

West Midlands and Wales Gaydon Show – March 12th 2017

Judges Report by Siân Allcoat

It seems very odd sitting here writing my first ever Judges report. It only seems like yesterday (but it was over three years ago) that I was at the National AGM and Barry Thornton announced that I was going to be the Judge Under Instruction for the West Midlands and Wales region.....which came as a total surprise to me!

The day before my first judging appointment I had no time to become nervous since it was spent preparing the food for the show and then later setting up the hall ready for the next day's event. As seems to be tradition with Judges' reports, I will briefly describe my journey to the show. The 300 yard trip was uneventful other than nearly burning myself on the tray of hot bacon that I had prepared for everyone's breakfast (what a glamorous life I lead as a judge!). I hasten to add I was not driving, hubby took me as I suspect it would be 6 penalty points on my license if I was caught driving while carrying a tray of bacon. I can just imagine what the headlines in the Sun would be, mad Welsh NCS judge caught driving while clutching a tray of hot bacon! On my arrival at the hall I was then confined to the kitchen for the next hour or so as people busily prepared their animals for the show. However, I would like to thank everyone who popped in and wished me luck (while picking up their bacon butties) and also thanks to little Izzy (aged 5) who presented me with a lovely colouring of a ballerina and kept me amused with her stories, songs and magic tricks.

I have to say I was extremely pleased with the numbers of entries in the show, especially as it was so close to the National. Not only were entries at a reasonable level but also the number of people attending. Lots of familiar friendly faces which immediately put me at my ease, but also 7 or 8 new faces who had come along to watch a show for the first time this really bodes well for the future, especially as many of the "novices" from the last few years have now progressed to the main bench .

Anyway, enough of the preamble and down to the animals. Colour phasing went quickly and smoothly with the expert help of the chief steward Stephen Helmore and show manager Kerry Bradburn Jones.

My first class of the day was a good class of Medium Dark young females. The 1st (A49) from Kerry was a nice clear animal of excellent colour, size and conformation as well as fur density. This chin went on to win Best Young Standard Female. The 2nd animal, again from Kerry, was also of good colour but a little bit wedgy in shape and needs to grow on. A third and HC went to Heather Boncey. The third ribbon winner was unfortunately out of condition, woolly around the hips and suffering from loose fur, while the HC was a decent coloured animal but again suffered from soft woolly fur along its sides.

The next class was a class of three Darks. Kerry's first ribbon winner (A40) was only 4½ months old but had excellent size and confirmation. It was beautifully bright blue chin with silky fur and with bags of eye appeal, this chin went on to win Reserve Best Young Standard Female. The 2nd ribbon went to Heather for an animal with a good fur type for a youngster, it had lovely colour and a nice white belly. Kerry's third had good strong fur, excellent size and conformation but lacked the eye appeal of the 1st ribbon winner in this class, but nevertheless still a good female.

Onto the Medium young females. The 1st ribbon winner was from Karly and Craig Donkersely . Again a nice female with good colour and a lovely white belly. Unfortunately, it was out of show condition and priming badly, you could see the horseshoe priming line on its back , however, it was a good quality animal that deserved a first. A 3rd ribbon went to Stephen for a chin that couldn't achieve a 2nd behind the winner of the class due to its condition, having a salt and pepper appearance and at nearly 7 months old it was also somewhat small for its age. The clarity could also have been better.

We then moved onto the Young Standard Males. There was one Medium Dark (B49) from Heather. This was awarded a "mean" 2nd . It was a clear blue animal but was slightly let down by the fact that the fur was rather open on the hips.

There were two young males in the Dark colour phase , both from Kerry. The first ribbon winner (B9) was only 4½ months old but was a lovely bright blue chin with good stand up silky fur. The 2nd was also of good colour, being big and blocky, but the fur was more open on the hips versus the 1st.

Onto the extra dark young males, again both from Kerry. The 1st ribbon winner at 4½ months old was not the biggest youngster in the show but was of decent size and conformation, however, it had excellent density and was a fantastically bright, blue, clear animal, so much so, that it went on to become Best Young Standard and Reserve Best Standard against some very stiff competition. The 2nd in this class (B12) was no slouch either! Again a very lovely animal with beautiful clarity of colour and good dense fur (but not quite as dense as the 1st in this colour phase) . The only criticism being that it could do with a bit more veiling in the neck, but that is being picky. This chin was good enough to win Reserve Best Young Standard.

Next came the Adult Standard Females. The first class to be judged was the Medium Darks . The 1st ribbon winner (C16 – Kerry) was an easy winner in the group . She was a large, high quality lady with lovely clear dense fur and with a stand out fantastic broad neck and conformation. These qualities meant she went on to win Best Adult Standard Female, beating a "flashier" darker female. Unfortunately there was then a drop in quality in the class, the remaining three females from Heather, Karly and Craig and Georgie Busher were only able to achieve HC's . C37 (Heather) was of good size and conformation, not of bad colour with a reasonable belly but the fur was somewhat weak and open on the hips. C21 (Georgie) suffered from loose fur, it was somewhat salt and peppery and lacked veiling on the hips while C24 (Karly and Craig) had a nice white belly but the fur lacked density and was somewhat soft, not being the strong upright fur we aspire to in our show animals.

The class of Medium Adult Females produced a "generous" 2nd for Karly and Craig. It had the best colour and density of the 3 animals in this class but it was on the small size and a bit wedgy in conformation. A third was awarded to Georgie. This chin was unfortunately priming badly, it had open soft fur around the sides and was somewhat casty in colour. The HC (Karly and Craig) suffered from similar problems being out of condition with soft weak fur.

