

INTRODUCING THE SHOW CAVY

By Nikki White.

You've had guinea pigs for awhile and would like to take the next step: showing. First, you can only show pure-bred pedigree guinea pigs in the breed classes. These will usually be cavies sold with papers from a registered breeder. Anything else, no matter how pretty or like a particular breed can only be shown in the pet or novelty classes. However, the NSW Cavy Club accepts cavies in the breed classes who meet the standards but who do not have papers (they may have been bought from a pet shop but happen to be choice specimens). Other clubs do not.

Next you should visit as many shows as you can to see the many different breeds and colours before deciding which one(s) to breed and show. Talk to the breeders of the ones you are interested in to find out their virtues as well as any problems with that type of cavy (e.g. faults, grooming needs, etc.). Watch the judging. Also, at shows you can often pick up good foundation stock.

SHOWING

The cavy fancy in Australia is governed by the [Australian National Cavy Council](#) (ANCC). This is a co-ordinating body responsible for the National Cavy Show held annually in Narrandera (where its annual general meeting is held), for registering stud names and for producing the Book of Standards for the Exhibition Cavy. Each state has a council which is affiliated with it. The state councils/clubs take it in turns to host the National Cavy Show as well as running local shows for their members.

You will need three things: the Book of Standards for the Exhibition Cavy, to join a club and a stud name.

If you plan to breed as well as show, you will need a stud name which will appear as a prefix on the names of all the cavies you breed yourself. Any cavy you have bought from another breeder will retain his or her own stud prefix even though you now own him or her. Thus if your stud prefix is Wozname and you buy a sow named Imacavy Floradora from Imacavy Stud, she will still be known as Imacavy Floradora, not Wozname Floradora. It's not like a marriage!

Most clubs will supply a stud application form as part of their membership kit. Or you can download it from the

1. Book of Standards for the Exhibition Cavy

This booklet, last printed edition is August 2004, is a guide to what you are aiming for in your breeding program. It lists each breed in its group, usually accompanied by a line drawing or a photo, describing what you should look for (type, coat, eyes, ears, etc.), the faults, the disqualifications and what points each item is worth. It used to be available through your cavy club but now can be downloaded (printed off) the [Australian National Cavy Council's](#) website.

2. Cavy Clubs

Each state has a state council, usually with a number of clubs affiliated with it. Some states have only a state council such as Victoria and Western Australia, In NSW there are three clubs. The oldest and largest is the [NSW Cavy Club](#), founded in 1969. In the northern part of the state, there is the Northern Rivers Cavy Society and in the southern part, [Capital Country Cavy Club](#).

The advantage of joining a club is that you know when and where all the shows are on, including the National. You can buy the breed standards and other cavy-related items through it, as well as register your stud name. The newsletter usually contains articles on cavy care and you can often find other people to turn to for advice and make new friends.

3. Registering a Stud Name

[ANCC website](#). You send in a choice of three or more names to the address on the form along with the appropriate fee payable to the Australian National Cavy Council.. These are checked against a master list of stud names for duplication or close similarity. If your first choice, or one like it, has been used by anyone else, then your second (or third) will be the one registered.

However, it is quite acceptable to enter stock you have bought not bred and for that you don't need a stud name. It isn't compulsory.

ENTERING

The NSW Cavy Club and Capital Country Cavy Club require that you send your entries in a week or so before the show date. With the

exception of the Royal Canberra Show and the National Show, no money is sent in with your entry. You pay when you arrive. The entries should be sent in to the show secretary listed for the show .

On the entry form you will be asked for the class number (on the show schedule supplied as part of your membership kit or on the [NSW Cavy Club](#) website); whether the animal is a baby, junior, sow or boar; its breed and colour; its name and its date of birth (all these are from the pedigree papers). Boars and sows are males and females respectively over 9 months on the day of the show, juniors are between the age of six and nine months and babies are between 3 and 6 months on the day of the show. The name of the cavy shown should include the stud prefix (if available) and a given name, as it appears on the pedigree. this may vary from what you call it at home e.g. a sow known to all and sundry as The Brick should be entered under her correct name of Imacavy (stud prefix) Floradora (given name).

