

The Mighty Manx

There's more to this breed than its lack of a tail.

BREED
PROFILE



The Manx is mischievous, lively and entertaining.

MARK SLUDER

By Carolyn Osier

If you love cat myths, the Manx will warm your heart. Why don't they have tails? Consider Noah, waiting impatiently at the ark's door as a pair of cats, the last animals to board, saunter up the ramp as the floodwaters rise. In his rush to leave, Noah slams the door shut, severing the tails and marking the cats forever as victims of their own attitude.

Or perhaps you prefer to think that cats take charge of their own destiny. British legend has it that fierce warriors liked to adorn their helmets with the cats' long, fluffy tails. One protective mother cat chose to save her offspring from this fate by chewing off their tails at birth and admonishing them to do likewise with their children.

Where did the Manx really come from? Again we have a choice of stories. We know that the Manx's home is the Isle of Man locked in the Irish Sea between England and Ireland. Many of the world's most fascinating animals are the result of mutations occurring in isolation. Perhaps the original cats were survivors of ships in the ill-fated Spanish Armada of 1588, sunk off the island's coast. Or they might have been adventuresome cats on merchant ships that were left behind.

For many years it was believed that these cats could have come from the same genetic background as many Asian cats with short or twisted tails (for example, the Japanese Bobtail). We now know that the Manx's genetic makeup is unique, bringing us back to the supposition that it could have occurred as an original mutation on the island. Once in the domestic population, from whatever source, the Manx gene spread throughout the restricted gene pool.

the genitalia and an inability to urinate.

Historically, diet played more of a role in causing FLUTD, but cat food formulations have changed dramatically over the past 15 years. Everyone used to talk about the food's "ash" content, which relates to the amount of minerals present. The mineral magnesium has been specifically indicated as a problem. In some cats, magnesium forms crystals in the urine with phosphate and ammonium and can create a type of bladder stone called struvite. Seafood products tend to contain higher magnesium levels, so owners should not give them to cats that have urinary tract problems.

Most commercial and premium diet manufacturers now make cat foods with lower magnesium contents. The other factor implicated in promoting FLUTD is nonacidic urine. In the wild, cats eating prey and natural diets have acidic urine, which tends to prevent bacterial infection and the precipitation of crystals in the urine. Acidifying agents have been added to many cat foods, but this is not always in the cat's best interest. Overacidification of urine has created other problems such as kidney disease and calcium oxalate stones. You should discuss your cat's diet with your veterinarian. Cats over the age of 9 years do not tend to have the same urinary problems as younger and middle-age cats.

Clinically I still see many cats with crystals in their urine and stones in their bladders, but currently the most common type of FLUTD seen in cats is a condition called idiopathic interstitial cystitis. Idiopathic means "no known cause;" interstitial describes the tissue layer of the bladder that is involved; and cystitis is a nonspecific bladder inflammation. Cats with interstitial cystitis can strain, urinate frequently and have blood in their urine. Veterinary researchers have been unable to confirm a cause for interstitial cystitis in cats, and have started recommending treatments similar to those used in human women for their interstitial cystitis. Carl Osborne, D.V.M., at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine, has performed studies that question how effective any drug therapy is in treating the problem. He believes that most cases will resolve on their own within five to 14 days without drug treatment. Unfortunately cats do seem to be in discomfort when exhibiting

interstitial cystitis, so veterinarians still try to help with medications.

Stress seems to play a major role in recurrent episodes of interstitial cystitis. Although owners may not perceive their cat's stress, I have many patients that flare up when their owners start packing to go on vacation or when houseguests arrive. Cats see the world from a different perspective and interstitial cystitis can be a manifestation of their stress.

What should you as a cat owner do if you notice signs consistent with FLUTD? Have your pet examined by a veterinarian initially. During this exam, the veterinarian should perform a urinalysis, which will determine the urine pH level, whether crystals or bacteria are present, and whether the animal is able to empty its bladder normally. Your veterinarian will devise a treatment plan based on these findings. If cats have recurrent episodes of FLUTD, other diagnostic tests should be considered, including a urine culture and antibiotic sensitivity test, X-rays, contrast studies of the bladder and urethra, ultrasound and bladder biopsy.

If your cat is prone to FLUTD and you change its diet, you should have your cat's urine analyzed. In addition, it is important for owners to observe their cat's litter box habits and detect a potential problem early. An inability to pass urine is an emergency, so do not wait before seeking veterinary care.

