The History of the Maine Coon and its arrival into the UK

By Daphne Butters

Sometimes I am asked what it was like in 'the early days' and I start to reminisce about those times, some of the things I say surprise people, and few who were around at that time really know much about it, so I decided to put pen to paper to give all you Maine Coon lovers a bit more of an insight into those long gone days. To do that, I need to go way back into the realms of Maine Coon history, not the myth, just the facts, things that happened long before any of us were alive.

The Maine Coon is a cat with a seemingly chequered history, although the rumours and myths, for the most part, simply embroider the basic facts which lie beneath. The Maine Coon is a natural American cat - a cat which can still be found in the woodlands and islands of Maine, on the farms and in the barns of New England and, just occasionally, in more suburban surroundings, where domestic cats have bred true to the original type of this New England beauty. Interestingly, the different islands of Maine are often inhabited by distinct colonies of different coloured cats - reds on one island, pure whites on another, and so forth. It is one of the oldest naturally occurring breeds in the USA. But, for the time being, never mind the truth and the facts - the myths are, to the casual observer, much more interesting.

The first obvious stop is at its name: the Maine Coon was so named, apparently, due to the fact that it had originated in the state of Maine and, particularly where the cat's tail and predominant colouring - the brown tabby - is concerned, slightly resembled a racoon. This gave rise to the first myth, that the Maine Coon was a result of interbreeding between domestic cats and wild racoons - something now known to be genetically impossible, although a letter appeared in the Washington Post in 1970, asking for advice on how to get the writer's female Maine Coon to breed with a male racoon she had managed to track down, without their killing each other in the process! In keeping with this belief at the time, brown tabbies (although many were largely unmarked and described by one writer as 'a curious seal brown colour or deep mahogany red') were called 'Maine Coons', similar cats with other coat patterns and colours being known as 'Shags'.

A further explanation of the name of the breed comes from the stories surrounding a certain Captain Coon, an English sea captain, trading along the Eastern Seaboard at the time. The Captain, so the story goes, had quite a collection of unusual and longhaired cats from England, allowing them on shore whenever he put in to port. Thus the inevitable offspring became known as 'Coon's cats', being notable for their long coats among the normal short coated kittens from the usual domestic breeding's.

In fact, the other historical legends and conjecture are each quite believable in their own right - or at least, historically possible, if not entirely probable! The most romantic and colourful revolves round Marie Antoinette, who supposedly shipped her beloved (Persian?) longhairs to the USA prior to her own planned escape from France, only to be beheaded before she had the chance to leave. It was widely believed that, on the arrival of the ship at Wiscasset, Maine, the cats were released (possibly to absolve the Master of any political sympathy with Marie Antoinette) and bred freely with the existing domestic shorthairs in the area, producing a breed of in-betweens - the semi-longhaired, shaggy Maine cat. This would be ironic, since it was the arrival of the purebred Persian breed in the early 20th century which temporarily unsettled the popularity of the Maine Coon in the USA - a period which will be discussed in more detail, later.

In line with the theories regarding ships' cats is the suggestion that the 'outcross' cats arrived into the USA with the Vikings - this thought backed up by the similarity between the Maine Coon and the cat which hit British shores just slightly later - the Norwegian Forest Cat. Whilst the standards defining the two breeds are quite specific, there are many blurrings of the boundaries between the two and, most certainly, both breeds have evolved and developed physically in much the same way, very possibly to embrace the same lifestyle and climatic conditions. Equally plausible is yet another theory regarding French sailors' bringing their own native longhairs - supposedly found in the Pyrenees and closely resembling the Maine Coon - to North America to trade with the Native Americans. This would go a long way toward explaining why many free-living Maine Coons were originally to be found in the Louisiana and Hudson Bay regions.

More likely is the theory, embraced by breeders even now, that the New England seamen released onto the Maine shores those cats which they had collected on board as ship's cats, from all over the world, and that the Maine Coon originated from the crossing of Angora-type cats with the American domestic shorthairs. This theory is backed up by the distinctive long head of the Maine Coon, in comparison with other American cats of the time, that of the Maine Coon being in keeping with the longer heads of the

'foreign' and 'oriental' types of cats from the East. It also ties in with the ‘Captain Coon’ theory - although the existence of the man with this very name remains questionable. In the early seventies, a breeding was confirmed between a Maine Coon and a bobcat - a small American wild cat - resulting in normal, healthy kittens, which led breeders to seriously embrace the theory that the Maine Coon was most likely to be an Angora x bobcat hybrid, although research into this was never conclusive. Most breeders also subscribe to the theory that there is a good deal of Persian blood in the breed. I guess we shall never really know.

At all events, the native cat of the state of Maine was instantly recognisable and not far removed from the more 'moderate' examples of the breed which we see, even today, on the show bench. The beginnings of the Maine Coon's show career were at farm shows and the like in the USA in the 19th century. New England farmers were inordinately proud of the hunting prowess of their farm cats and Maine Shags were consistently exhibited at the county fairs of New England around that time. There is literary mention of a black and white Maine Coon called 'Captain Jenks of the Horse Marines' as early as 1861 and a brown tabby female Maine Coon by the name of 'Cosie' is known to have won the title of Best Cat at the Madison Square Garden Cat Show in New York in 1895 and, in the same year, a tabby male named Leo was Best Cat in another New York City show. Around this time there is also documentation of the show success of a Maine cat called Richelieu, a silver tabby male, and another called Max, who was subsequently displaced by his son, called Donald, in 1900. A female named Mary Stuart was one of the first Maine Coons to be registered with CFA, being recorded as Blue with Golden eyes, Sire Black Maine Cat, Dam Blue Maine Cat. This could possibly be the same female Longhair Blue Maine Cat awarded Best in Show in Portland, Oregon, in 1911.

