

The Cat With The Velvet Waves

On July 21, 1950, in a barn in Cornwall, England, a kitten was born which would be the foundation of a new breed of cat. The kitten's mother and littermates were normal looking domestic shorthair cats. But this one kitten, later named Kallibunker, had a very short, soft, fine wavy coat. As he grew up it was apparent that his body appearance was also different from the other cats, longer and leaner with large ears. The owner of that barn in England was Mrs. Ennismore and she had once owned a breed of rabbit called the Castor Rex rabbit. She thought that this strange kitten's coat was a lot like her rabbit's coat and contacted a well known geneticist for help. Together they did experimental breedings and discovered that the coat was the rexoid gene operating as a simple recessive. They named their new cat breed Rex. Several years later the group of Rex breeders received word that there was another curly coated cat living in neighboring Devonshire. Because the very small gene pool of Rex cats was already causing breeding problems this was a very exciting find. However, when the two were bred together only straight coated kittens were produced. Research proved that there were two separate genetic systems in operation and thus two distinct breeds. The two breeds were named Cornish Rex and Devon Rex. They differ in appearance in that the Cornish has remained a tall, lean cat with big ears on top of its head and a tuck up in front of its hips like a Greyhound dog; and the Devon is shorter in both head and body with large ears set more on the side of the head and no tuck up. The Cornish coat feels like velvet and the Devon coat feels like suede and is a bit more fragile. The personalities are very much alike.

A Rex is a very active, very intelligent, very affectionate cat. They think they are a member of your family and they want to help run things. Rex are not a good cat for people who want their pet to sit on a chair and stay out of the way. Rex race through the house and bounce off the walls. They will open a cabinet door and eat all of your cookies with no shame at all. And then they will jump on your lap and demand that you love them. They enjoy riding on shoulders. And, with their extreme intelligence, they can learn anything you want to teach them. They may not always choose to do it but they can learn it.

The Cornish Rex coat is what usually attracts people to them first. It consists only of soft down hairs (the "undercoat"). There are no hard long outer guard hairs like on a normal coat. The soft, warm feel is luxurious. The coat requires very little routine grooming. Just petting removes the few loose hairs. Rex do shed like any other animal. But the short, fine hair is hard to see. And you never get long hairs all over your clothes and furniture like with other breeds.

Many people who are allergic to cats can tolerate a Rex. This does not mean, however, that the breed is "hypoallergenic". Some people also have a reaction to the Rex coat. The very short hair does not hold dust, dander and saliva as well as a normal coat does. Whether or not a reaction occurs probably depends a great deal on the type and severity of the allergy. Often a mild reaction can be prevented by having another person bathe the cat regularly. We recommend that a person with allergy problems spend some time visiting with and handling Cornish Rex before deciding to try to live with one.

Cornish Rex are a healthy breed of cat. They have no common genetic defects as occur in some other breeds. They look fragile but they are very strong and wiry. With good care, a healthy diet and routine vaccinations they can live to their late teens or early 20s.

Color is considered to be of secondary importance in this breed. They are accepted for registration in any color which exists in any other breed. Most breeders have a few favorite colors and work mostly with those. But if you look long enough you can find a Rex in any color that you want. The name "SiRex" used to refer to pointed Rex. This name is no longer used since it implied that the cat was a hybrid between Siamese and Rex, which it was not. The genes which produce pointed cats have been in the Rex gene pool as recessives since the early days of the breed.

Cornish Rex can eat the same high quality cat food as any other cat. Show cats may need a little extra fat in their diet to keep the coat in top shape. The major problem with feeding in this breed is that Cornish Rex are greedy and they dearly love to eat. They will attack food as if they were starving when they ate only minutes before. And they never

know when to stop. For that reason, the Rex diet must be controlled by the owner or the cat will soon become very fat. And a fat Rex is not a pretty cat.

Because of the lack of guard hairs a Rex coat gets wet very quickly. For that reason, as well as many others, this type of cat should never be an outdoor cat. They are very agile and can use their paws like hands. I have had Rex who could pick up marbles with their paws. Think long and hard before declawing a Rex. It changes the foot structure and they can no longer use their "hands" as well. A Cornish Rex will learn scratching post behavior very quickly and declawing does not need to be an option.

The Cornish Rex is an excellent pet for those who enjoy an active cat who demands a great deal of love and attention and returns it in kind. They get along fine with well behaved children, dogs and other cats. Most people find that once they have lived with a Cornish Rex they are never happy without one.

Written by Carol Barbee