

The Standard Chinchilla: A Century of Purpose and Perfection

By Eric Stewart, ARBA Executive Director, and Judge

Sterling from the Start

The Standard Chinchilla is one of the oldest breeds recognized by the ARBA. The mutation that created the Chinchilla was identified in written accounts by the year 1917 in France, although specifics remain unclear as to exactly when or whom was the first to produce chinchilla-colored rabbits. Shortly after the color was identified, Chinchilla rabbits were imported into England by breeders eager to explore the new variety.

According to Hoyle H. Kidd and James Blyth, the first Chinchilla rabbits were exhibited in the United States by Alfred Green of Hull, England, at the New York State Fair in 1919 or 1920. Green's Chinchillas were auctioned to breeders at the show to pay off his debts after importation and entry fees left him bankrupt. Jack Harris of Akron, Ohio, purchased some of these auctioned rabbits. The excitement surrounding these uniquely colored animals helped spark America's first commercial rabbit-fur industry.

To quote past ARBA Secretary James Blyth, "The Standard Chinchilla is no doubt the first of the fur breeds."

The first standard for a Chinchilla rabbit was drafted at the 1924 ARBA Convention in Lima, Ohio. At the 1925 Convention in Colorado Springs, standards were approved for two breeds of different sizes. The American Chinchilla (today's Standard Chinchilla) was the smaller, furrer's rabbit, while the Heavyweight Chinchilla was bred as a larger animal with appeal to the commercial rabbit industry.

The 1925 Convention also marked the request by Ed Stahl for the first working standard of the Giant Chinchilla breed. At the 1926 Convention in Anaheim, California, the American Chinchilla and Heavyweight Chinchilla were shown separately, although essentially the same other than the weight differences. Both breeds were represented by the same club, led by John Fehr, who remained president until 1936.

Blyth later wrote, "The real booster for the Chins was Ed Stahl. When Ed became interested, the stock in Chinchillas rose to a great height. Through Ed's promotions, Chins sold in most every part of our land. While Ed was active in the American Chins {current-day Standard Chinchillas} or the larger ones and helped to make the Giant Chins, his first love was the Standard Chins."

The Standard Chinchilla is no doubt the first of the fur breeds.

-James Blyth, Former ARBA Secretary

Why Standard Chinchillas?

I have often been asked, "Eric, why Standard Chinchillas?" The reason is not only that they're beautiful and versatile, but because they are the breed that helped the ARBA grow

into what we see today. In any species of animal, it is the marketable commodity that drives breeding and production. The chinchilla rabbit and the three distinct breeds that came from it attracted new breeders who wanted to make or supplement an income by raising rabbits for pelts and meat. This influx of new breeders only contributed to ARBA membership and patronizing its services. Classified ads from the 1920s promoted the advantages of raising Chinchilla rabbits, with some offering buy-back programs for offspring. In fact, the Chin Breeders of America operated as a corporation producing pelts, with an output of 1.25 million in 1927. Their 40-acre rabbit farm in the Catskills of New York, managed by Karl Haack, maintained more than 10,000 of the "finest Chinchillas to be found in existence." My reverence for this breed comes from its central role in developing both the commercial rabbit industry and the ARBA itself.

A Century of Standards

For a breed that has existed for a century, the Standard Chinchilla's breed standard has seen remarkably few changes. The first standard accepted in 1925 (printed in 1926), described body type as "medium length and chubby," with points allocated to body (10), head (5), ears (5), eyes (5), feet and legs (5), tail (5), and weight (5). Fur was worth 25 points and described as "about an inch long and very dense." The color was described much as it is today, also valued at 25 points.

At the time, the breed was referred to as the American Chinchilla. The name changed in 1930 to the Standard American Chinchilla. In addition to the earlier

disqualification for rabbits resembling Giants, a disqualification for ears over five inches was instituted, and maximum weights were increased to 7½ pounds for bucks and 8 pounds for does.

In 1934, the ARBA recognized that Chinchillas exhibit variable eye color and allowed any color permissible under the standard. In 1939, the color description was expanded, with specific points given to surface color, ring color, and under color; weight points were merged into body points.