Each veterinarian may handle recurrent cases differently, but if interstitial cystitis is my diagnosis, I may set the cat's owner up with medication to use during flare-ups or as a preventative during stressful times. Most cats that eat a good quality diet never experience FLUTD. If you are the owner of an affected cat, work with your veterinarian to get a more definitive diagnosis and to hopefully prevent future problems. 🐾

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Rumpies and Stumpies

The most well-known feature of the Manx is the tail's absence. It is not, however, true that all Manx are tailless. Several degrees of expression exist, ranging from the "rumpy" cat with a dimple where the tail should start, all the way to normal appearing tails. In between we find "risers," with a bit of cartilage at the spine's base, and "stumpies," with shortened tails. The rumpy is the perfect show cat, but the other variations are essential to the breed's continuation.

Despite the cat's sturdiness and sense of strength, Manx Syndrome is actually a fatal defect. Kittens homozygous for the gene die in utero, explaining the smaller litter size than one would expect. Heterozygous Manx exhibit the variety of tails/taillessness. The gene shortens the spine; carried to the extreme, some kittens are born with gaps or fused vertebrae or even spina bifida (incomplete development of the spinal closure). Perfect appearing kittens can develop severe bowel or bladder dysfunction or difficulty in walking at any time up to 4 months. For this reason Manx breeders do not let their kittens go to new homes as early as some other breeds.

Good breeders try to maintain a good balance of tailed and rumpy cats in their litters to avoid these problems. Because most pet buyers are looking for the typical tailless cat, it is common to dock the tails of Manx kittens at 4 to 6 days old. While mostly cosmetic, the procedure is also performed to prevent painful arthritic symptoms in later life from tail bone ossification. It is not considered unethical, and pet buyers will be informed if it has been done to their kitten. Such kittens are, in actuality, less likely to develop any problems related to Manx Syndrome than the perfectly tailless cats exhibit.

A Series of Circles

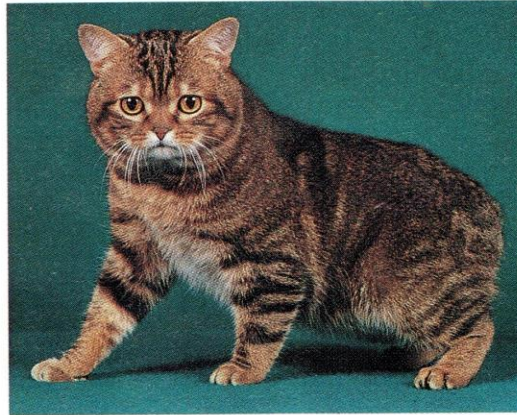
The ideal look for the Manx is a series of circles. The head is broad-jawed with a firm, round muzzle and prominent cheeks. The whisker pads are large and round just as in the British Shorthair. Large, round eyes contribute to a sweet expression. Unique to the Manx is a set and shape to the ears that resembles the rocker on a cradle when viewed from behind.

The Manx's shoulders and chest should be substantial and solidly muscled. A broad rib cage should allow the width of an adult hand to easily fit under the chest between the sturdy legs. The leg bones themselves should be heavy with the front legs shorter than the hind legs. Because the back is very short and the hindquarters high, you should see a continuous arch from the shoulders to the rump. The body has tremendous depth from spine to abdomen, producing a stout, powerful midpiece. Of course, the final circle is formed by the completely tailless rump.

Critical to the breed is the hindquarters' structure and function. When standing, the legs must be straight, never cow-hocked. Although early standards described a hopping gait as distinctive, throughout the years emphasis has shifted to the ability to stand and walk normally. A Manx that shows any

sign of weakness or dysfunction is severely penalized.

From the beginning of Manx history, both longhair and shorthair versions were represented. The shorthair coat is double with a dense cottony undercoat protected by hard, glossy guard hairs. The longhair version has a silky texture and medium length. When in full coat, longer hair will be visible on the breeches, abdomen and around the neck in a ruff. Despite its normal presence in the gene pool, the longhair was relegated to obscurity for much of the breed's history. Shorthaired Manx were among the first breeds to be accepted at early cat shows, competing with Domestic Shorthairs in the 1930s and '40s. A single paragraph in the standard describing the rounded rump and a hopping gait served to differentiate them from the others. In order to be able to show the long-haired variety, fanciers created the Cymric (pronounced kim-rick) breed, which gained championship status in Cat Fanciers' Association in 1989. Since the coat length is the only difference between the two breeds, four years later the CFA abolished the name Cymric in favor of two divisions within a single Manx breed. At least one association, The International Cat Association, has chosen to maintain the name and the breed distinction.



