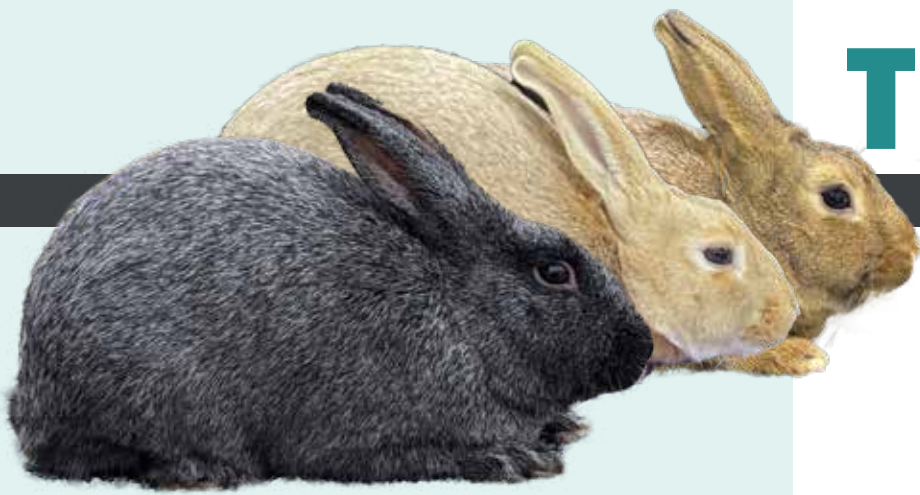


THE SILVER



Photos courtesy of Lisa Krause, Danielle Lowe, and the ARBA Photography Committee

From Top to Tail: The Anatomy of a Champion Silver

Historically, Silver rabbits were kept in enclosed warrens for meat and pelt production. The “Silver Grey” variety, characterized by black fur interspersed with white hairs, was particularly esteemed for its superior meat quality and valuable pelts. At one point, these pelts formed the basis of a thriving export market to China.

The Industrial Revolution of the mid-19th century led to the emergence of a middle class with increased leisure time and disposable income, fostering new hobbies and interests, including animal exhibitions. Silver Grey rabbits were among the first breeds showcased in these early rabbit shows. Competitions were intense, with results regularly published in periodicals such as *The Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* throughout the 1870s and 1880s.

Initially, both Grey (black) and Fawn (genetically orange) Silvers were exhibited. In the 1880s, breeders developed the Brown (chestnut agouti pattern) variety by crossing Silvers with Belgian Hares, resulting in the Brown Silvers’ deep rufus coloration. A Blue Silver variety was also developed and shown during this period but was later lost and had to be redeveloped. In the United Kingdom, all four varieties—Grey, Fawn, Brown, and Blue—are recognized and shown. In the United States, three varieties are recognized: Black, Brown, and Fawn.

Today, the Silver rabbit is considered a rare breed, recognized as critical by The Livestock Conservancy,

The Silver

The Silver rabbit is among the oldest domestic breeds, with records indicating its presence in England as early as the 16th century. It is believed that Sir Walter Raleigh introduced these rabbits to English warrens, possibly bringing them from Portugal. Some sources suggest that Portuguese sailors transported Silver rabbits from Siam which we now know is an impossibility but a common practice in that time to label novel animal breeds as exotic.

Though small in number, the Silver is mighty in impact. The 2018 West Springfield, Massachusetts, ARBA Convention heralded an ARBA group winner—a Black Silver bred and shown by the team of Wade Burkhalter, Michelle Bauer, Sharon Bauer, and Jason Ross. This victory by The Firm showcases the improvements made within the breed and its recognition at the highest levels of competition.



BUILT FOR BRILLIANCE

This article was a collaborative effort, with significant insights and guidance from ARBA Judges Justin & Danielle Lowe.

indicating fewer than 50 annual registrations in the United States and an estimated global population of less than 500. Efforts to preserve and promote this historic breed continue through organizations such as the National Silver Rabbit Club.

The Art of Silver: Perfecting Color in the Silver Rabbit

Surface & Undercolor, Evenness of Silvering, and Brightness of Silvering are all given equal importance and together account for 45 of the 100 points allocated to the breed. The Silver has more points on color than any other breed in the standard.

Understanding Silvering:

Silvering refers to the presence of bright white guard hairs interspersed throughout the rabbit's coat, giving it a distinctive silvery appearance. The degree of silvering can vary, and it is influenced by genetic factors. Some rabbits may exhibit heavy silvering, while others show lighter patterns. The Silver Standard doesn't specify an ideal quantity of Silvering, instead prioritizing intensity, evenness, and contrast with the surface color.

