



LIGHT SHADE SILVER GREY, "QUICKSILVER."

One of the 1st and Gold Medal Team, Lincoln. Winner also of 1st, Thorne; 1st, Gravesend; 1st and Special, Brighton, and many other prizes.

Bred and Exhibited by Mr. W. WALTER, Worthing.

The Silver

The sparkling attraction among the old Fancy breeds

By G A Wearmouth

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Although to the beginner the Silver rabbit is not an easy variety to understand, I know that I am on safe ground in proclaiming it as one of the most interesting in the whole rabbit fancy.

In writing this article I have nothing new to say to the older breeders, but perhaps by briefly giving an outline what is required in an exhibition Silver I may be able to interest any who have either just begun, or contemplate making a start with the variety.

The three recognised colours of Silvers – namely, greys, fawns and browns, all have their charms; therefore it is up to the beginner to decide which is preferred.

Apart from the difference in colour the standard laid down by the National Silver Club for an exhibition Silver more or less applies to all.

I should perhaps mention that in all colours there is a variation of shades, medium, dark and light. Although the

medium shade is really the ideal to aim for, both dark and light shades, provided they possess other good qualities, can prove successful in the show pen.

I think it would be better for me to try to explain what an exhibition Silver is like, and perhaps by drawing attention to the failings that the novice is most likely to encounter would make it more easy to understand.

Taking greys first, we will follow the standard set out for the ideal.

Body colour, a rich black. This should show up with a bright sheen, but is often spoiled by a dull rusty tinge, most noticeable on sides, hindquarters and inside forelegs.

The undercolour, which is revealed by turning the coat back, should be a blue-black carried down to the skin. This should merge into a narrow black band at the top. To bring out the quality of a good grey it is essential to have that bright blue tone. Avoid those with a hard dead undercolour.

Next in the standard comes evenness of silvering throughout, including head, feet, ears and chest (rather a tall order). However, the standard is so worded that it fully explains what is required, although I am afraid it would be a problem to find a Silver grey to comply with it.

In respect of this even shade of silvering we come up against many failings, some of which are very apt to reproduce themselves in the breeding pen; therefore should not be tolerated.

Three faults which, in my opinion warrant death sentence, are light chests, light ears and feet.

Other failings which are prevalent, but which by selective breeding may in time be bred out, are dark sides and haunches, a very common fault in greys at present, which gives the appearance of a saddle of silvering along the top of the back. It may be of medium shade, but gradually shades off down sides to a darker shade, and in some cases hardly shows any silvering at all on haunches.

Other faults that spoil an exhibition grey are dark cheeks, feet and badly covered ears.

The standard calls for sharp bright silvering, another very important make-up of a good Silver, for after all it is the contrast between the crisp sparkling silvering and the rich body colour that brings out the attractiveness and quality of an exhibition Silver.

It is my contention that the silvering in many of our present-day greys is not sufficiently pronounced and as it is too fine and close does not allow the rich black mixing to show up through, thus spoiling that desired sparkling effect.

I do not mean that we should accept that long streaky silvering sometimes seen, which has the appearance of being laid on top and not fast at the bottom, but suggest that we should strike a happy medium.

We come next to coat quality. This should be short and full and when turned back should have a hard wiry resistance. A long, woolly or silky textured coat is a fault that should never be tolerated.

Ears should be short, neat and carried erectly, along with bold bright eyes, so as to give an alert and healthy expression.

As the standard is compiled, condition and shape come last, but I would point out that on the show bench condition is one of the outstanding features of an exhibition Silver. The first impression a judge gets of an exhibit often has a bearing on his final awards. To me, it is like throwing money down the drain to pay entry fees and transport charges to exhibit a Silver that is not in good condition. You cannot expect to have that bright sparkling top colour and a hard fly back coat unless it has some firm flesh underneath.

The standard does not state what is really expected in type, but my interpretation is short and cobby, size a trifle larger than a typical Dutch.

I have been requested to write on all three colours, but space is limited. In attempting to outline an exhibition Silver grey I have, apart from colour, in many respects covered what is required in fawns and browns. However, I will briefly give my opinion on both colours and draw attention to what, to me, are the prevalent failings.

The body colour of fawns should be of a bright orange tone. Unlike greys this body colour is not uniform throughout but is inclined to shade off down sides and does eventually finish with a pale belly colour. It is a strong point in an exhibition fawn which this shading off in colour can be limited and the rich tone carried down as far as possible. Pale haunches, cheeks and large eye circles are generally the most obvious failings.

Again unlike greys, the undercolour in a fawn, which should be of the same rich orange tone as the top colour, is not carried right down to the skin. Any improvement that can be effected in that direction is all for the best, provided it is the correct tone.