The broad chest and substantial shoulders accentuate the Manx's sturdy look.

PARADOX PHOTOGRAPHY

A wide variety of colors and patterns adorn the Manx. Beginning with white, black, blue, red and cream, the Manx may also be seen in chinchilla and shaded silver and smoke patterns. The tabby patterns and colors are popular with Manx enthusiasts as are the tortoiseshells and calicos. The Manx standard is one of the few that does not penalize for a button or locket of white in the midst of another color or pattern. Many Manx are included in a general color description called Other Manx Colors, which allows for anything except colors derived from the Siamese or Himalayan system in the CFA. Other associations even accept these colors (chocolate, lavender and pointed colors). Little emphasis is placed on eye color.

Built like a sports car designed for acceleration and quick turns, the Manx is lively and entertaining. Intelligent and devoted, the cat forms a strong bond with its person or family. For this reason it can be a challenge for an adult Manx to change to a new home. Although even-tempered and friendly, the Manx takes its job as a "watch cat" seriously and can be fiercely protective. The cat's easygoing personality makes it an excellent family pet, though older cats may prefer a less unsettling environment. For people desiring peace and quiet, the Manx's soft voice and soothing trill is appreciated.

An unexpected facet is the Manx's fascination with objects. Owners quickly learn to put away intriguing items of jewelry, but many report that their pets learn to open doors and unlatch childproof drawers. Slow to mature, the mischievous Manx may live into its 20s, providing many years of devoted companionship and entertainment. 🐾

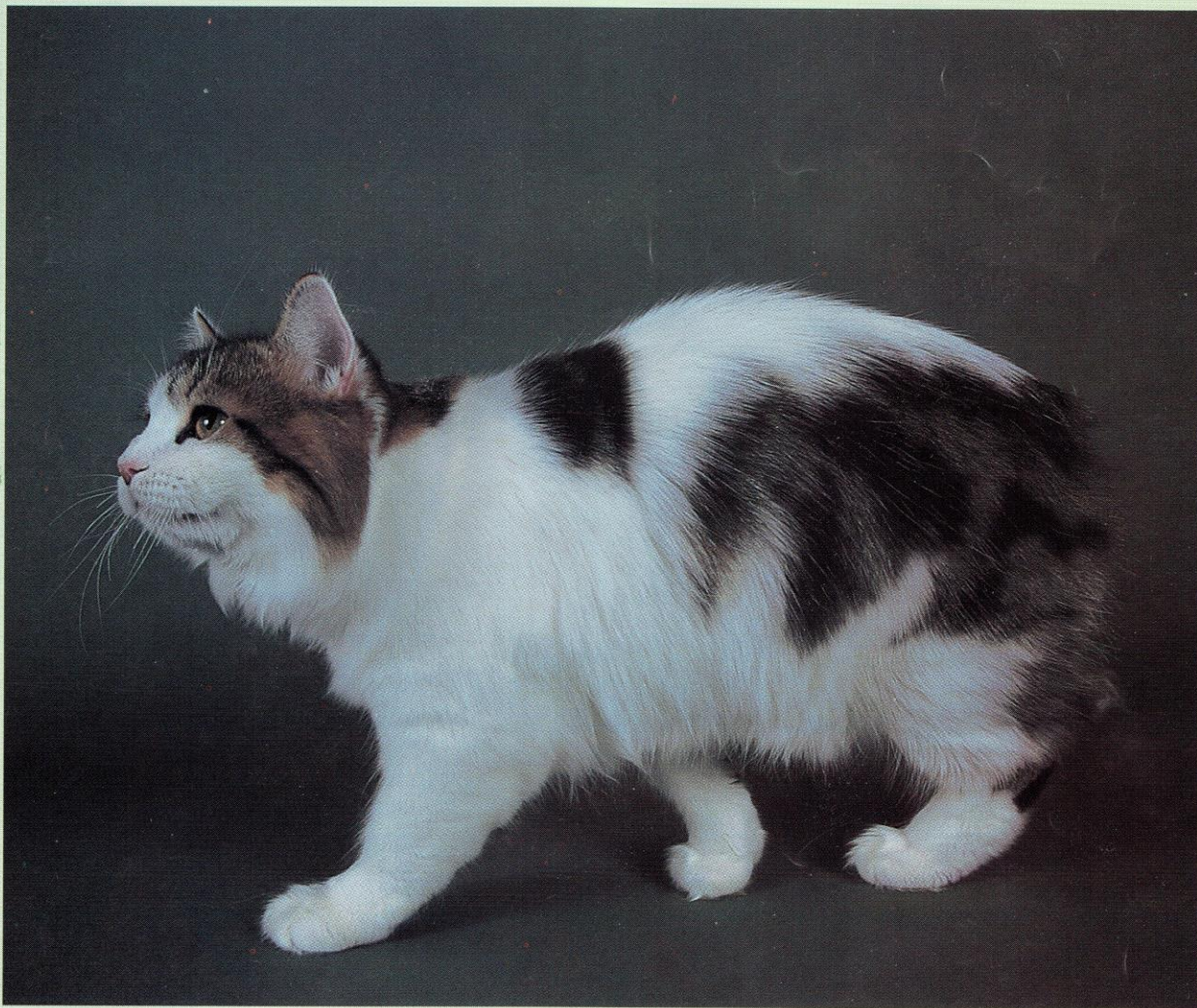
Carolyn Osier is a Cat Fanciers' Association allbreed judge and operates the Wil-O-Glen cattery in California.

