

New Cat Breed Thinks Like a Dog

Puppykats can fetch and wear a leash, but must avoid potential health risks.

Its the cat for dog lovers.

At least, that's what Dawn Houston says about the new breed that she has developed over the past seven years, which can be trained to fetch or walk on a leash. For Puppykats, its their personality that counts.

This breed just seemed to be really special, said Houston, who has sold about 40 of the cats while operating a rescue shelter in Lake Elsinore, Calif.

Primarily a hybrid from Scottish Folds and Manx, Puppykats tend to be intelligent, playful and easygoing. They often have the distinctive characteristics of their ancestral breeds, with folded ears and bobbed tails in addition to extra toes. However, the traits will not always show up in kittens.

The Rare and Exotic Breeds Registry recognized Puppykats about a year ago, and Houston is planning to set up an association for other people to breed them.

But Houston is cautious about future breeding programs. She has worked diligently to develop Puppykats, selecting seven types of cats from her rescue work to contribute to the lineage. And she is aware of genetic defects that could develop if the cats are bred irresponsibly.

There's way more to the breed than just their looks, she said. You couldn't duplicate them by putting a Manx and a Scottish Fold together.

Leslie Lyons, a feline geneticist at the University of California Davis, noted that the Puppykats' three characteristics—folded ears, bobbed tail and polydactyl toes—derive from dominant genes and affect bone development.

You've got to be careful with all of those, Lyons said. There's a chance there could be mutations, good or bad. You don't know until the kittens are born.

Lyons' current research includes studying the genes that cause mutations in Manx, Scottish Folds and Munchkins. Most of the breeders that she is working with are careful to breed a cat that has a trait with one that doesn't, avoiding serious birth defects.

Houston is among those who recognize that dominant genes should not be bred together, criticizing other breeders who might pair two folded-ear cats together in an effort to produce more folded ears.

Puppykats, she says, were developed with health in mind, and cats with good immune systems are among those who have contributed to the line.

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