted as a show animal in recent times, but which has probably been observed in the cavy population since the early years of the fancy. As of January 2015, the Chinchilla is a Guide Standard breed.

On the following pages Sue Ford (Kingate Cavies) has described how she has developed the breed and what judges should look for when assessing them. Sue is well known for showing teams of enormous, typey and very well presented, and some of these are illustrated in the accompanying photographs. The feature is supplemented by notes supplied by other breeders and exhibitors.

CHINCHILLA (Guide Standard)

HEAD, EYES & EARS

Head to be short and broad, with a gently curving profile.
Muzzle to be of good width and gently rounded at the nostrils.
Eyes to be large, bright and bold and set with good width between.
Ears to be large and drooping, with lower rim parallel to the ground & set with good width between.

BODY SHAPE

To have short, cobby body with deep, broad shoulders.
To be fit and of good substance, with plenty of firm flesh.
To have good size appropriate to age.

TICKING & MARKINGS

To have a long-ticked agouti pattern all over the body except for unticked white or cream markings in specific parts of the body, as defined below.

Ticking should be long and even in all but the marked areas.
Markings should be clearly defined and confined to 'eye circles', nostrils, jowls, chest, belly and an area around the forelimb extending from the belly.

Belly must be wide enough that it is just visible when the cavy is viewed from the side.

Feet to be ticked and should ideally match the body colour.

COLOUR

Top colour to be of a muted, pastel shade produced by a combination of the desired long ticking and a pale base colour each showing through.

Belly should be of an unticked white or cream colour, as detailed below.

Base colour should be paler than on the corresponding Agouti, to be as light a shade as possible without losing the desired pigmentation of eyes, pads and ears.

COAT

To be soft & silky, clean and short, groomed free of guard hairs.

DESCRIPTION OF COLOURS

Silver	Light grey base with long white ticking, white markings. Eyes dark. Ears and Pads grey.
Lemon	Light grey base with long cream ticking, cream markings. Eyes dark. Ears and Pads grey.
Cinnamon	Light chocolate base with long white ticking, white markings. Eyes ruby. Ears and Pads pink / light chocolate.
Cream	Light chocolate base with long cream ticking, cream markings. Eyes ruby. Ears and Pads pink / light chocolate.

GUIDANCE NOTES

In judging Chinchillas the emphasis is on quality of ticking, clarity of markings and achievement of the desired colour, along with the requisite type and condition.

u/5 exhibits may be paler in colour than adult exhibits. This should not be unduly penalised as it may well clear as the cavy matures.

Size is very desirable, but not at the expense of quality or cobbiness.
Grooming is essential to produce the effect of even ticking on the body and sides of the cavy.

SPECIFIC FAULTS

Too dark a shade of body colour
Patches of solid white or cream hairs
Uneven ticking
Inappropriate toenail pigmentation.

My interest the Chinchilla probably started back in 1979, when I had a pet Silver Chinchilla boar called Smokey Joe. In 2006 I came across some pictures of a Silver Chinchilla bred by Caroline Creese on a cavy forum. I was told that I could create the breed by using a White/lilac Argente crossed with a Self PE or DE White. At the time I was breeding Argentes anyway, so decided to have a go at creating my own Chinchillas. I managed to get a PE White sow from Liz Miles and borrowed a White/lilac Argente boar from my friend Louise, and had my first litter of Silver Chinchillas born in 2007. I was also lucky to get hold of a lovely young PE White boar from Margaret Hooper and crossed him with my own Lemon/lilac Argente sow, producing some Lemon Chinchillas. So I started off with these two lines. I then managed to get hold of a very handsome young Cinnamon Chinchilla boar from Nicky Reynolds, who grew up to be a huge boar! [Maxwell: 'The Brick']. I crossed him with sows born from my first two lines (Chinchillas and Argentes) and also with a few pet sows. I was getting some lovely stock from Maxwell and kept three lovely sons from him. Mozart, a super Silver Chinchilla boar, was one of my best, who went on to win Best New & Emerging Breed many times. I also managed to get a lovely Silver Chinchilla boar from my friend Pauline Dutton, and also crossed him into my lines. These litters did have a mixture of babies, Self DE Whites, PE Whites, Argentes and Chinchillas. I also had babies that were Chinchillas but with large white patches, or some that were much too dark. I had to be strong, any with white patches had to go, as did any selfs and any that were too dark. Decent White/lilac Argente babies I did hang on to and crossed a few back into the Chinchillas.

During this time I did try crossing a Black Fox sow with my Self PE White boar and had a litter of five Chinchillas born. But these babies later produced litters of Chinchillas that were much too dark and had shorter ticking; they also produced Foxes and the odd Self Chocolate in later generations. So I decided this was not the right way to produce the Chinchillas, and stayed away from using Foxes again.