Special Tear-Out Section



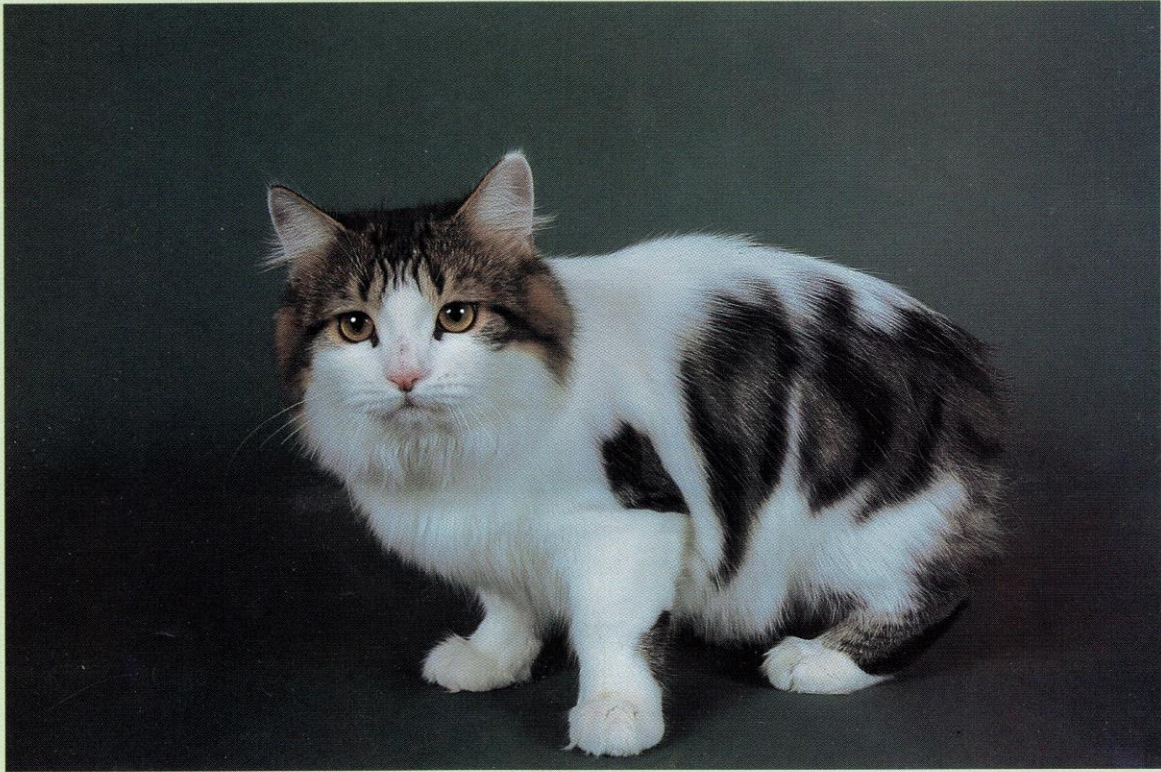
TARA DARLING

Large, round eyes contribute to a sweet expression.



SCOTT MCKIERNAN/ZUMA PRESS

The ideal Manx look is a series of circles. Note the arch to the back and the round, tailless rump.



SCOTT MCKIERNAN/ZUMA PRESS

Longhaired Manx occurred among the early cats on the Isle of Man.



MARK B. SLUDER

This shorthaired Manx kitten has a dense double coat and an eye-catching dilute calico color.

CATFANCY

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