By 1944, breeders were describing fur more precisely as "1⅛–1¼ inches in length (a longer or shorter length with density preferred over standard length lacking density)," with faults noted for any tendency toward woolly

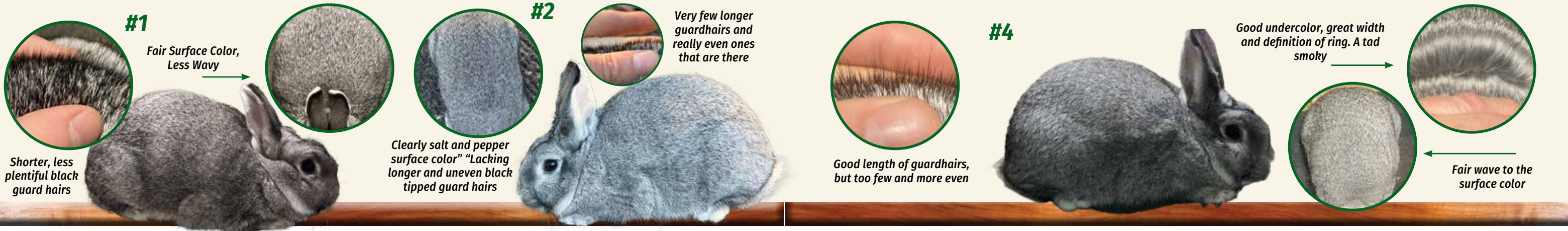
Good undercolor and ring definition but a bit smoky in ring color



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-James Blyth, Former ARBA Secretary





fur. During this era—amid World War II—the science of genetics was still developing. Even into the 1970s, some breeders experimented with Angora crosses to soften texture or increase density of some breeds; which we now know only causes problems and does not provide the desired result. Woolly or shaggy coats were never desirable.

In 1960, “compact with well-rounded hips” was added to the body description, and points for body type were raised to 30. In 1971, the breed name was shortened to “Standard Chinchilla,” and the word “chubby” was removed from the body description. The 1981 revision aligned closely with today’s standard, though weights were ½ pound heavier. In 1991, weights were reduced to their current range: Sr. bucks, 5–7 lbs; Sr. does, 5½–7½ lbs.

Over the past one hundred years these have been remarkably minor changes. The concept of this furrier’s rabbit has never changed.

The Standard Chinchilla is not a mere 4-class, chinchilla-colored rabbit with any type of fur. The two most significant traits given the most points are 1-Color and 2-Fur. I am not proud to admit that as a young judge 30 years ago, I did not appreciate the distinctive characteristics of the breed. Unless it is in an area with serious Standard Chinchilla breeders, we most often encounter chinchilla-colored rabbits at local shows that may meet the basic weight requirements but are clearly

not Standard Chinchillas. Rabbits in ARBA shows are judged according to phenotype (how they appear) and not genotype (their genetic composition-lineage); a rabbit that best meets the breed standard should win regardless of its family tree. There is nothing wrong with cross-breeding provided the distinct breed characteristics are maintained or enhanced. Crosses that diminish color or distinct fur quality do nothing to improve the breed.

General Type (30 Points)

Note that general type is allocated 30 points, not body-type alone. General type includes body, head & ears, eyes, as well as feet & legs. Depth and width of body are to be approximately equal and this balance should carry throughout the body with a slight taper from the hips to the shoulders. This is more specific than the original description from 1925 but it still describes a “medium length and chubby” rabbit. The well filled face and jaws, short neck and proportional ears also reflect a chubby appearance. Ears over 5 inches are a disqualification and an excessive dewlap is a fault. I recall seeing many more Standard Chinchillas with larger dewlaps decades ago but have not seen nearly as many in recent years. Feet & legs are described as medium-fine boned. Eyes may be any color but pink. These 30 points cover all of the aforementioned features, not merely body type; I cannot emphasize this truth strongly enough. Standard Chinchillas are not chinchilla-colored Florida Whites.

Fur (30 Points)

Body-head-ears-eyes-feet & legs are allocated the same number of points collectively as the single attribute fur. Standard Chinchilla fur is the very purpose of the breed and what started the breed’s boom in the first place. Even before the first sentence of the fur description is the word Rollback.

