

THE ESSENCE OF SILVER

Examining our Values as Breeders and Judges

How did you fall in love with the Silver? We all tell a different tale of how we came to the Silver rabbit – and several members' stories are printed in this issue!

But no matter how we got here, we are all in the same place: committed to the spunky, bright, silly bunny called the Silver. And loving a breed, being committed to a breed, means constantly seeking its improvement.

That's why, every five years, we take another look at the breed standard.

Where did our breed come from? What are its distinctives, and what should our values be as breeders and exhibitors? **Are these values clearly communicated in the Standard of Perfection, so that judges are handling our rabbits consistently?**

Recently, concerns have come up that the Silver breed in the US is evolving differently than the breed in the UK and elsewhere. While this isn't necessarily a problem – many breeds look different than their overseas counterparts – it requires us to evaluate our selections and make sure we aren't stepping away from the very essence of what makes a Silver a Silver.

Where did the Silver come from?

Before the colonization of the New World, the Silver grey was kept in warrens in England, possibly introduced there from Portugal. Some references say that Portuguese sailors brought Silver rabbits to England from Siam -- modern-day Thailand. Whatever their history before that time, it's well documented that Silvers were kept in the British Isles as early as 1500 A.D. – making it the **oldest known rabbit breed** in the western world. It was one of the original breeds recognized by the National Pet Stock

Association (later to become the ARBA), when it formed in 1910.

The really amazing thing is that our modern Silver looks much more like its ancestors than it does any modern breed of rabbit. The long ears, the slender face, the lanky body and athletic legs. The rock-hard flesh, the short tight coat. These are all features that you don't find in any other ARBA-recognized breed today. Unfortunately, most rabbit people and even judges don't even realize that we have such a unique breed among us. They certainly don't realize the historical value of keeping it alive. Once these genes are lost, there would be no way to re-create the Silver using other breeds of rabbits alive today.

According to our Standard, the most important feature of the Silver breed is its color. This includes both the base color – which must be deep and dark to set off the Silvering – and the bright white hairs. Closely linked is the super-snappy flyback coat. Without the right coat, the Silver hairs will not contrast properly. The body type, while of course important, should be only the third consideration when judging.

This makes the Silver very different from most of the breeds in the US. Here in America, we like to push for big round bodies in almost all our breeds. If a breed is labeled "compact" or "commercial," both judges and breeders have started looking for that chunky "half-basketball" type. That type requires shorter bones and deeply arched toplines. But the "tucked and gathered" method of posing really doesn't do our Silvers justice. It doesn't promote the body type that Silvers were meant to have. Most importantly, it does not allow the Silvering to be evaluated correctly. Traditionally, Silvers were allowed to move freely on the table so the judges could step back and take in the overall appearance of the silvering. Some judges even ran them.

These things used to be better understood when the Silver was less rare, and when there were fewer breeds

pushing for the half-basketball type. Now that things have changed, breeders are advocating updating our standard to make sure judges and new breeders know how to handle our beloved rabbits, and can join in the conservation efforts.

HOW TO CHANGE A BREED STANDARD

According to the ARBA By-Laws

One member alone cannot change a breed standard – and for good reason. Changing a breed standard can only be done by the body of people committed to the breed – the National Specialty Club. Changing the Standard is not a quick or an easy process. It has to go through both the specialty club membership and the ARBA Standards committee. This is to ensure that the changes will be in keeping with the rest of the SOP and in the best interest of the breed. Changes can only be made every five years when ARBA issues a new Standard of Perfection. The ARBA just issued a new standard in 2016, so the next one will come out in 2021. In order to have changes printed in 2021, these are the steps we must take:

1. The National Club board appoints a Standards committee of 5 Silver breeders and club members to review the Standard and recommend changes. The president must send this list of standards committee to the ARBA standards committee by January 1, 2018.
2. The breed standards committee listens to the concerns of breeders receives standard change drafts from members. They make recommendations and prepare a vote.
3. The entire NSRC membership votes on the proposed changes. The vote must be completed by June 30, 2019.
4. If the membership agrees on a proposed change, the change is submitted to the ARBA standards committee for review.
5. If the ARBA standards committee approves the change, they will recommend it to the ARBA Board of Directors.

6. The ARBA Board of Directors will vote to approve changes at their annual meeting at the ARBA Convention 2019.
7. All approved changes will be printed in the new standard, taking effect February 2021.

(Full details on how to change a standard are printed in the opening pages of the current ARBA Standard of Perfection.)

CHANGES PROPOSED BY MEMBERSHIP

Silver Standard Change – Draft

Concerned Silver breeders have already begun drafting Standard changes. A complete proposed standard is printed on the next page, with important notes added to the sections on silvering and posing and body type. The authors have requested that we print it in the newsletter for comments by the membership. If you love our breed, please read the new proposed Standard and send in your comments. If you'd like to comment publicly, please send your comments to our newsletter editor at ellyn@rabbitsmarties.com to be printed in upcoming issues. If you prefer to respond to the group working on this draft directly, please send your comments to cranford1934@gmail.com.