Although you should pay on the day, entering on the day (except for the pet and novelty classes at Capital Country Cavy Club shows) is not allowed.

Make a note of which cavies you have entered as it is easy to forget and you look a bit of a wally phoning up the show secretary to ask.

PREPARATION

You will want your cavies to look their best. Different breeds have different requirements and it is generally recommended you start preparing them at least five days before a show, doing a little each day. For the National, start several weeks before. All cavies will need the long guard hairs removed, claws clipped, grease gland (in boars) and feet cleaned and the whole animal shampooed and dried.

Guard-hair Removal is the most tedious and time-consuming - for you and the cavy. Many hate it and squeak or try to bite which is why doing a little each day is recommended. Less stressful for the piggy and you don't get RSI. It is best to get an experienced exhibitor to show you how to do this as there is a knack to it. Basically you move over the coat, using a thumb and finger motion to raise the fur to see the long guard hairs and to groom them out. You start at the rump and work towards the head or vice-versa. You can use a rubber glove to pass once or twice over the coat to remove loose hairs but don't over-groom this way (meaning, be careful you don't take out too much hair and have an uneven coat. This will cost you points).

Bathing: Once you have got the coat the way you want it, smooth and soft, you need to shampoo the cavy a day or so before the show (with Rex, many breeders recommend one month before the show). Either something like Fido's Free Itch, Triocil or a good baby shampoo will do. Place the cavy in an empty laundry tub. Pour lukewarm water either in a jug or through one of those rubber shower attachments and soak the coat. Next rub in the shampoo, washing the feet and the grease gland (tea-tree oil applied with a soft brush helps here). Nails can be done with a soft brush. Leave the shampoo on for about 5 minutes, then wash off thoroughly with more lukewarm water either in a jug or shower-attachment. You can add white vinegar to one of the rinses to bring a shine to the coat. Towel dry the cavy then gently blow-dry on a low setting, rubbing the coat back and forward as you would your own hair to aid drying.

Dipping: This means rinsing the cavies in an insecticidal solution, either to kill off suspected mites and similar, or on returning from a show, to kill off any creepy-crawlies they might have picked up. Fido's Free Itch will take care of most or a pyrethrin dip concentrate is available through the NSW Cavy Club. Cavies can pick up lice, either in the adult form (called 'running lice' a disqualification at shows) or as eggs seen in the fur (called 'static lice'), as well as mites. These can all be treated with pyrethrum. Rabbit fur mite is more serious and needs ivomectin. These parasites can come in on hay used a bedding.

[[PASTING TABLES IS NOT SUPPORTED]]

Rex are not true Rex in that they still have long guard hairs, so their coats do need to be stripped but in this case, mainly to make it all even and fuzzy. Place them at eye level on a table so as to see the hairs sticking up out of the coat. The coat needs to be worked backwards and forwards to make sure it stands up away from the body and doesn't lie flat (a problem on the lower haunches). They should have a good comb with a metal dog comb to remove the debris that gets in their thick coats.

Satins and other short hairs can have their coats buffed up with a satin mitt. These can be purchased through the NSW Cavy Club or you can make your own.

The cavies should be placed in their carry cages just before leaving for the show, on clean paper and fresh hay or paper-based cat

litter. Have some fresh juicy vegetables for them for after they have been judged to prevent dehydration. Avoid feeding staining veg like carrots and beetroot the day before the show. or putting greens in before judging as the leaves can get soggy and make the pig grotty.

WHAT TO TAKE

Purpose built carry cages for cavies are available through the NSW Cavy Club. These are stackable and easy to carry. You can put the name/logo on the bottom out of sight to identify the cages. Paper-based litter (Breeders Choice or Back2Nature) should be put in them as this is less messy than wood-shavings and is more absorbent. A cloth "skirt" similar to those for bird-cages helps keep the cavy crud inside the cages and not on the floor. Small plastic water bottles are useful plus dishes and their food if they are going to be away overnight. In hot weather a towel soaked in water and put over the cages keeps them cool.