Cosie – photo taken in 1895

This was the era during which the breed's popularity spread from the informality of the farmers' shows to the relative formality of the first organised cat shows in America. It was not, unfortunately, a popularity which would continue unchecked to the present day, due to the arrival into the USA of the rarer, fluffier, purebred Persian, which quite quickly usurped the place of the Maine Coon in longhair-fanciers' hearts - a place which took quite some time and effort to re-attain. From around 1904, very little is heard of Maine Coons in shows - or much at all since, as stated in one book of the time, the Maine cat 'failed to thrive in warm climates (which) contributed to the extinction of the breed'!! This fact can, of course, now be refuted but the cat was hardly to be seen again until the 1950s, when a group of owners and fanciers in the state of Maine formed the Central Maine Cat Club, holding shows exclusively for the breed, beginning the Maine Coon's slow climb back, including not only the Maine Coon well-known to Americans as a longhair but also what the club called a 'Semi-Coon', which had a thick and lustrous coat unlike most, not shorthaired but not long either. This club was founded and supported by a group of volunteers but, unfortunately, was not to last very long. Following this, but many years later, cat lovers from states other than Maine began to show an interest and the popularity of the breed began to spread more quickly. Myths aside, it is interesting to return to fact and to look into the background of the pedigrees of our Maine Coons today and see some of the names of catteries whose owners took so much trouble in the Great Maine Coon Revival of the late sixties.

The Central Maine Coon Cat Club

In 1953, the Central Maine Coon Cat Club was founded by Alta Smith and Ruby Dyer, two young ladies from Skowhegan, Maine. A purely amateur organisation, its intention was to provide attention for the breed, holding shows for Maine Coons and other unregistered cats. It also had a pioneering kitten registering system, something unheard of outside the CFA, and records from these registrations allowed later generations to trace their ancestry.

The first show was held on 21st June 1953, in a small barn outside Skowhegan, with an entry of forty cats and over two hundred visitors. In 1956, Dr Rachael Salisbury drew up the 'Standard for Judging Maine Cats':

<u>Point System of Judging:</u>

No. of Points

10	Head (shape of skull, face, cheeks, chin)
5	Ears (shape, size)
10	Eyes (colour, shape)
5	Tail (length, shape)

15	Body (bone structure, shape, proportions)
10	Legs and Feet (length, shape)
20	Coat (colour, markings, luster)
15	Health (body balance, coat texture and condition, facial expression, general resilience)
10	Condition (grooming, evidence of care)
100	To win a first ribbon, a cat should have 85 points.

This standard was used for the first time at the fourth show in 1956. Dr Salisbury was present and served as Chairman of the Judging Staff, training people to judge the Maine Coon. Although not as precise as the modern day standards, echos of this standard can still be seen in every Maine Coon standard around the world.

Between 1953 and 1963 the Central Maine Coon Cat Club held eleven shows, the overall winning Maine Coon gaining the title of Maine State Champion Coon Cat. Mrs Whittemore's cats were prominent winners. In 1956 her solid white neuter, became Maine State Ch. Major Sno Sheen. In 1958 Mrs Whittemore's 'solid tiger' (tabby) neuter became State Maine Ch. Tiger Boy and in 1961 her solid grey (blue) neuter, Maine State Ch. Blu Boy was awarded this prestigious title.

Popularity began to grow and the fifth show had an entry of over a hundred cats, with members from thirty-eight American states and fifteen foreign countries. By 1963, the club had outgrown its amateur beginning and a decision had to be made - should the club become a large organisation or should it fold? Alta Smith, who had now married and become Mrs Berry, had been the mainstay of the club. She opted to retire and with no one to take her place, the Central Maine Coon Club disbanded. However, the Central Maine Coon Cat Club had left a huge legacy to the breed in the form of records and publicity that had led to cat lovers in other parts of America to start taking an interest in this fascinating breed. People were now showing them in other organisations, in the Any Other Variety class.

After the Persian 'take-over' with fanciers and exhibitors alike, this small and dedicated group of Maine Coon breeders took it upon themselves to put the Maine Coon back on the map. They did this by stoically travelling hundreds of miles, often by public transport, to show their cats to the judges and visitors week after week and to prove that the Maine Coon was not simply the farm cat people liked to imagine. In the process, they of course met each other and formed a bond, agreeing on the need for an organisation to publicise the cat and it is not coincidental that those people's catteries are also those seen most frequently in the early generations of our cats' pedigrees. Look back into the family tree of your beloved Maine Coon and you will almost certainly find at least some of the following - Whittemore (said to be the first ever cattery specialising in Maine Coon cats, established in the mid-fifties), JoStad, Koon-Kits, Tati-Tan, Heidi Ho, Emin-Dale, Norwynde, War-Tell, de Richelieu; the list goes on and on. Many of today's pedigrees have reached the fifteenth generation or more and the early generations are no longer visible on current written pedigrees. It is, however, a fascinating hobby to backtrack your cat's pedigree 'to the woods', if you feel so inclined. Certainly, without the dedication of those breeders, our cat would almost certainly have remained right there - in the woods and barns of the state of Maine.

Whittemore Cattery's Tiger Boy, 1958

The Maine Coon Breeders & Fanciers Association (MCBFA)

The Maine Coon Breeders & Fanciers Association (MCBFA) was founded in September 1968 and, in 1985, the breed was granted special recognition when it was designated the Official Cat of the State of Maine.

During the first few years of MCBFA's existence, the Maine Coon was known to and registered in nine different North American registering organisations and accepted for Championships in five of them by the end of 1970. It is worthy of note that, whilst CFA registration numbers are some of the most frequently seen on today's pedigrees, CFA was, in fact, almost the last of the nine organisations to accept the cat for Championship status. This was largely due to the fact that CFA required at least 100 cats of any breed to be registered before acceptance and, of course, exhibitors were more interested registering their cats where they could show them. Nonetheless, once they realised, cats were registered with CFA in larger numbers, while exhibitors showed where they could and, in 1969, wrote a Standard of Points which was used by most of the organisations and which was finally confirmed as the MCBFA Standard in 1970. A copy of this Standard is reproduced here.

Original MCBFA Standard of Points

Taken from the MCBFA Newsletter, 'The Scratch Sheet', winter 1970

HEAD 20 POINTS

Head shape

Medium in width, except in the older more developed studs, where it should be quite broad. Cheek bones high. The nose and face should be medium long, with an appearance of squareness to the muzzle, little or no break in nose.

Ears Large in size. Tufted, pointed and wide at base.

Eyes Large, round, wide set. Slightly oblique setting.