I was very keen to try and produce some of the Cream Chinchillas. I did manage to get hold of a lovely Cream bred Buff sow and also a super Saffron sow. I crossed both sows into the Chinchillas and started off my first line of lovely Cream Chinchillas and Lemon Chinchillas from the Saffron sow. I sold on any Self Creams or mismarked babies that were born in these litters.

Now my Chinchillas are breeding true; very, very occasionally a Self in Cream or DE White will pop up in a litter. I feel that sticking to breeding Chinchilla to Chinchilla must be the way forward, with the ultimate outcome that Chinchillas will genetically have two Agouti genes AA and also be EE. Any other breeds that are mixed into them will keep popping out later, what you put in is what you will get out!

BABIES

Baby Chinchillas are much paler than the adults. I always keep the palest ones, with a soft pastel appearance and a lovely wide, solid white or cream belly. Babies will get darker as they get older.



6 weeks old Silver Chinchilla - Mozart



Belly on an u/5 Cinnamon Chinchilla



Base colour on a 5-8 Cinnamon Chinchilla

I also look for a pale base colour in the babies, the paler the better, as this will get a bit darker as they get older. The pale base colour should go right down to the skin along the hair, and not be black or very dark chocolate.



Chest markings on a Silver Chinchilla

MARKINGS

Good clear markings in solid white or cream are very important from early on, these include eye circles, nostrils, jowls, chest, belly and an area around the forelimb extending from the belly. These markings are very similar to the Fox, but are not produced by the Fox gene. The Chinchilla does not need to have pea spots.

Overall, the Chinchilla must have long, even ticking, and be as far away as it is possible to be from an Agouti in terms of paleness and light base colour, without the coat becoming patchy.

I have found that the best Silver and Lemon Chinchillas (i.e. those with the correct base colour are those that are carrying the chocolate gene (Bb)).

The Chinchilla is a super breed, and has a really friendly temperament. They all seem to love their food, and keep their weight on and don't seem to have any health issues. Sows do seem to have a bit of an attitude when in company, but boars seem to be big softies with a lovely laid back attitude!

2014 was a great year for me, probably my best so far, with many Best New & Emerging Breed wins. I am very much looking forward to the Chinchilla moving up to Guide Standard in 2015, and it will be interesting to see if they can hold their own against many of the other Guide Standard breeds!



Face markings on a Silver Chinchilla - Mozart

THE BREED COLOURS

all owned by Sue Ford



Silver Chinchilla Sow – Sugar



5-8 Cream Chinchilla Sow - Sherbet



5-8 Lemon Chinchilla Sow – Maisie



Cinnamon Chinchilla Boar – Maxwell (The Brick)

The genetics of the Chinchilla

by Simon Neesam

Genetically, the Chinchilla cavy is a homozygous (true breeding) Agouti, usually in combination with a silver or other C-series dilution gene, and selected for a pale base colour and long ticking. The various Agouti genes: A (full Agouti), Ar (Solid Agouti) and At (Tan), control how the yellow and black pigment on each hair shaft is turned on and off. In the case of the AA Agouti (or Chinchilla), a lot of yellow (or silver) ticking is visible, as compared to the tan, where the yellow ticking is confined to the belly, feet, muzzle, chest, pea spots and eye circles.

For Agoutis or Chinchillas with two copies of the agouti gene, there is a natural tendency for the ticking on the belly and around the eye to be especially long, to lose the tiny black 'tick' at the end of the hair shaft, and become 'tipped'. The Chinchilla breed exploits this phenomenon in its markings. In contrast, most short-ticked 'show standard' Agoutis are in fact Aa (i.e. they have only one copy of the agouti gene) and so do not breed true (producing a proportion of self or 'dilute' babies, as well as long-ticked AA ones).

The four commonly seen Chinchilla colours – Silver, Cinnamon, Lemon and Cream – are inherited in exactly same way as their Agouti counterparts; although in the best examples, modifier genes are undoubtedly present to help soften the base colour.



Cream Chinchilla & Cinnamon Chinchilla – Sherbet & Merlin

Chinchilla: Breeder Questionnaires

Sue Ford

What are your proudest achievements with the breed?

Winning my first New & Emerging award with Mozart, a Silver Chinchilla boar that I had bred myself. He went on to win many Best New & Emerging awards. Offspring from Mozart has gone on to win Best New & Emerging at the Real London Show twice. Also in Oct 2014, getting the Chinchillas their Guide Standard.

What do you look for in a breeding boar?

Long even ticking and clear markings, with a pale base colour. No extra cream or white patches. A good decent-size stocky boar.

What do you look for in a breeding sow?

A good size. Long even ticking and definitely not too dark a base colour.

What do you look for in a potential show baby?