But, rather strangely, breeders have found from experience that fawns with the deepest undercolour often lack that bright orange tone and where you get a hard brickly colour you are very liable to come up against dark hairs, often most noticeable in ear roots and cheeks. This is a fault that should never be allowed to get into the breeding pen.

The rest of the standard applies in fawns the same as in greys so needs no further comment, but I would, however, stress the necessity for bold bright silvering.

I have never bred browns, but have during the course of years had many through my hands, and although I may not be in a position to go as fully into the description of them as some of the noted breeds I will briefly give my opinion.

Again following the standard, the desired body colour in a brown is a deep rich chestnut, the undercolour to have a top band of chestnut and the base a deep blue-black to the skin. The weakness in the body colour of a brown is very similar to that of a fawn with the tendency to shade off on sides to a much paler colour.

This rather presents a problem to breeders. In attempting, by selective breeding, to get that rich colour to carry as far as possible down sides and on to hind feet they are very apt to lose that chestnut tone; the colour shows up more of mahogany shade. Yet where breeders concentrate in their efforts to get clean finish on points the colour is liable to weaken both top and under.

In both greys and fawns, after colour, the standard reads "evenness of silvering" but in browns it is worded "evenness of mixing." The reason for

this is that it calls for an even mixing of black and silver hairs along with the chestnut, to be carried in an even shade throughout. The failings that invariably creep in here are that in some cases where you get a predominance of black hairs the top colour has a blue appearance.

Bad finish on feet is also a common fault. Many browns have very little silvering on forefeet, others show up flaky in armpits and down forelegs and also have pale hind feet.

The rest of the standard follows on the same lines as that for greys and fawns. Its application is equally essential to bring the attractiveness out of a good brown.

Even with years of experience behind them in both breeding and exhibiting I always feel that it is a difficult job for anyone to define fully the ideal Silver in writing. In some of the marked varieties, such as Dutch and English, the required standard can be brought to the fore by photographs, but unfortunately we cannot get much assistance from the camera in displaying the ideal silver. I would, therefore, point out to the novice that knowledge can be much more quickly and more easily acquired by practical contact with the variety.

Regarding general management the novice should never get the idea that there are any secrets attached to it. All that is required is a keen interest and commonsense methods.

Being a hardy variety, the Silver can be kept successfully in outside hutches. Of course, an inside rabbitry is preferable as it affords shelter in bad weather for feeding and attention.

Feeding need not present any difficulty. Oats, greenfood or roots and good hay covers about all that is required. Small additions such as a little wheat mixed with oats and dried bread crusts, help out.

I have been asked to give my opinion on present-day Silvers compared with the past. I can already hear some of our older breeders saying straight away that Silvers of today are not in the same street as those of twenty or thirty years ago.

Well, to me the answer is not quite so easily found. I often think that when we look back on life there is a tendency to magnify the past. Recollections oft beguile and it is very doubtful if we see things as they actually were.

This question of comparison in most varieties often creeps up when fanciers of many years' standing get together. The argument for the past is often centred on some outstanding exhibit of that particular time, but does not necessarily prove that the general run of the variety was good. We have to bear in mind that some exhibits have gained fame, not actually through their own brilliance, but by the fact that the quality of the opposition to them was weak.

However, as I have been a breeder of Silver greys for so many years, I am going to confine my comparison to them. In doing so I would point out that there are not the numbers to be seen on the show bench now as there were years ago and, without a doubt, the variety has to some extent taken on a new look. I can remember when it was quite common in a class of say, twenty Silver greys, for more than half of them to be light, medium of 'tween shades. Today this shade is not often seen.

The sparkling silvering on many of those lighter shades was very attractive, but the chief faults were that, owing to heavy silvering many showed up flaky on top and some were excessively light on front.

To counteract this breeders began to concentrate more on a deeper medium shade with what was termed pin-point silvering. The outcome in general is that the present-day Silver grey has lost much of its top sparkle. I think that accounts for our older breeders comparing very unfavourably greys of today with those of the past.

The last clause in the editor's request is to give points for future progress. Without taking up any more space I would suggest going fifty-fifty in opinion with the older breeders and using more silvering in the breeding pen, as I am convinced it is the only way to combat the rust and flatness so noticeable in the colour of present-day silver greys.

Editor- Ten years after the publication of this article a Silver grey exhibited by Wearmouth Bros was best in show at the Bradford Championship Show.

In his article Wearmouth did not mention the Blue, a colour which was first shown in 1887 but soon disappeared.

In 1989 the Blues were resurrected but again lost favour with breeders. A class for Silver Blues is included on the Bradford Ch Show classification; there were no entries at the 2019 event.