Besides these, you will also need a snowboard (also available from the NSW Cavy Club) or 30 x 30 cm carpet square per cavy entered. These are placed under each cavy on the judge's table to keep them off the tablecloth and thus provide some protection from picking up creepy-crawlies off other pigs perhaps not as well kept as yours. You should also take a sheet of plastic or a tarp to table shows to put under your cages to keep the debris to a minimum. A folding chair for you and a folding table for the cavy cages can be useful at some hall shows. A grooming kit, consisting of brush, mitts, claw-clippers and gloves, is also handy for those last minute touch-ups.

THE SHOW

There are two types of show: pen shows and table shows. The NSW Cavy Club and Capital Country Cavy Club have only table shows. The National Cavy Show is also a table show.

Pen show: At these numbered cages are assigned to each cavy and the animals remain in them once they are penned until the end of the show except when removed by the exhibitor.

Table show: Here animals remain with you in their carry cages all day placed on tables supplied by the hall (sometimes you have to bring your own hence it is a good idea to have a folding card table to put the cages on as well as a chair). You must listen for the classes as they are called and the number which has been assigned your cavy (on the ear tag, see below) and then take it with its showboard or carpet square to the judge's bench. Once there, do not speak to the judge unless asked a question, do not make any comment on the other exhibits or your own and don't gossip or chat. You can be penalised if you do, depending on how formal the show.

At both types of show there is usually more than one judge (unlike rabbit shows which only have one as a rule). The classes are divided up amongst them so they can be judged simultaneously (unlike cat shows where each of the multiple judges sorts out all of the cats so each cat is judged several times even before it goes up for best of group, etc). With cavies each animal is judged once at the base level). At the National, it is wise to go into the judging hall and see which judge is doing your class so that you can go straight to the right table when your cavy is called. The name of the judge and the classes s/he will judge is posted up behind his/her table there.

Still on the subject of judges: always remember that it is those animals on that day which are being judged. In other words, on that day your cavy might be in top condition and excellent coat and the other cavies not so much, so you will get a Best of Breed or Best in Group. A week later, your cavy might be off her bloom and another cavy in full fig and so the top awards will go to her/him. Also a judge's personal opinion plays a part - some don't like dark Creams or black foot-pads in Reds and so on. Listen to the judge's comments but don't be too disheartened unless several different judges pick the same fault. The you know you have some work to do to correct it in your breeding program or preparation. Above all, remember, it's only a guinea pig (rabbit, cat, whatever) and most judges are there to help you with their remarks. As one judge says, "You are paying for my opinion on the day" and always says when making her awards, "On the day, this was my Best in Show" or whatever.

On arrival you go to the show secretary's table and pay your entry fees (unless they have been paid in advance as at the National or Royal Canberra). You would have already sent in your entry form. You will be given a sheet with each of your cavies' details and class number to which is attached a strip of round sticky-backed labels with numbers on them. Read carefully to see which number belongs to which pig and attach the label with it on to the left ear. This is the ear tag. You should also notify the show secretary of any scratchings at this point. The earlier you can do this the better.

[[PASTING TABLES IS NOT SUPPORTED]]

Buffy and Cordelia pay their entry fees at the show secretary's table. They check carefully to see which pig has what number then indulge in some last minute grooming of Red Pig Walking and Fiordiligi before attaching stickers to the cavies' ears. They then put them back in their carry cages on top of the card table they brought and collapse in chairs supplied by the hall. The running order is Marked (Himalayan, Tortoiseshell, Roan, Tricolour, Dutch, Dalmatian), Satin, Coarsecoat (Abyssinian and Rex) then so when Cordelia hears the class 'Satin Self' called, she takes Red Pig Walking with her show board (no mere carpet square will do for Cordelia's cavy) to the judging bench. She puts the board down on the table, then places Red Pig Walking on it, getting her to sit to show off her head, shoulders and body type. No talking is permitted which Cordelia finds a dreadful trial as she is never short of an opinion, but she knows the rules and won't jeopardise her chances. Red Pig attempts to waddle off to investigate the sow next door but Cordelia pulls her back and rearranges her.

