

THE ARGENTE FAMILY

by Peter Smith

In our February 2018 issue Peter introduced us to the Argente Bleu; now let's explore the fascinating Brun.

Argente Brun

INTRODUCTION

In previous articles regarding the Argente, the breed has, on occasion, been referred to as the Cinderella of the Fur world. I think if this were to be applied to any of the Argente colours, it would have to be the Brun.

HISTORY

My understanding is that the Brun was introduced into the UK in the 1920s from the Continent, where it had been bred for many years. However, it made little progress and became extinct, but was recreated during 1939-41 by H D H Dowle, the author of the excellent *Rabbit Judgeship* book, which all rabbit judges should read in my view.

He achieved this by crossing Argente Cremes with Argente Bleus, from which silvered agoutis were produced (St Huberts). These were mated with normal coated Havanas and produced silvered blacks (Noirs) which, when mated amongst themselves, gave Argente Bruns. At a later stage, Brown Beverens were introduced to improve the length and the colour of the coat.

Throughout the forty odd years that I have been a member of the National Argente Club, the Brun has been the colour with the fewest number of dedicated breeders.

However, a more dedicated breeder you could not wish to have than in Jenny Blanchard, who has kept Bruns for over 40 years and achieved best Argente at London, Bradford, many stock shows and Best Ladies Fur at Bradford.

Many others have kept them over this period with varying degrees of success, but Jenny's dedication has been second to none, both in terms of the Brun and also to the Northern Argente Circle, for which she has been a loyal secretary for well over 40 years. She only agreed to take the job for six months until a replacement could be found!

However, with the Brun being in so few hands, invariably the problem of inbreeding arises. I know that this has been a problem in recent years for all breeders and there was nowhere to turn for unrelated stock.

I understand that things are now starting to improve as a result of introducing new

blood. Hopefully this will result in spare stock becoming available and new breeders taking up the challenge. You only need to see how well Jenny's Bruns have done at the National and Northern Stock Shows in 2017 to see that dedication brings success.

If you do fancy some Bruns in your rabbitry, then what lies ahead for you and what should you be looking for?

TYPE

The Brun, to all intents and purposes, should be a carbon copy of a Bleu, apart from colour. As I said in my earlier article regarding the Bleu, at around the 4 weeks old stage, you are looking for a cobby rabbit, with a good broad head, short ears, a well-rounded body and fitness.

You could almost say that you were looking for a tiny Vienna Blue – or Brown in this instance. Rangy, long eared and narrow headed youngsters will not make the grade and should not be used for breeding or exhibiting.

As the young rabbit develops it should fill out in proportion and should be fed a balanced diet in order that it retains its fitness throughout its life. As with many types of rabbit, once a bout of the scours or poor husbandry deprives a rabbit of its fitness, it is very difficult to replace the lost flesh and get the desired firmness of condition back.

As with the Bleu, in a good buck we are looking for a broader head and a well-rounded body with the weight being approximately six pounds.

In the does, a finer head is the case, but a snipey head should be avoided. Again, we are looking for a well-rounded body. My experience is that does will be slightly longer in body than the bucks, due to mother nature.

The picture (p 39) shows a Brun with a lovely round body type and the correct top colour.

COLOUR

Brun - French for brown. So, you've guessed it that the young Brun is born a self-dark brown colour. Just like all the other colours it undergoes the silvering process, which commences around the four weeks old stage and can take around five months to complete – though each rabbit seems to have its own speed of silvering.

I've had some that are completely silvered by the age of 14 weeks and others that still do not clear over their eyes and on their ears until 6 or 7 months old.

It is quite baffling as to why there is such variation -but often a joy to watch as they change on a daily basis. I always find that the development is most noticeable if I have been away from home for a few days, you can literally be faced with a different coloured rabbit when you return from your travels.

We have two aspects of colour to concentrate on. Firstly, the top colour and the evenness of this from nose to tail. This should be of a brownish white shade.

The extent of the shade of this colour is determined by the extent of the longer brown guard hairs (ticking) that come through the topcoat.

Little or no ticking gives a very white looking rabbit, which is too light, but usually very even in colour. Too much and you get a dull brown colour, with little or no sparkle. This is often coupled with dark smellers and dark ears, which are not desirable.



