



# Chocolate Satins

By Marlene Hayward, Lebanon, ME

In the beginning there were Chocolates! Many years have passed since Walter Huey, of Indiana, first discovered the Satin mutation in litters of Havanas. Yet, we have not come far over those years in developing the Chocolate to be a consistent breed winner. There is hope! There are quite a few breeders dedicated to the task of developing winning stock. I am encouraged by these people and believe the

Chocolate variety is on its way to top placements!

It's not easy to understand why the Chocolate hasn't fared better. After all, they seem to draw more "oohs!" and "aahs!" than other varieties at the shows. They are certainly no harder to raise than some others, and easier in many respects. But perhaps we Chocolate breeders have known the secret that decorators and designers standby: This color is known to empower, stimulate, dramatize, compete and symbolizes passion. Now that's a rabbit!

So what's a small breeder (25 hole rabbitry) like me doing writing an article on. Chocolate Satins? Perhaps, it's my optimism, unorthodox ways, and a desire to see a Chocolate in every Satin breeder's rabbitry. But, I also represent a viewpoint away from the semi-professional breeder, more along the line of an enthusiastic hobbyist.

Raising Chocolates has been an. education and a half for me. I am learning the art of culling, but I find that is one area that can never be quite perfected. Of course, we have to be on our toes about it every bit as much as our breeding program. We must also stay up to date on the changing trends in nationwide judging and breeding.

As always, with any variety, the basics of breeding apply. Make sure you get your type and then work on the fur. All too often we can get hung up on one or the other.

It's been fun over the years to see where some of my better stock has come from. Backyard meat pens and raffles, for example. But I must credit Al Tisko with getting me started, and Dennis Weih for keeping me going. They are a real credit to the Chocolate variety.

Being a small breeder, I use two herd bucks and three to six does. I find it is in my best interest to stay away from any white or broken varieties. Despite the temptation of the wonderful type, it always comes back to haunt me. The litters' best typed rabbit will have white toenails or off colored eyes. I have learned the hard way, of course, that light eyes may darken up. I hate to think of how many Best of Varieties, ended up on somebody's dinner plate before I smartened up!

Periodically, I like to breed Blacks into my Chocolates. I find it not only helps maintain the deep dark Chocolate color, but also breeds in type and fur for which the Black satin breeders have worked so hard at. The nice thing about the Black breedings is having the availability of the Rainbow Connection Rabbitry. Buck services are readily available only 15 minutes from home.

So, now you've taken your herd doe and bred her to the buck with the traits that would most complement her. Wait 31 days or so and hope she builds a nice to kindle in. She kindles a fine litter, and you notice a few obvious runts. What to do? I am a firm believer in culling, but perhaps because of my gender, I find I can't cull when they're kits. I have no problem putting them down if they're sickly or shipping to the meat man, but I just can't live with visions of me breaking little necks. And besides, there's always some little runt that grows up to be a real knockout.

I am rather strict with my brood does and have a three-strikes-you're-out policy. I can't afford to keep a doe around that consistently kindles on the wire, won't pull fur or whose milk doesn't come in. These are all traits you certainly want to cull out of your herd, because good motherhood is hereditary.

Then there's the emotional angle. I had a particular buck that had awesome type, but his fur was always out of condition. Not to mention he had a great personality (small rabbitry dilemma #1-you tend to get to know every bunny pretty well). Not only did I keep him around, but I used him in many breedings. Wrong! That one came back to haunt me many times over.

You just have to learn to cull hard. At about eight weeks you can get a pretty good idea of who is coming and who is going. Generally, in the fourth month, I make my final and most confident decision. This takes getting to know your herd. A rabbit showing good size potential and width at four months may end up being as wide as a house at eight months. And what looks scrawny when young may turn into the perfect senior. You have to know your line!

Fullness of hindquarters is what I look for first. Then, I like to see good strong shoulders and a top line that peaks over the hipbone. The fur should possess qualities of being dense, fine in texture and naturally, having a high sheen.

For a long time I have tended to stay away from line breeding, sensing somehow it was causing some of my size and health problems. I am now attempting it again with good results, although I am still reserved about going beyond one generation. I prefer to let someone else do the heavy line breeding and pick up quality offspring from them, since I don't have the room in my rabbitry for experiments.

Grain choices are rather limited in my area and unless I want to make a heavy investment or travel far, then my only other option are to stay with a regional producer. For nine years I've used the same company, feeding 18% protein quite successfully. I feed six to eight ounces and occasionally supplement with sunflower seeds.

I'd definitely recommend you buy the best breeding stock possible, but as this is not always feasible, just keep experimenting with what you have, cull hard, keep good notes and records, and for heaven's sake.. have a good time!