Evaluating Coat Color:

The Silver rabbit breed is recognized in three color varieties, including Black, Brown (chestnut), and Fawn (orange). The base color should be rich and uniform, providing a distinct contrast to the silvering. Intensity and definition of color are key to the Silver breed in all three varieties.

Selecting Breeding Stock:

To achieve a desired level of silvering, pair rabbits with complementary silvering patterns, focusing on evenness. It is more effective to breed for evenness of silvering than degree. Degree of silvering can become consistent after multiple generations, but most often the offspring in a litter will be very diverse; some will be lightly silvered and some will be heavily silvered. Continually select for evenness, then degree and eventually litters will become more consistent.

When selecting animals for color, consider distinctiveness, shade, and intensity. Genetic modifiers cause intensity and should be thought of as cumulative when breeding. Modifiers can be lost when pairing dull animals and they can be increased when breeding intense animals.

From Surface to Undercolor: Coat Perfection from Tip to Root

The coat of a Silver rabbit should be short, with a very snappy flyback and evenly covered with bright silvering. The surface color refers to the dominant hue visible on the outer fur, while the undercolor is the shade found closer to the skin. Both aspects play a critical role in maintaining the breed's standard and aesthetic appeal.

BLACK SILVER



Surface Color: The ideal black Silver rabbit should have a deep, rich black coat with a striking contrast between the base color and the silvering. The black should not appear faded or rusty but should be glossy and intense.

Undercolor: A proper Black Silver rabbit will have a dark blue undercolor extending to the skin, ensuring depth of color in the coat.



The Black variety carries an additional challenge. While the black color itself is very consistently dark in this breed, it is the only variety that shows silvering on the belly and underside of the tail. Pay attention to even silvering in these areas.

BROWN SILVER



Surface Color: The Brown Silver displays a deep, bright, rich chestnut with an even mixture of black and silver hairs. The rich chestnut surface color should extend down to an intermediate orange band, inherited from its historical connection to Belgian Hares. The silvering should blend evenly across the coat while allowing the warm brown tones to remain visible. The belly and underside of the tail are a light cream color.

It is important to look for intensity of color. The bands should be in stark contrast. We are looking for bright distinct bands, not dull beige or mottled bands of color.

Undercolor: The richness of color should extend to the deep, bright, slate blue undercolor of the Brown. The undercolor is slate blue on the entire animal, including the belly and tail.



When a Brown has muted color, the silvering blends in and lacks contrast. This makes it an easy mistake to allow for unevenness in the Brown variety, because the Silvering does not always stand out in such a stark contrast as it does in the Black variety.



Balanced Brilliance: The Science of Even Silvering

Evenness of silvering refers to the uniform distribution of white guard hairs across the rabbit's coat. This characteristic is one of the defining features of the Silver breed and is essential for achieving the ideal breed standard.

What Even Silvering Looks Like

A well-silvered rabbit should exhibit a balanced distribution of silver hairs throughout its coat, with no patchy or uneven areas. The silvering should be evenly dispersed, creating a shimmering effect over the base color rather than appearing clumped or concentrated in certain spots. Each hair should contribute to a soft, blended transition between the silver and base color, maintaining the rabbit's striking contrast and unique appearance. Evenness of silvering is of much greater significance than the degree of silvering. Intentionally observe the silvering on the cheek, tips of the ears, down the sides, on the feet and toes, and on the top and bottom of the tail. These are areas where the silvering can fade.

Achieving Even Silvering

Breeders should carefully select rabbits with consistent silvering across the entire body. Uneven silvering—where some areas are heavily silvered while others lack coverage—should be avoided in breeding programs. Here are key considerations for maintaining and improving silvering uniformity:

- **Why Genetics Matter:** The silvering gene is inherited, and its expression varies between individuals. Rabbits with balanced silvering should be prioritized for breeding.
- **Age and Development:** Silvering progresses as rabbits mature, often becoming more defined with age. Young kits will not show their full silvering potential immediately, as they are born without any silvering at all and don't typically finish silvering until 3-4 months of age. Oftentimes, Silvers will have a heavier degree of silvering when they transition to a senior coat, but evenness stays the same.
- **Coat Quality:** The short, very snappy flyback coat is the result of good genetics. However, a finished coat will display silvering more evenly. Pay attention to animals that naturally finish their coats and stay finished longer. Silvers are very unique; grooming a Silver may remove the slightly longer silver hairs and cause unevenness. It is important to promote natural finish in your herd. Watch your rabbits as they develop to learn the ideal age when your stock will be prime for show.