Chin Firm and in line with upper lip and nose.

Undesirable Short, flat face or long pointed nose. Undershot chin. Short rounded, narrow set ears. Narrow, slanting eyes.

BODY 30 POINTS

Neck Medium long. In the older, more mature cats, especially studs, the neck should be thick and muscular, giving the appearance of power and strength.

Body shape Muscular, powerful and long. The chest should be full and from medium to large in size. The body should be level, but in its stance, the hind legs hold the body slightly lower than the front. There should be a definite squareness where the hind legs join the body at the rump. All the physical aspects of the cat should be in proportion to one another.

Tail Long and full. Wide at base and should taper to its end with no kinks.

Legs & feet Substantial, muscular, wide set and of medium height. The cat should stand well up on its forelegs giving the impression of an unbroken line from shoulder to forepaw. Paws should be large, round and well-tufted, with five toes in front and four in back.

Undesirable Short legs and untufted feet. Short cobby body and short neck. A rounded rump. Delicate, dainty bone structure.

COAT 20 POINTS

Coat The fur on the front shoulders is short and should become gradually longer along the back towards the tail, ending in a shaggy, heavy coat on the 'britches'. The sides of the cat's coat should gradually get longer until the stomach is reached, where it should be long and full. A full ruff is not expected; however, there should be a slight frontal ruff beginning at the base of the ears. The fur on the tail should be long and full. Feet should be tufted. Coat should be fine, heavy, lustrous and should fall smoothly. A slight undercoat may be carried. This is the optimum coat and will vary with climate.

COAT COLOR 10 POINTS

Coat colour The coat may be any colour or any combination of colours. Winners are not to be withheld for buttons, lockets or spots.

EYE COLOR 10 POINTS

Eye colour The eye colour may be the same as that required for that colour in other longhairs, or green. Clarity of colour is desirable.

CONDITION 10 POINTS

Condition Solid, firm, muscular. Should be presented in well-groomed manner.

In order to register a cat as a Maine Coon, the MCBFA recommended that owners have the cat checked by three different judges and certified to be a good representative of the breed. The reason for the delay in final acceptance of the Standard was the existence of an unusually high number of polydactyl (extra-toed) cats within the breed. Disagreements between breeders as to the acceptability of genetic traits have not altered much over the years - even in those early days, with the undoubted natural occurrence of this trait, the founders of the Association could not agree upon the wording regarding the extra toes. In the end, the Standard was issued as for normal-toed cats and the polydactyl clause accepted in Spring 1970. Some registries were persuaded to include a 'P' in the registration numbers of these cats, so that breeders would be able to recognise that the gene existed in the line. Many, however, did not, and polydactyl kittens can still crop up unexpectedly from time to time. Even the original Standard was difficult to set, however, and the breeders involved spent many hours mailing questionnaires, studying and drawing round outlines of photographs and collating information as it was returned, so that they could create a Standard of Points - and even a set of outline drawings of front, profile and full-body view of the cat, which truly reflected the wishes of all Maine Coon lovers at the time. The first listed Grand Champion Maine Coon was Sir Driftwood of Pupuli, in 1970 by ACFA, followed by Mieaou Damariscotta, in October 1971 by Crown, Dauphin de France of Tati-Tan, November 1971 by ICF, Andy Katt of Heidi Ho, April 1972 by ACFA and Mor-Ace Satan, April 1972 by ACA.

Dauphin de France of Tati-Tan

Heidi Ho Cattery - Mary (Connie) M. Condit

Andy Katt of Heidi Ho

Connie (as she was nicknamed) Condit was a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army, in her profession as a nurse. It was during her time at the Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D.C. in 1969 that a heavily pregnant cat wandered into the room she shared with several other nurses. Having her own home, with a spare room, Connie took the queen, "Susan", home. On 16th April 1969 she produced four kittens, all males, three short hairs and one brown mackerel tabby & white long hair. Connie found homes for three of the kittens. She had Susan neutered (with financial help from the other nurses). She spent the next eleven years with Connie's mother, and her last four back with Connie. Connie kept the long hair, which she named "Andy Katt" (left).

Connie and Andy moved to Maryland where someone told her that Andy looked like a Maine Coon, which stimulated Connie's interest in the breed. About six months after Andy's birth, Connie met Bonnie Rich of the de Richelieu cattery (owner of Panda Ring-Tip of Miston). Bonnie believed that Andy would be a good foundation Maine Coon and after some persuasion, he was registered with ACA (American Cat Association), although Connie insisted that she was not in any position to breed cats. Undeterred by this comment, Bonnie returned from a holiday in Florida with a mate for Andy - she had found a tortie smoke & white female whose mother had been black & white, father unknown. This cat was called Bridget Katt. These two cats were to form the beginning of the now famous Heidi Ho line.

Connie joined MCBFA to learn more about the breed, and through this made contact with Betty Ljostad who suggested that she should take Andy to an ACFA show in New Jersey to let the judges decide whether he was a Maine Coon. He returned home a Champion and three shows later was a Grand Champion! Connie decided to name her cattery 'Heidi Ho' after her long suffering German Shepherd dog, who was totally involved with the breeding programme and made an excellent kitten sitter.

Only one kitten from Bridget's first two litters to Andy was sold for breeding, the rest went to pet homes. Connie kept three girls from the third litter, Heather, Molly Stark and Fanny Abigail, and two boys, Seth Parker and Henry Sayward, to interbreed them in order to weed out any hereditary problems. When Connie was transferred to Germany, her cats travelled with her. Although she had a few litters, just to keep the cats healthy, she didn't really get back into breeding until she returned to the USA, and retired to Colorado.

Heidi Ho Sonkey Bill

Tanstaffl Polly Adeline

On her return from Europe, Connie mated Henry Sayward to his daughter, Henrietta, producing Heidi Ho Sonkey Bill. She bought Tanstaafl's Polly Adeline and Ktaadn Oquossoc as outcrosses, which would enable her to do some line breeding. It was the matings between Sonkey Bill and Polly Adeline that were most famous – the offspring all looked like clones, and they were known as 'The Clones'. There is a very good chance that if you delve far enough back in your pedigree you will most likely find Sonkey Bill & Polly Adeline offspring (clones) in there somewhere.