Jenny Blanchard with her winning Brun at the 2017 Nidderdale Agricultural Show

So, what we want is the ticking, moderately interspersed, in order to show the sparkling shine that the silvering gives when coupled with the brown ticking.

In recent times, there have been some very dark exhibits shown, which according to the standard should be discouraged. I know that the rabbits are part of a longer-term plan to enhance the gene pool and I believe that it will bear fruit. However, as I said earlier, they should be a carbon copy of a Bleu and the top colour is no exception, apart from the brown ticking that should be evenly interspersed and not the dominant colour.



COAT

There does seem to be a larger variation in coat properties in the Brun, than in the other Argente colours. I have handled some very short-coated ones with harsh texture to the other extreme whereby they have been too long in coat with too much texture, resulting in a very soft coat, and also a number of others in the middle.

What is needed is a good flowing coat, about an inch in length, with silky texture and density. I never get tired of handling good-coated Argentes, they feel wonderful to the touch.

FUTURE

With the recent successes of Bruns at the Argente stock shows and at the 5 star shows, I hope that the Brun will find its way into more hands. It is a fascinating rabbit to watch develop and one that can clearly hold its own at the big shows.

A rabbit with good temperament, it makes an ideal start to anyone entering the fancy or an existing fancier looking for a second breed.

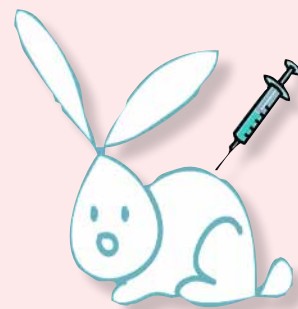
It may not bring you top honours week in week out, like some of the more popular Fur breeds, but such is the competition in these, it can take many years to rise to the top.

However, keeping Bruns will give you a deep sense of satisfaction seeing the rabbits develop and pitting them against other enthusiasts at stock shows and the major shows. I hope some of you will take up the challenge.

To be continued

RHD2

Frequently Asked Questions



WHAT IS RHD2?

This is a viral disease affecting rabbits which causes death in most cases, often without any previous signs of illness

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

It is known to be carried by rats, mice, flies and birds. It is also thought to be airborne. If you have cats or dogs then they might pick up the virus elsewhere and transport to your home or garden. Any animals passing through your garden may also walk the virus onto your property. You may also carry the virus on your shoes, hands or clothing if you have had any contact.

HOW IS DIAGNOSIS CONFIRMED?

The best way to confirm the diagnosis is to have the vet take a small liver sample to send to the laboratory for PCR testing. If however you own a number of rabbits, it is likely that you will see several/many animals dying within days of each other without any sign of illness until shortly before death.

WHAT IS THE INCUBATION PERIOD?

3 to 10 days from exposure to the virus.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY RABBITS?

The only safeguard is to vaccinate all of your stock, at least annually with either filavac or eravac. Both vaccines are available from your vet via their wholesalers. Eravac is available in 10 and 40 dose vials. Currently on offer buy one, get one free until end of April 2018. Filavac available in single dose vials only in this country, also 50 dose vials from France.

CAN I VACCINATE BABIES?

Kits can be vaccinated from 4 weeks of age with either vaccine, however eravac can be used from 9 days in the event of an outbreak. If given to kits prior to 10 weeks then the dose should be repeated after a 6 week period to ensure continued immunity.

CAN I VACCINATE A PREGNANT DOE?

Eravac can be given to does up to 19 days gestation. Their immunity drops as they approach 31 days so should not be given later in pregnancy as they may not develop an effective level of antibodies to provide adequate protection.

Information supplied by Hazel Elliott, Chairperson of Health & Welfare Committee



BRADFORD'S WRITE A CAPTION COMPETITION (March issue)

Jim Blanchard's captions:

- Do you really think we can convince the Americans that these are good examples of UK Polish?
- Crikey Phil, was that you? I told you not to have so many beans! Yes but if anyone else notices I'll say it was Charlie.
- Mine can't be very good it doesn't have a fitness line, has yours Alex?
- What colour pinny do you fancy Alex?