Did you know?

The number of Silvers shown at ARBA Conventions skyrocketed between 2017 and 2024, increasing by over 250%! This remarkable growth highlights the breed's rising popularity in the show world.

FAWN SILVER

■ Selective Breeding:

Over time, breeding pairs with strong, consistent silvering will help refine and stabilize this trait in future generations.

The Glow Factor: Breeding for Brilliant Silvering

Brightness of silvering refers to the clarity and luster of the silvered hairs, which should create a striking contrast against the base color of the rabbit's coat. The ideal silvering should be crisp and clean, giving the coat a radiant glow rather than a dull or muddled appearance.

What Bright Silvering Looks Like

A well-silvered rabbit should appear as though its coat is shimmering under the light, not to be confused with sheen or luster. The silver hairs should stand out vividly against the underlying color—whether black, brown, or fawn. The brightness enhances the rabbit's overall appearance, giving it a uniquely striking appearance.

How to Achieve Bright Silvering

Breeding for brightness requires careful selection of rabbits with clean, well-defined silvering. To maximize brilliance in the coat, breeders should consider the following factors:

- **Genetic Selection:** Some bloodlines naturally produce brighter silvering. Breeders should prioritize rabbits with a history of producing clear, well-contrasted silvering.
- **Coat Health:** A healthy coat maintains better depth of color thus contrast with the silver hairs and base color. Proper diet, clean cages, and good overall condition will help maintain the silvered hairs' luster.
- **Avoiding Excessive Heaviness:** Silvering should not appear to be a blanket or veil. Overly heavy silvering will lack contrast with the rest of the color, detracting from the potential the Silvering's potential to shine.
- **Age Considerations:** Silvering develops over time, with most rabbits needing to mature into their best brightness. Evaluating rabbits at different growth stages can help identify those with the strongest silver quality.

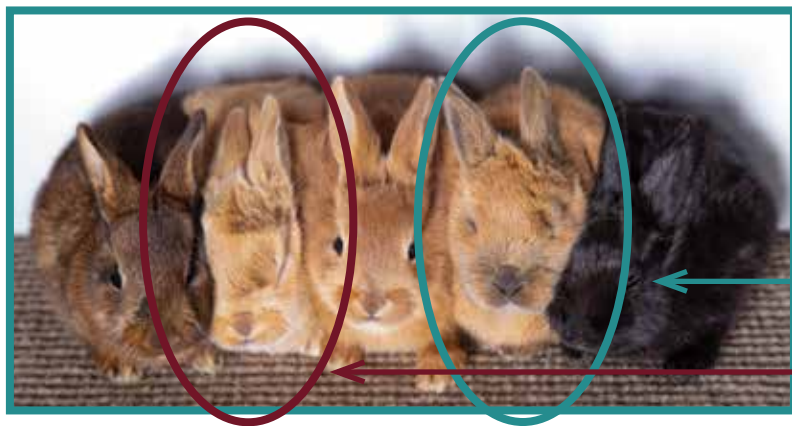


Surface Color: The Fawn Silver rabbit features a bright, rich orange color contrasting with the silver hairs. This color should be even and free from smuttiness (Black guard hairs, typically most prominent on the extremities), allowing the silvering to stand out against the rich orange base. The belly and underside of the tail should be a light cream to white color.

The Fawn Silver Standard is different from most Fawn Standards, because it is genetically a black based Fawn, requiring Brown eyes, and faults for "yellowing". Pale fawns should be faulted, as well as fawns that are too dark and "bricky". Yellow Fawns do not show contrast of silvering well at all and points can be deducted for color and brightness.



Undercolor: The undercolor should be as close to the surface color as possible, blending smoothly into the surface color. A consistent undercolor ensures that the coat retains its warm, golden appearance even as silvering develops.

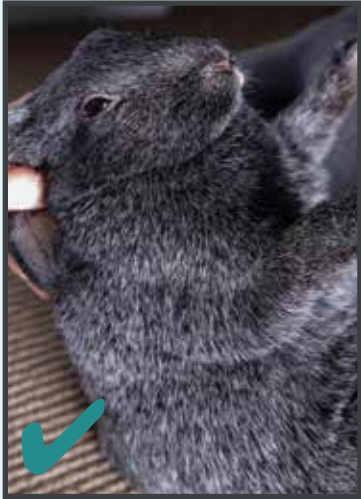
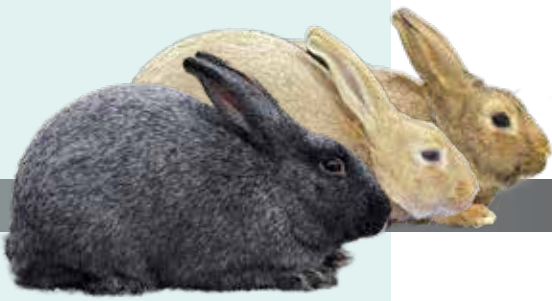


It bears noting that a Fawn Silver carries non-extension genes and a Black Silver carries self genes. This means that the crossing of varieties can eventually produce Tort, a variety that is not accepted.