The Maine Coon was soon to be accepted by all the American associations except the biggest, CFA, but in 1976, it too finally accepted the Maine Coon as a pedigree breed. The Maine Coon was back on the map. Today, and since 1992, the Maine Coon has remained one of the most popular breeds in America.

First Paws onto British Soil

Maine Coons began to feature in cat magazines and newspapers worldwide, and soon they were being exported to mainland Europe. However, Britain had to wait until the mid-1980's before the first Maine Coon set foot on British shores. Many American breeders were reluctant to send cats into quarantine, fearing that they would be kept in small cages with little attention. The first Maine Coons arrived on our shores in 1984, brought in from the USA and Germany by Mrs Pat Brownsell, of Norfolk, who had been a breeder of other breeds for some years under the cattery name of Patriarca. Her first breeding group consisted of five cats - two males and three females - and the offspring of these cats were to provide the essential foundation of the first Maine Coon lines in Britain. It was not long, of course, before others spotted the breed and new imports began to appear. Almost all of the Maines born in the early years in Britain will be found to have either the Patriarca or the Pusiluv (later Koonluv) cattery name somewhere in their background.

The first group of five was, fortunately, varied in colour possibilities and the Maine Coon in Britain has always therefore been a multi-coloured breed. The first five cats were: Kalicoon Bashta Khan, a black smoke male; Nephrani Dexter, a brown tabby with white male; Glenncourt Tara Lou, a tortoiseshell tabby female; Nephrani Ashley, a blue tabby female and Charmingcat Chalifa Begum, a silver tabby female. The only colour which could not arise from this combination was the pure white, which arrived in the country shortly afterward in the shape of a male called Illya Galanthus.

The original group was also well-chosen for health and temperament. Cat fanciers in Britain quickly realised that these cats, although looking like a domestic longhair, had something consistently different about them. Much as it is a cliched phrase, the Maine Coon truly is the Gentle Giant of the domestic cat world. As with anything new, there were a few publicists who chose to exaggerate certain points - in particular the large size of this breed as a whole - and there were some people who sought a huge cat at all costs - but, in general, it was for the temperament that potential cat-owners sought the breed, quickly lifting its popularity until it now stands near the top of the breed poll in Britain.

After the arrival of Mrs Brownsell's cats, another, larger group was brought into the country into the Koonluv cattery including Solkatz Luciano P (the P was short for Pavarotti and not an indication that he was polydactyl) and a pregnant female, Ch Kayenta La Paloma of Roselu (left). The reason I mention these two cats, is that I ended up owning them both. Charlie (Luciano P) was one of my stud cats for a while and they both ended their days with me, living their last eight or nine years here. La Paloma (affectionately known as Raine Ratbag) was born the month that Prince Charles & Diana married and she was put to sleep on the day of Diana's funeral, aged sixteen years. There were nine generations of offspring and over twelve hundred British bred Maine Coons with her name in their pedigree when she died in 1997!

Below: Solkatz Luciano P

THE MAINE COON CAT CLUB BEGINS

In 1985, a small band of British breeders started the Maine Coon Cat Club with the aim of gaining recognition with the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy. The inaugural meeting was held in the car park of a cat show in the South East of England. A Standard of Points was drawn up and the breed was granted Preliminary Recognition in 1988. The first Maine Coons were entered in competition at the Maidstone & Medway Show on 16th July 1988, and their Breed Class (Open) was judged by Helen Light, then a long-standing and well respected judge. Initially, entries were small, and success when competing with the well established breeds was limited, but as popularity grew, and judges began to recognise the finer features of the breed, the Maine Coon started to become a force to be reckoned with. The Maine Coon didn't have an easy ride. Some judges wouldn't accept them, referring to them as "the moggie in the pedigree section" and stories of exaggerated prices for kittens didn't help the situation, but the owners kept going, determined to win people over.

In those early days, the Maine Coon was in the 'Foreign Section', chosen because the breed is of "foreign" type. Competing against the well established Abyssinians, Rexes, Russians and Korats, as well as British and Burmese at some shows, was not easy. Maine Coon owners were happy if their cat was awarded the Merit Certificate and didn't expect to do anything in side classes, but as judges' confidence grew and the cats developed, other rosettes began to appear alongside the Merit. Early Southern exhibitors included Tex & Sue Morgan (Purpus), Brenda Tracey (Purrserrene), Mr. & Mrs. Froud (Charlemma), Mrs. Neale (Kayakahn), Di Everett (Kaiulani) and Toni Cornwall (Caprix), many of whom attended that very first show on 16th July. In the North West, Bill Griffiths (Shookatoo) attended the Chester and North Wales Show a month later, with Doris Lendon (Majanco), Heather Horton (Namrib) and Cora Evans showing in the Midlands. Early Scottish exhibitors included Mrs. Thain, Veronica Davis (Kilmaine) and Beryl Middleton (Firthkatz). The first Maine Coons in North East England didn't appear until August 1989 when Tony & Yvonne Wilcox (Wilful), Lesley Rich (Matagot) and myself (known at that time as Daphne Dyke) (Keverstone) exhibited at the Teesside Cat Club Show. These people, along with others, were pioneers for the breed in Britain, taking cats from show to show just to get people interested in the breed. We lived in County Durham at the time and would travel the length and breadth of the country, just to get judges to look at the breed, Scotland one month, London the next. We were all a very committed group and took many knock-backs from some judges and other exhibitors in those early days, but we held our heads high and didn't give up.

Progression towards Championship Status within GCCF at that time was slow. The first stage was Preliminary Status, where cats are judged against the Standard, and provided the judge feels that the cat fulfils the requirements laid down, it was awarded a Merit Certificate. When fifteen cats had at least four Merit Certificates (under different judges) and could satisfy various other criteria, the breed could apply for Provisional Status. The first fifteen Maine Coons to gain four Merits were Majanco Moshatel, Kaleetay Cracklin Rosie, Purrserene Sebastian, Adixilo Okanagan Coonlouis, Adixilo Mambreno, Purrserene Dancing Brave, Caprix Marvellous Marvin, Bealltainn Hunkdory, Caprix Kisme Quick, Kaiulani Frederik, Belujondra Fenella, Shookatoo Robert Dazzler, Henrietta Capapie, Adkrilo Gayellacoon and Purpus Mainechance. During the four years at the Preliminary Stage, over two hundred and eighty Maine Coons were shown, and at least two hundred and twenty gained a minimum of one Merit Certificate. Many good cats retired from the show bench after gaining four certificates, having 'done their bit' for the breed, but others continued successfully and several had Merit Certificates into the teens!