The fur is to be of a fine texture and very dense with body fur 1 1/8–1 3/8 inches in length, ideal being 1 ¼ inches. The standard clearly states that a longer or shorter fur with density is preferred over a standard-length coat lacking density.

Faults include molt, hutch stain, fur shorter than 1 inch, tendency towards wooly, harsh or wiry coat; and flyback fur. Fly back fur is specifically identified as a fault. 1/3 of your consideration of a Standard Chinchilla’s quality is determined by its fur. The fur has complexity with multiple guard hair types found throughout the coat. The undercoat is what provides most of the density, the guard hairs protect the undercoat.

When measuring fur, the length described by the standard is that of the undercoat and its primary guard hairs (think the silver tip and silver band on the longer guard hairs). A quality coat is interspersed with uneven black guard hairs and banded guard hairs with a black tip that are longer than the primary guard hairs. The SOP only states “jet black guard hairs” however they are in fact banded with a distinct jet-black tip.

Pay close attention to the length and variability of these black guard hairs as they play a critical role in the surface color. Longer black guard hairs do not make the coat too long or shaggy and are not part of the 1 ¼ inch ideal length consideration. These longer black guard hairs can vary in length from 1 1/8 inches to 1 1/2 inches in length on the same rabbit, and that’s a good trait.

Color (35 Points)

Standard Chinchillas have more points allocated to color than any other breed of rabbit recognized by the ARBA. Over 1/3 of the total points are assigned solely to color.

Speaking again to the 20 year-old Eric Stewart, color is of paramount importance so pay particular attention to the text in the Standard of Perfection and not your own preconceived notions. The under color is to be a dark slate blue and it is to be definitely wider than the intermediate band; there is no specific width identified except “definitely wider”. I am quite confident that I had picked too many Standard Chinchillas in the early days with 50% or wider intermediate bands because I found it attractive.

Under color is 8 points and note that there are varying shades of under color intensity. Ring color and definition are allocated 12 points; this is where it starts becoming a bit complicated as there are several factors that impact the ring from above and below. The ring (intermediate band) is defined as light pearl (off-white to white) with black edging at the top and definitely narrower than the under color



Good undercolor, good ring definition, smoky color where coat is breaking

Long black guard hairs, but too even and too few

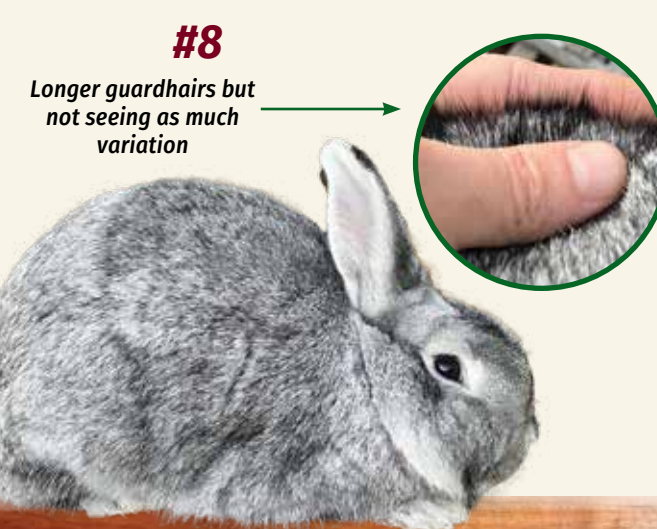
Very uneven guard hairs; almost looks like a band when pressed together

WHO IS JOHN FEHR — AND WHY HE MATTERS TO THE STANDARD CHINCHILLA

John Fehr stands among the most influential pioneers in American rabbit breeding and ARBA history. Based in Indianapolis, Fehr was a founding force behind the early development and organization of the American Rabbit Breeders Association. His work extended beyond breeding — he was also an innovator, businessman, and teacher who helped transform rabbit keeping from a simple pastime into a structured and professional pursuit.