The judge picks up each cavy and examines her for problems such as fur faults, bare belly, lack of satinisation, static lice, correct pigment, fatty eye as well as looking at type, size, head, size and droop of ears, boldness of eye, coat, depth of colour, condition, satinisation and conformation to the breed standards. Sometimes the judge will pull several cavies on their boards/carpet out from the rest, especially in a big class, and turn them sideways, crouch down and look at them at eye level, in order to make comparisons. S/he may make comments such as "Bold eye, good coat, a little long but well groomed." Or "Good satinisation but colour lacks depth". (This means that it does not go all the way down the hair shaft). The person assisting the judge by writing down the numbers of the cavies in the first three (or more) places in each class and the Best of Breed is known variously as the penciller, the scribe or the book steward.

Red Pig Walking comes first in the class Satin Self Sow. She is then placed against the first-placed Satin Self Boar, the Satin Self Junior and the Satin Self Baby to decide the Best of Breed Satin Self. She just beats out a nice little Self Satin Junior who needs a bit more time, so comes Reserve (or Runner-up) to her Best of Breed. She will now go up against the Best of Breed from each of the other Satin classes (e.g. Satin Marked, Satin Ticked, Satin Crested) to decide Best Satin. Having won Best Satin she will be up against the other best of groups - Best Self, Best Ticked, Best Marked, Best Crested, Best Coarsecoat and Best Longhair for Best in Show. Collinwood Fiordiligi has not done too badly having gone Reserve Best Crested.

At lunchtime the novelty classes are called and Buffy puts up The Jeepster, a large tricolour pig of indeterminate parentage bought from a pet shop. The Jeepster vacuums up the food placed before him to win Fastest Eater and dressed in leather as a gladiator comes second in Fancy Dress. He doesn't do very well as Best Pet as he eats the table cloth.

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BREEDING

These are just some general notes here as there are a number of books, websites and magazine articles which deal with this topic.

A show cavy is not your pet-shop pig. It is bigger, stockier, with a bigger and different shaped head (shorter nosed,, bolder eyed - in rabbit terms you are looking for a good crown and good ear carriage - a broad muzzle, Roman nose. They should not be snipey - long thin bodies and noses like rats. Go to a reputable breeder either at a show or make an appointment to visit one (they advertise in the club newsletters or many have websites) If you have internet access, join the forum on the [ANCC website](#) or the [Australian National Cavy Fanciers Forum](#) as many breeders and judges post there and they have a section for people wanting to buy or sell cavies. You can ask questions about cavy husbandry and breeding, too. Everyone is only too happy to help.

When starting out it is best to concentrate on one or two breeds, no matter how appealing so many are. One of these should be Sells as they are easy to care for and prepare for a show, they come in lots of pretty colours and they don't have so many restrictions as other breeds so you can have something to show usually from your first litter.

Don't be shy about showing stock you have bought from someone else. It happens all the time in the cat fancy. It gives you experience in showing while waiting for your own litters. Indeed, the Best in Show at the National Cavy show of 2000 was a Texel not bred by the exhibitor and she is a long established breeder.

Once you have some foundation stock, you will need to register a stud name with the Australian National Cavy Council as described above. You will also need a copy of the Book of Standards for the Exhibition Cavy or access the breed standards on the Australian National Cavy Council website. Anything you breed in your sheds will have your stud prefix.

Most cavies are bred like to like e.g. Self Black to Self Black, Self Red to Self Red to maintain intensity and depth of colour. Some, like Self Creams don't breed true - two Creams will give you 50% cream, 25 % Buff and 25% White. Buff and Cream-bred White will give you 100% Cream. Some breeds should not be mated together, chiefly Roan and Roan as they carry a lethal gene.

Size is a factor of genetics as well as feeding. Cavies in cold climates growing up in winter will need a richer diet to allow them to gain weight and reach their full potential size as they are likely to put all their energy into keeping warm rather than growing. A mash made of pollard and bran and water helps, feed with molasses in it, leaving the light on in the shed.