NEXT STEP – PROVISIONAL RECOGNITION

Four years after being granted Preliminary Status the breed moved up to the next rung on the ladder of success, Provisional Status, on 1st June 1992. The cats were now judged against each other in Maine Coon Open Classes, with the potential of an Intermediate Certificate to the winner. The breed came out on mass, determined to show the cat world that they were a real force to be reckoned with. The first Maine Coons to be awarded three Intermediate Certificates were Purpus Mainechance and Adkrilo Rosamunde Rosetta, followed closely by Majanco Moshatel. GCCF required twenty cats with three Intermediate Certificates before application for Championship Status could be made. No one, not even the founder members of the Maine Coon Cat Club could believe what was about to happen. Within eleven months, there were twenty-one cats with the requirement. These included Addeilo Jeffracoon, Adixilo Mambreno, Adraylo Treblis Smugboots, Belujondra Fenella, Karolou Balas Bucaneer, Keverstones American Dream, Kuddli Krystalle, Mabalakat Maisie May, Mabalakat Majika, Majanco Moshatel, Matagot Charlie Brown, Shookatoo Bruno, Smugkatz Demelza Poldark, Smugkatz George Warleggan, Sunregal Rocky, Sunregal Sweet Peach and Ursella Brown Billy. During the 1992 - 93 show season, over two hundred Maine Coons were shown in GCCF shows around Britain.

At that time, I was secretary of the Maine Coon Cat Club and had responsibility for collating evidence and submitting the application for Championship Status to GCCF. No fancy computers then, just a trusty old Amstrad with a ribbon printer to get everything done, but with the help of everyone, we did it. Maine Coons were also very successful at the Supreme Show both in 1992 and 1993. In 1992, Adraylo Treblis Smugboots was Best Provisional Adult, Staroyale Desperate Dan was Best Provisional Kitten with Adixilo Mambreno winning Best Provisional Neuter. In 1993, Keverstones American Dream was Best Provisional Adult and Smugkatz George Warleggan, Best Provisional Neuter.

Keverstones American Dream winning best Provisional Breeds Adult in 1993

CHAMPIONSHIP STATUS

The breed's application for promotion to Championship Status was approved in the autumn of 1993, though we had to wait patiently until June 1994 for the classes to start. It was just seven weeks later that we had our first titled cats. At the Gwynedd Show, Keverstones American Dream and his daughter, Keverstone Yankee Girl (pictured below), both owned by Steve & Daphne Butters, became the first champions.

A week later, at Kensington Kitten & Neuter, we celebrated our first Premiers – Smugkatz Claude Anthony owned by Sue Deane and Noracoon Ernestina Mallory owned by Phillipa Holmes. Finally, ten years after the breed first arrived in Britain, we had our first titled cats.

For the previous two years, the Birmans, Turkish Vans & Somalis had been competing for the SLH Grand certificates. Now the Maine Coons joined these classes. Back in April 1994, before we had Championship Status, Yankee Girl won the Kitten Open Class under probationer Maine Coon judge, Joe Bury (a senior Foreign Section Judge at the time). After judging, he came over to speak to us, saying “This kitten is going to be GCCF’s first Grand Champion Maine Coon”. I remember laughing at the time, thinking “Not a chance”, but Joe proved me wrong. In October 1994, less than five months after gaining Championship Status, Yankee became the first Grand titled Maine Coon when she won her third Grand Challenge Certificate. Three weeks later, at the Supreme, Lawmaine Stripes Again, owned by Steve & Daphne Butters, became the first Grand Premier. Back in those days the Grand classes tended to be on the large side – entries often in the teens, so competition was really stiff. In January 1995, Noracoon Ernestina Mallory became the first female Grand Premier and in March, Adraylo Treblis Smugboots, owned by Rob & Sue Grace, became the first male Grand Champion. We now have many Grand Champions and Grand Premier

The 1994-95 show season was so important for the breed, a real milestone. Not only did we have our first Championship Classes, but it was also the year when the first Maine Coon Cat Club Show was held. The idea of the club holding a show started one Sunday morning in early 1993, at our kitchen table, after a rather heavy night’s drinking. Phillipa Holmes, David Howe, Steve & I, still hung over, thought it would be a good idea to hold a show. Phillipa offered to be show manager, Steve said that he would be assistant until someone more suitable could be found and David said that he would organise the catering. But first we needed some funds as GCCF would not issue a show licence if the club did not have money put aside to run the show. So, we decided to hold a photographic show, large raffle and garden party and a few months later we held the event at our house. This raised several hundred pounds, enough for us to make the application to GCCF. We held our first show in early August 1994, taking quite a chance considering that the breed had just gained championship status. In those days, all clubs had to go through a ‘training period’, holding three Exemption Shows and then three Sanction Shows before being considered to be given a licence to hold a Championship Show. Our question – would people support the club even though there were no certificates available to them, or would they go elsewhere to try to gain CCs and PCs. What a great set of members we had – they came out and supported us in their droves and the first show was a huge success. The Maine Coon Cat Club’s First Overall Best in Show was the wonderful large solid black boy from Bodmin Moor – Adraylo Trebils Smugboots.

Phillipa continued to be the club’s show manager, taking it right through to its first Championship Show in 2000, before standing down, having done her bit for the show. I then took over as show manager, and ran the show for the next eleven years before David Howe took the helm in 2012. After his untimely sudden death in 2013, Jacky Edwards agreed to become show manager and has held this position ever since. We always aimed to hold the show in a central location, knowing that we have members from Scotland to Cornwall. Whilst many of the Maine Coons are not in full coat during the summer, the decision to hold the show at this time of year was made to enable those people who have travelled long distances to have more daylight for travelling and the chance of better weather than during the winter months. Over the years, there have been lots of different Overall Winners, including two girls who both won three times!