Proposed Breed Standard Revision

Silver

Varieties Black-Brown-Fawn

Schedule of Points

GENERAL TYPE	30
Body.....	20
Head.....	4
Ears.....	2
Feet & Legs.....	3
Tail.....	1
FUR	15
COLOR	50
Surface & Undercolor.....	15
Evenness of Silvering.....	20
Brightness of Silvering.....	15
CONDITION	5
TOTAL POINTS	100

SUGGESTED JUDGING ORDER

FAWN-BROWN-BLACK

SHOWROOM CLASSES & WEIGHTS

Senior Bucks & Does-6 months of age and over, weight 5 to 7 pounds

Ideal weight 6 pounds

Junior Bucks and Does- Under 6 months of age, not over 5 pounds.

Minimum weight 2 1/2 pounds

Note: Juniors exceeding maximum weight may be shown in the higher

age classification. No animal may be shown in a lower age classification than its true age.

GENERAL TYPE

BODY - Points 20:

The Silvers' body type is distinctive and unique, neither compact nor fully commercial, perhaps midway between the two. The body is to be of medium length overall having moderate and well filled shoulders. When viewed from above, a slight taper from the shoulders widening to the hindquarters should be evident without being extreme. A side view, should show a top line rising from the shoulders in a gradual curve with the high point over the center of the hips, then down forming a rounded and well filled hindquarter. The loin should be well developed and the flesh to have a hard-core firmness throughout, carried on a fine to medium bone.

Note: After the initial inspection, attempts to pose Silvers as a typical compact rabbit does not do justice to the breed. Judges are asked to let the animal move around on the show table with the head erect to allow assessment of the overall evenness and brightness of the silvering.

Faults- Racy; too much taper overall, flat or too long in body, very rough spine or badly protruding hip bones.

Disqualification from Competition:
Dewlap.

HEAD - Points 4: The medium sized oval shaped head should be well formed and be in proportion to the body set on a very short neck. Overall the head should appear somewhat fine in does while showing more breadth in bucks. Silvers are to show a bright prominent eye.

Faults- Long, slim head with pinched nose; long neck; small, lack luster eyes; blocky or bulky head.

EARS - Points 2: Ears to compliment the head and body, well set on with a strong base with sufficient substance. Ears to be carried erect in a straight, upright position.

FEET & LEGS - Points 3: Feet and legs are to be medium in length and size of bone. Nail color should be dark and match on the same foot and corresponding foot.

Disqualification from competition-
One or more white toenail.

TAIL - Points 1: The tail is to be as evenly silvered as the body.

FUR - Points 15: (Flyback) The coat should be short, lie flat and close to the body, with a very snappy flyback texture to create an overall smoothness.

NOTE : The correct coat type is very important in all varieties of the

breed in order to accentuate the contrasting white (silver) guard hairs.

Faults- Long or wooly fur; uneven or soft coat; molt.

COLOR - Points 50

SURFACE and UNDERCOLOR - Points 15

BLACK - The black color is to be rich and intense, enhanced by a lustrous brilliance, giving the silvering maximum contrast. Color is to be carried as far down the hair shaft as possible. The undercolor to be a very dark blue, carried right to the skin giving depth to the overall black color. Eyes- Brown.

Faults - Brown or rusty tinge; pale undercolor.

BROWN - Color is to be a deep, bright, rich chestnut, with an even mixture of black and silver hairs. The rich chestnut surface color should extend down to an intermediate orange band, followed by a slate blue under color. The base color to be a deep and bright slate blue. The belly color light cream to white with a slate blue under color at the skin. Underside of the tail, light cream to white. Crotch marks are to be accepted. Evenness in tickling and silvering is stressed but should not

take away from the overall rich chestnut color. Eyes - Brown.

Faults - Color mix lacking uniformity. Legs lacking the rich chestnut intensity.

FAWN - Surface color is to be a bright, rich orange, with silvering. Color to be carried as far down the hair shaft as possible with a white to creamy under color. Body color is to extend over the head, ears, chest, feet and legs. The belly surface and undercolor and the underside of the tail shall be a light cream to white. Crotch marks are to be accepted. Eyes - Brown.

Faults - Yellowing, brickiness, or a gray tinge to color; ear lacing or smut.

EVENNESS of SILVERING - Points 20: The evenness of silvering is more important than the degree of silvering. Silvering is to be evenly distributed over the entire body, head, ears, tail, feet and legs.

BRIGHTNESS of SILVERING - Points 15: The silvering should be extremely bright and distinctive, giving the maximum contrast between surface color and silvering.

NOTE: While the degree of silvering (ticking) is subjective on all

color varieties, with the overall evenness being key, as a general guide a 35 to 40% proportion of silvering to base color might be seen as ideal. The silvering process in this breed is often slow to develop completely, therefore juniors sometimes lack the desired tickling on the extremities. Judges may allow some leeway in this regard.

General Color Faults - Silvering failing on nose, feet, tail, or failing to extend over toes.

Disqualification from Competition - Any white spot.

NOTE: White spots are not to be confused with congested clusters of silver tipped hairs. Actual white spots will show white hair right to the skin, while congested silver clusters will have a colored base.

CONDITION- Points 5: Per ARBA definition.

Sound good? No? Need revision? Send comments to ellyn@rabbitsmarties.com to be printed in the next issue and join the discussion.

How did you get into Silvers?

I have always liked the look of the Silvers when I would see them at Convention. After raising Himmies for years, I wanted a new challenge and I really wanted to get into a heritage breed. Thanks to Wade Burkhalter, I was able to get some nice foundation stock. I love their spunky personalities and the Fawns are my favorites. —Laurie Adams