In 1918, Fehr established the Hares & Rabbits Supply Company in downtown Indianapolis, one of the earliest commercial ventures dedicated entirely to rabbit supplies and literature. This business served as a vital hub for rabbit enthusiasts nationwide, fostering the growth of organized breeding and exhibition standards. His lifelong commitment to improving rabbit breeds — particularly the Chinchilla — helped guide the refinement of the breed's type and color descriptions that would later appear in the ARBA Standard of Perfection.

Through over seven decades of involvement, Fehr's legacy is seen in both the foundation of ARBA's organized structure and the preservation of accurate, breed-defining qualities in the Standard Chinchilla. His influence shaped not only how rabbits were bred and shown, but how they became part of American agricultural and exhibition history.



below. Not only must one discern the color quality/clarity of the ring (COLOR) but also how clean the edges are on both the top and bottom of the ring (DEFINITION). A ring can be smoky, brassy, bright, uneven in width, have great definition on the top but not the bottom (and visa versa), too wide, too narrow, etc. There is a lot than can go wrong with the ring or it can be a vivid, brilliant pearl hue that shines through when the fur is stroked.

Above the ring is the narrow black band, ideally clean and distinct with no bleeding or smoky edge marring the ring definition. Above the narrow black band is a very light band comprised of pearl tipped or banded guard hairs, this is the fur you measure for length assessment. The standard specifically refers to this as “a very light band, brightly ticked with jet black guard hairs of uneven length”, however I’m a pragmatist and the very light band is every bit as pearl as the ring color.

There are 15 points allocated to surface color alone; the same number of points as Giant Chinchillas allocate to color itself in their standard. Surface color is what you immediately see before even touching a rabbit. A full ½ of the Standard Chinchilla color points are dedicated to solely surface color. Note that it is not simply a matter of having some longer black guard hairs, they must be plentiful enough and uneven in length to provide the ideal wavy surface color. Salt and pepper appearance (a more even

black stippling of color on the pearl surface) is the result of the black guard hairs being too short and of insufficient plenitude. A light surface color that’s less salt and pepper can be caused by too few black guard hairs and their being too even in length.

If there’s anything you take away from the surface color descripton you must recognize that it is the longer, uneven, black guard hairs (banded hairs with a black tip) protruding over the pearl-tipped guard hairs (light band) that create a correct, wavy surface color.

Disqualifications include failure to possess blue under color on the white hind feet markings, extremely light or dark color, extreme brownish tinge to the ring, absence of ring color and pink eyes.

Color Variation and Coat Condition

As a breeder we will observe variations in most litters with virtually every aspect of color. One of the most apparent variations includes brassy color or what they call “brown backs” in the UK. Color will change as young animals begin to develop a mature coat. Oftentimes those babies with brassy rings will clear and may hold their under color intensity

better as adults. Extremely brownish or brassy juniors may not clear when they mature or will retain a brassy or smoky edge to their ring into maturity.

I have had rabbitry visitors ask if we had chestnuts born in litters as some may have kits with extremely brassy or brown color, it is that marked of a departure from the ideal color. There will be variations with the length and evenness of black guard hairs on an otherwise beautifully colored rabbit; but without the longer uneven black guard hairs it’ll never have an ideal surface color. There may be wider or narrower intermediate bands as well as smokier, brassy, or well-defined pearl rings all from the same litter.

Venerated breeder Sherman Healy stated, “When the young are sixteen to twenty weeks-old they get their first good coats.” Any portion of the coat that is broken or molting will cause an indistinct ring or what appears to be roaning/mealiness in the under color. If a Standard Chinchilla is broken in coat, assess a section of coat that may be finished in an effort to determine what the under color and ring may be for comments, but then of course fault for uneven surface and inconsistent ring and/or under color in the broken area(s).





#11

Plenty of uneven guardhairs
Nice waviness to coat
Pretty good undercolor, good band width, but a little smoky

Living legend Tex Thomas cautioned in an article, "All rabbits molt, but the process should only take a couple months. What I am saying is beware of the animal who only has a finished coat 1 month of the year. Rabbits from such animals are usually the same way, hard to condition."

Fur and Function

A Standard Chin with incorrect fur cannot display ideal color. A molting rabbit with extreme depth of body and flesh condition cannot compete with a rabbit possessing marginal body type and correct fur & color.