Avoid Fawns that display a light yellow coloring.



THE SILVER



A well-silvered rabbit should appear as though its coat is shimmering under the light. Silvering should be uniformly dispersed throughout the entire surface area of the body.



Lack of silvering; particularly on the cheeks & muzzle.



Lack of silvering on the forelegs.



Uniform silvering on the forelegs.

Coat of Distinction: Perfecting Coat Texture for Maximum Presence

The Silver rabbit's fur is short and exhibits a pronounced flyback quality, meaning that when the fur is stroked against its natural direction, it quickly returns to its original position creating a smooth and sleek surface. This snappy flyback is essential for the coat to lie flat and close to the body, enhancing the rabbit's streamlined silhouette and silvering.

The importance of proper fur texture in Silvers cannot be overstated, as it plays a crucial role in showcasing the breed's hallmark silvering. The short, tight coat provides an optimal backdrop for the white guard hairs to stand out, giving the rabbit its characteristic silvery luster. A coat that is too long, woolly, or soft can obscure this effect, diminishing the visual impact of the silvering and detracting from the breed's unique aesthetic. It is important to select rabbits with substance of the individual hairs; rabbits with fur structure that is too fine will have a slower rate of return on the coat. Fur that naturally lies tight and smooth, offering plenty of resistance when stroked from tail to head is ideal.

Common faults in Silver rabbits' fur include excessive length, a woolly or soft texture, and molting. Take note of the straightness of individual hairs as well. Hairs that hook on the end or have a wave, kink, or curve to them will not lay smooth and straight. These issues can disrupt the smooth appearance of the coat and interfere with the proper display of silvering. To maintain the breed's standards, breeders should select rabbits with the desired short, dense fur and avoid those exhibiting these faults. Proper nutrition and clean living conditions can also support coat health, ensuring that the fur remains in optimal condition to highlight the Silver rabbit's distinctive silvering.

The Silver Standard: Perfecting Structure for Balance and Elegance

The Silver rabbit is a medium-sized breed with a well-balanced and proportional body, head, ears, legs, and tail. The ideal Silver rabbit should have a firm, well-conditioned body with strong bone structure, maintaining a graceful yet sturdy appearance. Below is a detailed breakdown of the breed's physical attributes, common faults, and strategies for improvement.

Body

Ideal Structure:

The Silver rabbit has a medium-length body with a slight taper from the hindquarters to the shoulders. The topline should form a smooth, gradual rise from the base of the ears to the highest point at the hips, then gently curve downward toward the base of the tail. A well-conditioned Silver should have firm flesh, reflecting good musculature and conditioning.



Age Considerations: Silvering develops over time, with most rabbits needing to mature into their best brightness. Evaluating rabbits at different growth stages can help identify those with the strongest silver quality.

BUILT FOR BRILLIANCE

Common Faults:

- A racy body type that appears too elongated and lacks substance. These animals lack substance of bone and are long limbed.
- Excessive tapering along the sides, creating an overly narrow shoulder region. Avoid rabbits with a narrow shoulder, as these will either be narrow throughout or they will taper to the extreme.
- Flat or overly long body, which detracts from the balanced appearance.
- Long neck, which disrupts the proportional flow of the body.
- Rough or protruding hips, giving a bony or poorly conditioned look. Hips should blend smoothly, with the appearance of firmness.

Improvements:

Breeding for a strong, well-filled midsection and hindquarters will help maintain the ideal shape. Selecting rabbits with a correct topline and avoiding those with extreme tapering will ensure structural soundness. There is nothing loose, heavy, or sloppy about a Silver; they are a truly sleek rabbit in every sense of the word. Overly fatty animals will lead to a looser pelt and these animals are more prone to develop dewlaps. Conditioning through proper nutrition and proper cage size can also enhance muscle tone and firmness.

Head and Ears

Ideal Structure:

The head should be medium-sized, proportional to the body, and set well on the shoulders. It should be carried erect, with a bright, prominent eye that enhances the alert expression of the breed. The ears should be well-set, upright, and of moderate thickness, providing both function and aesthetic balance.