MAINE COON CAT CLUB SHOW OVERALL BIS WINNERS

1994	ADRAYLO TREBLIS SMUGBOOTS
1995	GRPR LAWMAINE STRIPES AGAIN
1996	GRCH KEVERSTONE YOUNG AMERICOON
1997	CH KITITAS SWEETGEORGIA BROWN
1998	JAKATTA DESDEMONA
1999	GRCH JAKATTA DESDEMONA
2000	GRCH JAKATTA DESDEMONA
2001	CH CLASSICOON ZIGGI STARDUST
2002	CH HARTSCOON TABITHA RUGRAT
2003	GRCH & GRPR BEARDWOOD ROBBY WILLYAMS
2004	PR DAIRYMAINE CHESTATON
2005	GRPR DAIRYMAINE CHESTATON
2006	IGRPR KEOKA TOPEAK
2007	IGRPR DAIRYMAINE SARNIA CHERIE
2008	PR DOTCOM MONZA
2009	SUP UKIGRPR DAIRYMAINE SARNIA CHERIE
2010	IGRCH MCKITTYCREEK AURORA
2011	SUPUKIGRPR DAIRYMAINE SARNIA CHERIE
2012	UKOSIGRPR COONTASTIC NIJINSKY
2013	OBIGRPR KASSARO CISCO KID
2014	ISADORYOU PHOENIX
2015	ISADORYOU LOVEBUG
2016	OGIGRPR KASSARO CISCO KID
2017	JULESCOON OTTO
2018	UK IGR PR ISADORYOU POLOBEAR
2019	UKOGIGRPR ISADORYOU LOVEBUG
2020	No Show (Covid Restrictions)
2021	No Show (Covid Restrictions)
2022	TIGERFEET CHIANTI
2023	IGCH ISADORYOU HERAKLES
2024	IGPR ISADORYOU ARIANNA
2025	IGRCH ISADORYOU LUGUS
2026	OSIGP ISHCUS QUIET HARRIET

Many of the above cats went on to gain further titles, but these were the titles that they held at the time of their Best in Show win.

Grand Champion Jakatta Desdemona became the first cat to win the Maine Coon Cat Club Show three times, doing it in consecutive years!

The mid 1990s era was a very exciting time for the breed. Not only did we have Championship Status and our own breed show, but lots of people started to import new breed lines. I remember the first time we ever showed Keverstones American Dream (bred by Steve & Carol Lawson in Florida, USA), he was so different to what people were used to seeing, and people loved his size, power and rich warm brown tabby coat.

Perhaps he was, in some small way, a reason to encourage more people to consider importing, despite the huge expense and six months compulsory quarantine period at that time. There are so many imports who helped the breed, though special mention should go to Verismo Britannicus, a Red Silver Tabby & White, owned by Phillipa Holmes, Brit had a hugely successful show career as well as producing some wonderful offspring, including the famous Jakatta Desdemona, a stunning silver tortie-tabby & white female, owned by Rocco & Angie Barletta, who won so much over her show career.

First UK Grand Maine Coons

Back to show history. Having had lots of Supreme Show success at Provisional Status, with several gaining Best Provisional titles, Grand Champion and Grand Premier titled Maine Coons now competed in the same classes as Somalis and Turkish Vans for the top GCCF Certificate – the UK Grand. A cat must gain two of these to become a UK Grand and that means, for most cats, winning the certificate at two different annual Supreme Shows. In 1997, we had our first UK Grands – in the adults, UK Gr Ch Smugkatz Morwena Chynoweth, owned by Rob & Sue Grace and Gr Ch & UK Gr Pr Keverstone Yankee Girl (left) in the neuter section. We will return to the Supreme Show later.

Popularity of the Breed Increases and the First Colour Splits

It wasn't long before Maine Coons were competing strongly against the Birmans, Turkish Vans and Somalis in Grand Classes at shows around the country, and in 1997, Norwegian Forest Cats joined the Grand Classes. Competition was now really tough. By 1998, Maine Coon classes were often huge. When the Maine Coon was initially promoted to Championship Status in 1994, we had little idea of how popular the breed was to become within GCCF over the next few years. Soon we had tens of cats and kittens entered at shows, often twenty to thirty. Whilst we saw some variety in colours, the predominant colour/pattern was Brown or Blue (the dilute variation of brown) Tabby with or without white. We requested to split classes as some, especially the kitten and neuter classes, were at times, huge, well into the teens. At that time we had just six classes – Male and Female Adult, Male and Female Kitten, Male and Female Neuter. We had to collate evidence to show that we had enough numbers and the colour breakdown. This took time to prepare, many exhibitors from all over the UK would send marked up show catalogues to us, enabling us to produce the information required. I think that this was where my husband, Steve Butters, gained his nickname of Catalogue Kid as he would always ask people to get a catalogue for him. It had to include multiple year's results and include all shows around the UK including The Channel Islands and Northern Ireland. Back then, there was no internet as we know it today, everything was done on a word processor. Show results and reports were not published online – there was no "online" – results were not posted anywhere in the public domain, all we had was a weekly magazine called "Cats". It later became a newspaper format rebranded "Our Cats". That magazine was the life blood for the regular exhibitor, it was where judges' reports were printed. However, you could wait up to six months for a report – depending on how many reports were being submitted at the time. The norm was about three to four months I think, by which time you may well have already entered and been to several more shows. A successful application meant GCCF granted a Colour Split to have two Maine Coon Classes instead of one. So, on 1st June 1999, the new show year started with a Brown/Blue Tabby With or Without White Class and an Any Other Colour (basically any cat that wasn't brown or blue tabby).

