



SIAMESE SATINS

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The Siamese color combined with Satin sheen results in one of the most attractive and admired of all rabbit varieties. The Siamese Satin is a major asset to the Satin breed.

Variety is defined by color and markings, and our comments will concentrate on variety rather than overall breed characteristics. The ARBA standard specifies that the Siamese color be dark sepia brown on the head, ears, feet and tail (points), shading to medium brown body color. This defines the color within rather

broad limits, and leads to some variability in the shades of color that different breeders and judges prefer. Our experience has been that most judges accept some range without faulting for color. This allows breeders options, within limits, to develop their own unique lines. Our personal preference has been for a slightly lighter than average body color shading to relatively dark points for maximum contrast. Within limits the contrast between body and point color may be more important than the shade of body color. Body color should also shade to a darker sepia brown along the lower sides and rump, and on the belly. Eyes must be brown. Toenail color may be dark or light, but must be the same for all front toenails and for all rear toenails. The front and rear toenail color may differ.

Siamese color intensity is responsive to temperature. Animals born in the early spring can be relatively light in color at first prime (about five months age), and then change to a considerably darker color in winter. Although the Siamese is a shaded variety, uniform body coloring is one of the most important factors in that body color should be evenly shaded, rather than mottled, streaked or splotched. Mottling is common during molt, but a prime coat should not appear mottled.

Selection for color in Siamese is impractical until about four to five months of age. We select for type and other characteristics and for disqualifications at about 10 weeks, and again three to six weeks later, but selection for color is delayed until about five months (at first prime). Our selection criteria include shade and uniformity of body color and contrast between body and point color. Further selection at seven to eight months is sometimes done to cull animals that fail to retain desired color characteristics. Some animals that have uniform light color in summer change to a body color that is too dark or uneven in winter.

For the beginning breeder we recommend that, in addition to studying the standard, you visit at length with established Siamese breeders about standards for color and markings and all characteristics of a good show animals. **Purchase the best stock available!** For those wishing to raise a few animals to show, we suggest a buck and two or three does from each of two sources that are not closely related. This provides the option to cross between unrelated lines for maximum vigor and condition. You can select your show stock from hybrids between the two lines, avoiding many of the problems that accompany inbreeding. For a long term program you can maintain and improve your stock by inbreeding and selection within lines.

For the breeder who wishes to make major contributions to breed and variety improvement, we suggest the following challenges:

Presently, Siamese color and markings are highly variable, not only between different breeders' lines, but often within lines. 'Siamese' is controlled by a single gene that is recessive to genes for other colors in the same multiple allelic series. However, the quality of Siamese color and markings is affected by an unknown number of gene interactions. Development of lines that breed true for all characteristics of color and markings will greatly improve the variety. Different approaches to accomplish this may be effective, but most likely it will require inbreeding and rigorous selection among relatively large numbers of animals over several generations. Consultation with a trained animal geneticist would be helpful for this kind of program, but it could be carried out by anyone with a commitment to do so. This can be a long term and relatively expensive program, but very rewarding.

Because Siamese breeders must select so rigorously for color and markings, other breed characteristics are sometimes neglected. As a group the Siamese variety at present would benefit from breeding work to improve fur quality. Programs to combine the best Satin fur qualities with acceptable Siamese color and markings are needed. Current breeders have made significant progress in doing this already, and we expect that Siamese fur quality on the whole will improve considerably over the next several years.

In our Siamese breeding program, the first criterion for selection has been body type. In a long term program we have outcrossed to other breeds in order to improve the Siamese for type, with major emphasis on depth and fullness of loin. We also have made considerable progress in improvement for genetics of color and markings, but much more is needed to combine all of the attributes of outstanding Siamese Satin into a line that breeds true for all of these attributes.

Other challenges for future Siamese Satin breeders can be identified. There is no shortage of things left to do. This very exciting Satin variety is a challenge and a joy for the serious rabbit breeder and for those who just want to raise a few rabbits to show. Also we should not forget that the Satin, including Siamese, is an excellent quality meat and fur animal.