Sows come into season once every 15-17 days. Oestrus lasts 24-48 hours and the sow will accept the boar for 6-11 hours during this time. A sow can be mated once she reaches 500 g or is 4 to 5 months old. Boars should be used for breeding once they are over 4 months old, even though the precocious little pests can reproduce at 4 weeks. They can become infertile or at any rate have a decreased libido if they are not allowed mate until over a year old. One boar can be run with a number of sows or with just one as a breeding pair. Running with sows tends to knock the show conditioning from the boar as he gets more exercise! Likewise, having a litter often causes a sow to lose her girlish figure so you have to decide whether you will show her or breed her. You should not put two boars together in with a group of sows, not if you don't want to pick up bits of boar from the scenery.

Gestation is from 59 to 72 days. Unlike rabbits, they don't pull fur or build nests when close to kindling (littering down). The optimum litter size is three but many have four or two. Any more is a problem as she only has two teats (take a number and wait...). The size is determined by the sow who is genetically predisposed to a large or small litter. Once you are sure the sow is pregnant - the gourd shape her body goes is a good sign or you can feel her muscles firm up in the abdomen, or even the babies within - remove the boar. The sow returns to oestrus 6-48 hours after giving birth and it is not good for her health to be pregnant while trying to raise a litter.

Most sows have little problems with pregnancy and giving birth, the babies arrive fully furred, eyes open and able to move around. The sow cleans them as they appear. Some problems that can occur include pregnancy toxemia (obesity or stress leading to anorexia late in pregnancy are the main causes and it can be fatal), resorption (re-absorbing the foetuses, again caused by stress, something rabbits do, too), miscarriage and abortion, toxoplasmosis (caused by a parasite), and premature births (the babies are born under 59 days, are small, weak with short, very silky hair and white nails).

When the babies are four weeks old, the boars should be separated from the sows as they can impregnate not only their mother but their sisters as well. Sexing such young cavies is not as hard as it sounds (certainly not as hard as sexing 4 week dwarf rabbits!). Put the cavy on its back and press on either side of the genital area. If female, the space between the genitals and anus will be small, and a membrane can sometimes be seen. If male, the space between the genitals and anus will be greater and the penis will protrude. The sow should be rested about three months before being mated again to allow her time to recover and get back into condition.

HOUSING

The pregnant sow should be put in a breed pen, about twice the length of a normal cage, 70-90cm long, 45 cm wide and 35 cm high. Several sows can be run together and they will often share feeding and cleaning chores with all the babies. There is a danger that a pregnant sow might go into early labour if another sow gives birth, though.

It is thus useful to have banks of cages with double doors and a partition which can be slid in and out to convert "semi-detached" twin cages into one long single one. These banks can be kept in a shed (not a garage unless you leave the car outside. Exhaust fumes don't do cavies much good!). You may have to have them made for you if you are carpentry-challenged. They can be made of wood or melamine (the latter is more expensive than marine ply but is easier to clean). The wood can be painted with acrylic weather-shield paint to keep moisture from warping it (from leaky water bottles as well as leaky pigs). Single cages can be around 45 x 45 cm, doubles 90 x 45 cm, and around 35-40 cm high. Doors should be wire (with or without a wooden frame and bolt)

A layer of newspaper, then rice hulls, or wood-shavings and lots of meadow-hay, ceramic feed dishes (so they won't tip over) with low sides as cavies are low slung and a water bottle hung on the wire complete the accommodation. The cages should be cleaned out once a week.

Don't use plastic boxes or fish tanks to keep cavies in as not enough air circulates in these and they can suffer.

USEFUL SOURCES

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Gurney, Peter, The Sex Life of Guinea Pigs. England, TFH Kingdom, 2001. ISBN 1852791330

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Richardson, V.C.G., Diseases of Domestic Guinea Pigs. 2nd ed. Oxford, Blackwell Science, 2000. ISBN 0632052090

Cavy Capers (NSW Cavy Club, PO Box 5513, Erindale ACT 2903)

[Fur & Feather](#) (Elder House, Chattisham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 3QE, England)

[Peter Gurney's Guinea Pig Health Guide](#)

[Australian National Cavy Forum](#)

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