Common Faults:

- A long, slim head with a pinched nose, giving an unrefined appearance.
- Small or dull eyes, which take away from the breed's characteristic bright expression.
- A blocky or bulky head, disrupting the streamlined elegance of the breed.

Improvements:

Breeding for proportional head size relative to body length will improve balance. Selecting rabbits with strong ear placement and maintaining eye brightness through health and genetics will enhance overall appearance. Avoid animals with round heads; while the Silver head should not be narrow, it has a slightly more angular appearance.

Feet, Legs & Tail

Ideal Structure:

The feet and legs should be medium in length with well-balanced bone structure, neither too fine nor too heavy. Toenails should be dark and match within each foot and corresponding foot. The tail should be well-furred and evenly silvered, maintaining consistency with the body.

Common Faults:

- Uneven or mismatched toenail color, leading to disqualification.
- Overly thin or weak legs, affecting the rabbit's ability to carry itself properly.



Silvers have a medium-length body with a topline that rises gradually from the base of the ears to the highest point at the hips and curves downward towards the base of the tail. Bone is medium and flesh should be firm.

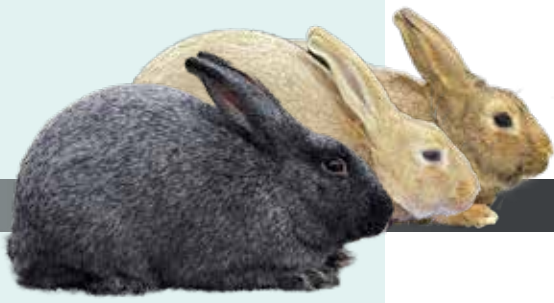


Select away from racy, rangy bodies, fine bone and an overly narrow shoulder region. It is undesirable to have bony or protruding hips.



Balanced distribution of silvering can be tricky on the belly. The rabbit on the left exhibits a balanced distribution of silver hairs throughout the belly, with no patchy or uneven areas.





THE SILVER BUILT FOR BRILLIANCE

Breed for evenness of silvering from nose to tail



Improvements:

Consistently selecting rabbits with proper bone density and structure will enhance leg strength. Monitoring for mismatched toenails and ensuring even silvering on the tail through selective breeding will help maintain the breed standard.

Strategies for Improving the Silver Rabbit

- **Selective Breeding:** Choosing rabbits with the correct type, avoiding those with extreme tapering, long necks, mandolin type, or poor bone density. Prioritize evenness of silvering and intensity of high-quality surface color.
- **Conditioning and Nutrition:** Ensuring rabbits develop firm, well-muscled bodies through a proper diet, genetics, and cage space. Watch your herd to learn when they are in ideal finish and use animals that stay finished longer.
- **Evaluating Development:** Silvering and body type develop with age, so evaluating rabbits at different stages ensures selection for the best overall structure. Learn when the rabbits in your herd look their best and when they look their worst in order to cull at appropriate times.
- **Balancing Traits:** Avoid overcompensating in breeding programs—correcting a fault should not introduce another, such as selecting for evenness and losing intensity of color. When using a rabbit with many strengths, avoid keeping offspring that have the same faults as the parent. Only keep offspring that have the strengths of the parents and fewer flaws.

By maintaining high standards in structure and condition, breeders can continue to refine the Silver rabbit's historical elegance, ensuring it remains both a striking show breed and a well-balanced, functional rabbit.

Preserving the Legacy of the Silver Rabbit

The Silver rabbit stands as one of the oldest and most distinctive domestic breeds, combining a rich historical background with a stunning, eye-catching coat. While once prized for its meat and pelts, today the Silver rabbit is recognized for its unique silvering, balanced conformation, intensity of color, and sleek presence in competitions. Despite its rarity, dedicated breeders continue to refine and preserve the breed, ensuring that its elegance and historical significance remain intact.

To maintain the integrity of the breed, careful attention must be given to proper coat development, silvering distribution, and overall structure. By following the ARBA Standard of Perfection, breeders can work toward producing rabbits that exhibit the ideal type, fur quality, and silvering evenness that define the Silver breed. Understanding the nuances of genetics, conditioning, and selective breeding is essential in preserving and improving this rare yet remarkable rabbit.

For those interested in learning more about Silver rabbits, accessing breed standards, or becoming involved in conservation efforts, the National Silver Rabbit Club offers resources, support, and a community of passionate breeders. By joining, breeders can contribute to the continued success and visibility of the breed on both the show table and breeding programs. DR