The ARBA Commercial Fur standard states, "The guard hair should be uniformly longer than the undercoat on the back and sides with the difference in length not to exceed 1/8 inch"; clearly a rabbit with commercial fur cannot have correct color thus it is not a Standard Chinchilla.

Aside from the SOP, my personal experience with fur animals has caused me to select for animals with a little more bone and hide. Again, Standard Chinchillas (along with Mini Rex, Angoras, even Angora goats and sheep) possessing a bit more bone tend to maintain or hold coats longer/better. Remember, we're breeding animals to produce fiber-pelts and not fryers so we expect a little more substance to them which would be discarded as waste with fryers.

With density as a key consideration, there are only so many follicles that can produce hairs per square inch; the more hide on the animal the more fiber-hair they are capable of producing. We do not want sloppy Standard Chinchillas but I very much prefer



#12

Excellent waviness to coat

Good overall color, would fault the wide intermediate band

Visualize waviness like ripples in the sand

Longer uneven lengths to the guardhairs create the waviness

(and select for) a rolling skin hide over a tight-hided animal as they do tend to carry more density of coat. With the expectation that we must grow them out longer in order to harvest a marketable pelt, their size lends itself well to an excellent carcass to put in the freezer that easily provides a healthy meal for a family of 5.

A Century of Excellence

The year 2025 marks one hundred years of the Standard Chinchilla in the ARBA Standard of Perfection. The breed has changed little over the decades because it remains exactly what it was meant to be from the start: a furrier's dream and a fancier's delight.

The Standard Chinchilla is growing in popularity again and has been recognized by The Livestock Conservancy as a heritage breed and a true cornerstone of the ARBA legacy. The Standard Chinchilla is eligible to compete in ARBA sanctioned Rare Breed specialty shows and is categorized as 'Threatened' by The Livestock Conservancy. The American Standard Chinchilla RBA adopted the slogan, "The Granddaddy of All Chins." All rabbit breeds that recognize the chinchilla variety are the result of introduction of the Standard Chinchilla. The Standard Chinchilla's moderate size makes it an ideal breed for anyone with limited space and breeders of any age. Just as breeders such as John Fehr and Ed Stahl noted nearly a century ago, homesteaders are recognizing the versatile appeal and value of these sterling silver beauties. The Standard Chinchilla truly epitomizes the ARBA's cornerstone "Fur, Food, and Fancy" slogan with something to offer anyone interested in raising rabbits. The American Standard Chinchilla RBA has a Facebook page called Standard Chinchilla Rabbit Breeders Association with information about membership, join today! DR

Eric has been ARBA Judge #677 since 1995 and has raised several breeds since getting his first rabbit in 1986.

This in-depth article was made possible by the ARBA Library Committee with considerable credit given to Kevin Whaley for his earlier research that brought many historical facts to the surface. The generous donations from our members have significantly enhanced details of our history and make informative articles such as this possible.

If you have publications or artifacts that may be of interest to the ARBA Library and Museum please contact Ellie Bonde ellieandrc@aol.com

- SOURCES**
- The Central Furrier Magazine The Central Furrier Publishing Company, Chicago, IL Vol XI, No 1. January 1928 New York Central Library
 - The American Standard Chinchilla Association Official Guidebook. 1972
 - The American Standard Chinchilla Association Official Guidebook. 2013
 - ARBA Standard of Perfection- Editions 1926-2025
 - Join the Standard Chinchilla Group on Facebook
 - ARBA Library and Museum, Knox, PA

JOHN C. FEHR

PIONEER · JUDGE · PUBLISHER · LEADER · TEACHER · INVENTOR

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HARES AND RABBITS SUPPLY COMPANY
Fehr maintained a retail store and office on Indianapolis's Massachusetts Avenue in 1918. The building still stands today. Here he sold all manner of rabbits and rabbit supplies.

FEHR'S ORIGINAL TATTOO MARKER
Fehr, a smooth by trade, designed the original tattoo needle in 1913 by soldering three needles to a wire form handle.