New Titles Appear – Introduction of the Imperial Certificates

In 2003, Birman cats were granted their own Grand certificate classes, but all other championship Semi-Longhaired breeds still competed in just a single class. Competition in the "Any Other Semi-Longhair" Grand classes remained as competitive as ever with the Ragdolls having gained Championship Status in 2001. This single Grand series was to continue for the next sixteen years until a huge overhaul in the entire GCCF showing system took place to even out the size of Grand classes. We now compete for Grand certificates only against Siberian cats. In those days, gaining a Grand certificate was so difficult with very large classes. Back then, cats could enter both their Open Class, and, if they already held the title of champion or premier

they could enter either the Grand Class, the Open Class or both. This was a strong area of discussion, with some exhibitors believing that the best cat should win the Open, no matter what title it held and others believing that once a cat had titled, by entering the Open as well as the Grand, then it stopped younger cats from progressing. We will come back to this shortly. Once a cat had gained a Grand Champion or Grand Premier title, it could gain no more titles at general shows, there was no higher title in existence. The only other title was the UK certificate, awarded only at The Supreme, a show held just once a year. Much discussion took place within the Maine Coon Cat Club and I remember speaking as a delegate at a GCCF Council Meeting requesting that GCCF consider introducing a higher title to enable the quality Grand titled cats to continue to show to aspire to a new title. Good news came. In 2005 GCCF gained a new higher class – the Imperial Grand. To become an Imperial, cats had to gain not three, but five certificates under five different judges. There would be one Imperial Class Group within the Semi-Longhair Section, so Maine Coons would compete against all other Grand titled semi-longhairs. It gave the breed and the club an immense amount of pride when the very first Imperial titled cat was a Maine Coon – Imperial Grand Champion Kassaro Ferrguss

Ferrguss made up at Wyvern Show in September 2005, a gorgeous red tabby owned by Mr & Mrs Snodgrass (left).

Whilst we had three more male adults gaining the title in-between, it was another two years before we saw our first female Imperial Adult - Imp Gr Ch Moonraker's Hacoona Matata owned by Steve & Laura Whitmarsh (left).

It wasn't such a long wait for the neuters. Brown Tabby, Imp Gr Pr Dairymaine Emily, owned by Jane Haynes, became the first Imperial Grand Premier, (yet another female beating the boys to get that first title by becoming the first Imp Gr Pr Maine Coon), less than a month after Ferrguss and just one week later, it was another Dairymaine, this time Imp Gr Pr Dairymaine Chilli Pepper, owned by Saffi Rabey, took the honour of becoming the first Male Imperial Grand Premier. Today we have many Imperial Grand Champions and Imperial Grand Premiers.

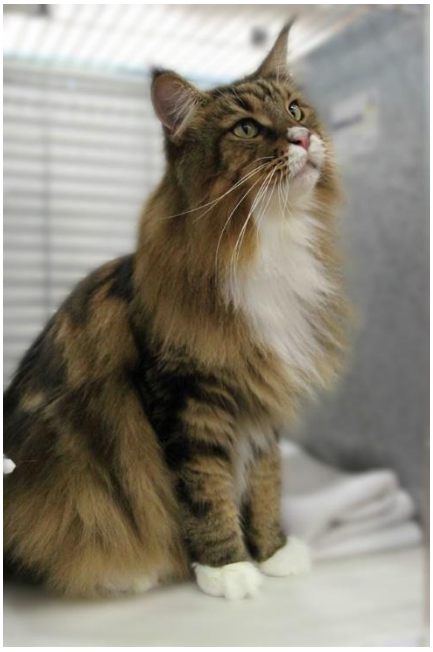
Silver Tabby Class Starts

In 2005, we had enough Silver Tabby Series & Any Other Colour (AOC) cats being shown to enable the AOC Class to be split into Silver Tabby & AOC. The AOC series included Red/Cream/Tortie-Tabby & Blue Cream Tortie tabbies so was a real mixed bag of colours.

Maine Coon Cat Club Instigates Change Within GCCF Showing System and The Olympian Title Is Introduced

For the next few years, showing continued without much change, but a major alteration was on the cards, and the Maine Coon Cat Club took a big part in this. Some exhibitors within the cat world felt that the system was unfair, where an Imperial Grand titled cat could compete alongside young untitled cats for the CC or

PC. A proposal put forward at GCCF Delegates' Meeting by other clubs had been knocked back on wording. The Maine Coon Cat Club put forward a proposal that the cat could only enter the higher class for which it is eligible, hence untitled cats would compete for a CC/PC, champions & premiers would compete for Grands, etc. But something new was needed to keep those really top cats in competition. So, whilst the MCCC proposal was accepted, along came another class at the same time – The Olympian. Imperial titled cats across all breed sections would compete for the Olympian certificates, needing five to become an Olympian Bronze, another five for Silver and a further five for Gold. At the time, everyone believed that the Gold title would take years to attain. This new system started on 1st June 2011. Once again, it was a Maine Coon that was to prove everyone wrong.



In September 2011, UK Imp Gr Pr Coontastic Nijinsky (left), owned by Stephen & Jill Bunce, jointly became the first Olympian Bronze, on the same day as a Birman did it. Eight months later, Saffi Rabey's Sup UK Imp Gr Pr Dairymaine Sarnia Cherie became the first female Maine Coon to gain this title. But the story didn't end there Nijinsky went on to become the first Olympian Silver in February 2012 and the first ever Olympian Gold in June 2012. What an amazing accomplishment for the cat, his owners & breeders and the entire Maine Coon breed. Dairymaine Sarnia Cherie continued her winning ways, becoming the first Olympian Gold Female Neuter in April 2014.

Noracoon Molepolole (right), owned by Steve & Laura Whitmarsh, bred by Phillipa Holmes became the first adult Maine Coon to gain an Olympian Bronze title in 2015.

The Maine Coon was now most definitely on the map. Having been sneered at by, albeit a minority of judges in the early days who thought it was just a farmyard moggie, the continued hard work of breeders and owners had paid off. We now had one of the most popular breeds being registered with GCCF, regular Best in Show wins, and highly respected judges requesting to train to become a Maine Coon judge.

Introduction of Red Tabby Series Class

We had constantly looked at splitting off the Red & Tortie Tabby Series, right back when we had split off the Browns but numbers could never seem to justify any application. In fact, the Silver Tabby Series overtook the Red Tabby Series in numbers quite early on which was why the Silver Tabby split came first. Finally, over twenty years after we gained Championship status for the breed, we finally had four colour breed classes. In 2016, having continually monitored numbers of cats being shown and the colour range in competition, we applied for and were granted a colour split for the Red Tabby Series to include Cream, Tortie and Blue Tortie tabby. The remaining cats – solids, smokes and shadeds would stay in the Any Other Colour Class. It had been a very long road to get that Red Tabby colour split, but finally we got it.