Long ticking and very pale base/undercolour. u/5s are always pale anyway, so babies should be extra pale. No extra cream or white patches. Decent size for age.

Are there any specific points a judge should consider when assessing a Chinchilla?

That u/5s are much paler than the adults. The base colour is supposed to be pale down to the skin and not dark. Ticking is long. A good solid cream or white belly is desirable. The Chinchilla must be as far away from just a 'bad Agouti' as possible, they are supposed to be light/pale.

Are there any management or preparation techniques that are peculiar to the breed?

No, not specifically. Grooming out of the long unticked guard hairs is similar to an Argente or Agouti. The grooming must be done carefully so as not to give the impression of a patchy coat with uneven ticking.

What do you think the future holds for the breed?

I think the Chinchilla has a bright future and will eventually I am sure, be able to compete well in the open shows if it gets a Full Standard, in a few years' time. They are good strong, stocky pigs and should prove to be a competitive breed!

Veronica Mires

What attracted you to Chinchilla cavies?

The soft gentle colour with the white around the eyes

How did you create your line?

The first pigs came from Sue Ford & Lily Leete although I did use some Foxes to create a larger gene pool

What are your proudest achievements with the breed?

Winning the New & Emerging class/trophy at Harrogate in 2014 with a Cream sow

What do you look for in a breeding boar?

Good type and size with no white patches. If anything is lacking in the sow such as ears then the boar must have excellent ears

What do you look for in a breeding sow?

Same as boar really

What do you look for in a potential show baby?

No white patches, and as pale a colour as possible as they tend to get darker

Are there any specific points a judge should consider when assessing a Chinchilla?

Read the standard/breed notes! Stop treating them as if they are just some pigs stuck on the end of the schedule that don't count.

Are there any management or preparation techniques that are peculiar to the breed?

When grooming try to only remove the guard hairs which are generally a dark colour and can change the look of the coat or make it appear darker/patchy

What do you think the future holds for the breed?

That very much depends on the people who are breeding them and the judges! If judges do not know the standard and judge poorly then exhibitors and breeders get fed up (probably the same for most breeds). Exhibitors and judges must respect the standard. I have heard judges and exhibitors saying that they like the pigs to be darker but that is not what Chinchillas are. At the same time, if the breeders keep making them paler and paler how will anyone see the eye circles? A happy medium has to exist.

Lynsey Thane

What attracted you to Chinchilla cavies?

I breed Foxes and Otters; the Chinchilla has similar markings and that is initially what attracted me. I also love their pale colours in contrast to the Fox.

How did you create your line?

I have had chins for around 18 months to 2 years. I am based in Inverness, but I have travelled to Wiltshire, Surrey and Darlington to collect my first chins. I would never have been able to start up with them without travelling for stock.

What do you look for in a breeding boar?

Breeding boars should be large in size and well-marked, pale in colour with a nice solid white belly. Good ears.

What do you look for in a breeding sow?

A breeding sow should be all of the above and fit

What do you look for in a potential show baby?

A good baby will be very, very pale with correct nose and ear colouring in relation to colour. Good even ticking without patches

What do you think the future holds for the breed?

The future for the chins is very exciting. I am hoping that more people will take up with this breed and that more people will take them seriously and stop comparing them to the Agouti!

Maplewood Stud

What attracted you to Chinchilla cavies?

Breeding and showing chinchillas and chinchilla mice for several years then seeing chinchilla cavies at shows.

How long have you kept the breed, and how did you create your line?

Approximately 15 months. Originally Self x pale Agouti, as stock was hard to come by. First Chinchilla stock originated from Dan Thomas

What do you look for in a breeding boar?

The best example of a Chinchilla possible, that has all of the desired traits (size, pale pastel colours with subtle chinchilla banding, well-shaped body, good head, eye and ear).

What do you look for in a breeding sow?

The sow should complement the chosen stud boar and be of sufficient size and weight to breed. She should be as near in quality to the boar as possible.

What do you look for in a potential show baby?

A light coloured even pastel shade top coat, with clearly banded hairs. Good eye circles and subtle markings that don't run into the face, nice belly width with good clear colour. Blocky shape, well-shaped and positioned ears, bright bold eyes, broad head and good calm temperament.

What do you think the future holds for the breed?

Hopefully the breed will continue to be well supported and go from strength to strength; however, the guide standard will need to be developed to give a more accurate description of what is to be aimed for. Will eventually be a strong competitor in marked and ticked classes.

Questionnaires were also submitted by a number of other breeders, including Tim Brown, Lynne Beard, Annie Smith, Natalya Hayward, Teena Smith and Julie Litchfield. All agreed that they sought big strong cavies, with even ticking and pale base colour for the breeding pen. All predicted a bright future for the breed.