FEHR'S ICONIC WOODLAWN AVE. RABBITRY
Fehr maintained his Woodlawn Avenue home for over 40 years, until his death. He is shown inside his home in upper photo with a pair of his prized Flemish Giants.

IF YOU ARE THINKING OF RABBITS OR RABBIT SUPPLIES - WRITE - JOHN C. FEHR 1302 WOODLAWN AVENUE INDIANAPOLIS, IND. FREE CATALOGUE

THE ARBA HALL OF FAME LIBRARY MUSEUM PRESENTS:

Indianapolis is hallowed ground in ARBA history.

You are Invited!
To A Special Historic Tour Of ARBA Founding Pioneer John Fehr's Residence, Rabbitry Site, and Downtown Supply Store Site.

Our tour will start by driving past the former Woodlawn Avenue home and rabbitry of John Fehr. Possibly the most significant person in ARBA history, the narration will include many never-before-known historical details of John Fehr's life and contributions to the rabbit industry over a period of 70 years.

We will view several museum artifacts from this early period.

We will then head to downtown Indianapolis's trendy and historic Mass Avenue District. After a brief lunch break, we will walk and see the original brick storefront that housed Fehr's 1918 Hares & Rabbits Supply Company. Includes lunch. Leaves and returns to fairgrounds.

Where:
Pickup From ARBA Convention Showroom

Time:
Monday November 17, 10:30AM - 1:00PM

Host:
Kevin Whaley

Cost:
\$88 adults
\$65 children under 13.

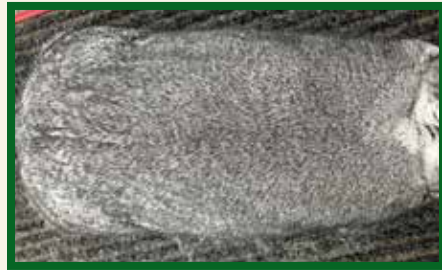
Includes lunch and coach transportation.
register at showprogram.com after 9/1/2025

Evaluating Standard Chinchilla Fur:

Trait	Desirable	Undesirable
Texture	Fine, silky	Coarse or wooly
Density	Plush, resilient	Thin or open
Type	Rollback	Flyback
Undercolor	Dark slate, wide band	Pale or narrow
Ring	Bright pearl, clean edge	Brassy or smoky Wider than under color
Surface	Wavy silver, black tips	Salt-and-pepper, flat
Guard Hairs	Uneven, plentiful	Sparse or uniform



Click below or scan the QR code to see a nice example of a dense, rollback coat with a nice wavy pattern and ring definition.



The surface color is an example of a less-than-ideal stippling or salt & pepper surface due to the lack of longer black guard hairs that are too even. In addition, the fur is thin (note the visible skin on the ring photo).



The surface color has a better wave pattern, but is broken along the sides.



The surface color is an example of an ideal wavy pattern due to the uneven longer black guard hairs, that are both abundant and uneven in length.



The surface color displays a nice wavy pattern due to the uneven longer black guard hairs. They are not as abundant (thin) as the B & C examples.



Note the break along the sides due to molt spoiling finish. The surface color has a brassy tinge although there is a wavy surface color, not as nice as examples B&C



Note the lack of abundant longer black guard hairs and the less than-desirable evenness of guard hairs in comparison with the other examples. However, the guard hairs display a distinct bright black ring color.



The undercolor is a nice deep slate blue, but the ring lacks definition and is a bit smoky. Note the evenly ticked tail.



Excellent definition & color, but note the too wide intermediate band. There is a correlation between a too-wide intermediate band & light belly undercolor, (see photo above)



The ring definition is good, but note the width and undesirable brassy tinge to the ring. In addition the fur is thin and could have more uneven black guard hairs.



The undercolor is a nice deep slate, but is spoiled by the brassy ring. There is good ring definition and nice black banding at the tips

All rabbits molt, but the process should only take a couple months. What I am saying is beware of the animal who only has a finished coat 1 month of the year. - Tex Thomas



Travel back to the 20's with us at the Standard Chinchilla Judging area at Convention as we celebrate the 100 Year Anniversary of the Standard Chinchilla.