Supreme Show Winners

And now, returning to the Supreme Show, and how much success the breed has enjoyed at this prestigious annual event since we gained Championship Status in June 1994.

The Supreme Show takes place once a year. It is different to any other GCCF Cat Show. All other shows are organised by individual clubs, they take place all over the country most weeks. At these shows all cat pens must only include a white litter tray, white food and water bowls. They cannot have curtains, decorations or displays naming the cat as judging is done at the cat's cage by the judge. The judge moves

from cage to cage to examine, report and place each cat. Each cat is entered into its certificate class and up to three other miscellaneous classes, so the cat may be judged several times over the day.
The Supreme Show is different. Firstly it is organised by our governing body, the GCCF, rather than individual clubs. Secondly, the cats are taken to a ring where the judge is based, put into holding pens and then judged at that ring. The judge writes a report which is given to the owner on the day. Because cats are not judged at their own cages, owners are allowed to decorate their pens – and many go to very extravagant lengths to make the most of the day. This is a pure knock-out competition, rather like the FA Cup, if you win you go into the next round. At the Supreme, cats are only entered into their certificate class (or breed class for kittens). The winners of each class go forward and a Best of Breed is chosen. All Best of Breeds from within the section then compete for Best of Variety – at this point Maine Coons will come up against all the other Semi-Longhair breeds so there could be seventeen cats competing to win the next stage – Best of Variety. A Best of Variety Semi-Longhair Adult, Kitten and Neuter are chosen. These three cats are then taken to the centre stage. They will then compete against Best Persian, British, Foreign, Burmese, Oriental and Siamese for best Adult/Best Kitten & Best Neuter. It is everyone's dream to have a Supreme Exhibit at this show – many hundreds of exhibitors go with high hopes of this massive win, but each year only three pedigrees gain a Supreme title (Supreme Adult, Supreme Kitten, Supreme Neuter) and of them, one is finally chosen as Supreme Exhibit.

It was just seventeen months later after Championship Status for the breed began, November 1995, that the first Maine Coon hit the dizzy heights of a "Supreme" title when Alexis Craig's Rockoon Tigerlily was made Supreme Kitten (below).

Since then, we have had a number of Maine Coons gaining a Best of Variety win and more cats have gained a 'Supreme' title with three being awarded the coveted Supreme Exhibit in 2005, 2008 and 2010.

SUPREME TITLED MAINE COONS

Supreme Adult

2000 Gr Ch Ohyo Murphy Of Noah's Ark, owned by Mrs D Brettell, bred by A Kneifel
2010 Ch Julescoon Dexter, owned and bred by Mr & Mrs Gregson
2025 IGRCH Isadoryou Lugus, owned and bred by Miss T Murray

Supreme Kitten

1995 Rockoon Tygerlily, owned by Mrs A Craig, bred by Mrs J Lambeth
2002 Lionmaine Kennya, owned and bred by Mrs J Chadwick
2003 Dairymaine Chestaton, owned and bred by Mrs J Haynes
2005 Coontastic Xavier, owned by Mrs S Wilkinson, bred by Mr & Mrs Barletta
2011 Isadoryou Mr Bojangles, owned by Mrs T Cole, bred by Miss T Murray

Supreme Neuter

2005 UK IGrPr Dairymaine Chestaton, owned and bred by Mrs J Haynes
2008 UK IGrPr Dairymaine Sarnia Cherie, owned by Miss S Rabey, bred by Mrs J Haynes

Supreme Exhibits

2005 SupUK IGrPr Dairymaine Chestaton, owned and bred by Mrs J Haynes
2008 SupUK IGrPr Dairymaine Sarnia Cherie, owned by Miss S Rabey, bred by Mrs J Haynes
2010 SupCh Julescoon Dexter, owned and bred by Mr & Mrs Gregson

Supreme UK Imperial Grand Premier Dairymaine Chestaton owned and bred by Mrs J Haynes warrants a very special mention as the only Maine Coon to win a Supreme title twice, Supreme Kitten in 2003, Supreme Neuter & Supreme Exhibit in 2005.

Supreme UK IGrPr Dairymaine Sarnia Cherie
Owned by Miss S Rabey, bred by Mrs J Haynes,
Supreme Exhibit 2008

Supreme Ch Julescoon Dexter, owned and bred by Mr & Mrs Gregson.
Supreme Exhibit 2010

CISCO - A Legend in his Own Lifetime

Cisco, or to give him his full title, UK Olympian Gold Imperial Grand Premier Kassaro Ciscokid deserves to be in the Maine Coon history books. Bred by Sandra Turpin, owned by Ray and Sandra Burgess, he really was a cat who was in a league of his own - not just for his show success, but also for the way he wooed thousands of people over the years.

His show career spanned almost fifteen years and during that time he entered 246 shows, was awarded Best of Breed at 229 of them, Best of Variety Semi-Longhair Neuter (Section 2) 82 times, Best in Show Semi-Longhair (Section 2) 59 times, Overall Best in Show Exhibit 25 times and Best of The Best 6 times.
He won Overall Best in Show at the Maine Coon Cat Club Show twice, 2013 and 2016 and he won GCCF's Cat of the Year in 2017.

He was a truly wonderful example of the Maine Coon breed.

Aside from being one of the most successful cats ever shown in GCCF, he was the most amazing ambassador for the Maine Coon breed. A huge cat who would happily spend his show day afternoons meeting and greeting the public. allowing them to get up close and personal, he just loved all the attention. He was the most gentle cat you could ever wish to meet and through him, many people fell in love with the breed and went on to get one themselves. Judges also fell in love with him, and some even decided to train as a Maine Coon judge because of him. Over the years he was admired and photgraphed by literally thousands of show visitors and basically had his own fan club - people would arrive at a show and immediately go looking for Cisco.

He did so much for the popularity of the Maine Coon in the UK and really deserves his own place in our breed's history.

History continues to be made by our special breed and we look forward to the next landmarks.
I hope that you have enjoyed learning about the Maine Coon's history and how it has developed and grown in popularity in the UK.

Author - Daphne Butters