We then progressed to a class of two lovely Kerry bred Dark Adult Standard Females with lots of eye appeal. The 1st ribbon winner (C20) was a bright blue animal with strong upright fur, a white belly and good conformation and size. A lovely breeding female that was just pipped in the special awards by the Medium Dark, but it did become Reserve Best Adult Standard Female. The 2nd female in this group was also a high quality female of good colour but it was beaten by the 1st ribbon winner because the fur was not quite as strong.

Next, we were in for a real treat as a number of very high quality adult males were brought to the show bench.

The Medium Dark Class produced a good 1st for Lorraine Price. D12 was a lovely big, blocky, nice coloured chin with a white belly and was in the best condition of the three in the class. The 2nd D35 from Kerry was probably a bit brighter than the 1st ribbon winner but the size and conformation was only acceptable. Heather received a HC for one that was badly out of condition and had soft fur that did not bounce back. Unfortunately it was not a herd improving male.

We then had a great class of 3 Dark Males all from Kerry. The first, D19, being an exceptional herd improving male any of us would love to own. It was of excellent size and conformation, basically you could describe it as a beautiful blue blocky male with outstanding plushy strong fur. A top class chinchilla that won Reserve Best Adult Standard, just being edged out by the Best Young Standard from the Reserve Best Standard spot (D19 already being the "complete" animal but I felt the Young Standard Male was exceptional for a 4½ month old). The 2nd in the dark class was also an excellent male which was beaten by an exceptional one. Again, he was of really good colour including a lovely white belly and had very good fur density. Normally a very worthy 1st ribbon winning male, but it had to take a 2nd on the day since the fur quality couldn't meet that of the winner in this class. A third was awarded to a chinchilla of acceptable size and conformation, the colour was reasonable and it had a nice clear belly, however, it lacked show condition.

In general, the quality of the standards in the show was outstanding making my first appointment as a judge quite challenging but immensely enjoyable. There is an expression "keeping the best for last" and in this show, with regards to the Standards, this was certainly the case. The last one to be judged was an Extra Dark Standard Male from Kerry that went all the way to become our worthy Grand Show Champion. A very beautiful male, with excellent size and conformation and absolutely wonderful dense, plushy, silky, blue fur. Having bred a few darks and extra dark standards, I know how difficult it is to achieve the uniform dark veiling and sufficient fur strength that means that it does not reveal any of the contrasting white under fur when they brush up against the show cage. The darker colour phase standards have a wow factor, but any lack of veiling or fur strength especially around the hips, is more immediately "stand out" and can detract from the animal. Our Grand Show Champion and I have to say a number of other animals in the darker colour phases, showed none of that. He would brush up against the side of the show cage and instantly the fur would just bounce back into place with no visible signs of a break in the beautiful dark veiling. Quite an achievement!

At this stage we were intending to stop for lunch but I had underestimated how long it would take to steam the potatoes (being cook and judge on the same day is hard to juggle, lol!). Therefore after a short break and deciding against eating rock hard spuds, we agreed it would be a good idea to do a few mutation classes before we ate.

We started with a class of three Wilson Whites. The 1st ribbon winner (E8 - Kerry) was the clearest of the three animals. It was of good size and conformation especially for a 4 month old animal, it had attractive guard hair and decent strong fur that was not lying back. The 2nd for Georgie had the most incredibly long guard hair which was quite unusual, but personally I found this quite attractive. The fur strength on this animal was actually reasonably good but unfortunately it was off colour and

rather creamy. The HC from Heather was actually clearer than the 2nd ribbon winning Wilson White, but the fur was very weak lying down at the sides and even on parts of the back.

We then went on to a large class of 7 young beiges which gave the potatoes plenty of time to cook! E25 produced a 1st for Kerry. It had good strong upright mutation fur that was of good clear colour and it had a nice white belly. The 2nd went to Karly and Craig for a chin that was still very much a baby at 4½ months old. Like Standards, Beiges come in “different colour phases”, this animal was a beige but I suspect it may have carried a recessive gene. Personally I was not a fan of the colour, however, it had decent fur strength and was clear in colour and therefore I could not deny it a high position in the ribbons. The third was awarded to Georgie . A decent animal that unfortunately was out of condition and could have been better prepared. The remaining 4 chinchillas I felt were all worthy of a Highly Commended so I did not spend time putting them in order. E17 (Lorraine) had decent size and conformation, nice quality fur but it was just starting to “go over” , showing the first signs of oxidation. The remaining three animals all belonged to Karly and Craig. E3 had reasonable clarity but the fur was quite soft and was lying back. E39 also had soft fur which was lying down on the hips but at only 5 months old this would hopefully improve as more of the adult fur grows in. E21 again had some soft fur lying down on it sides and the size for 5½ months old could do with being bigger, this chin could also do with being blockier.

Karly our stand in chef for the day (many thanks to her), to everyone’s relief then declared the potatoes cooked and lunch was being served!

After lunch I returned to my judging duties with a class of young violets. A well deserved first went to Cameron Holmes for a good animal with good strong fur, a nice bright blue colour and also a clear belly. It was a step up from the other two in the class .The other two from Stephen both received HC’s.E14 suffered from soft fur which made it appear overlong, it was lying flat on the sides. E23 had a reasonable colour and belly (probably marginally better than E14) but again the fur was lying down on the sides.

We then moved onto a class of 3 Black Velvets. The 1st from Kerry was a bright, blue black animal with a beautiful contrasting white belly, good conformation and fur density. This eye catching black went on to win Reserve Best Young Mutation.The only other award in the class was a HC for Heather. This animal had a band of grey in its neck which might right itself with time, but it could only achieve a HC because there was a big drop in clarity from the 1st ribbon winner.

On we went to the Any Other Colour (AOC) young mutations , two animals both from Kerry – a Pink White and a Brown Velvet. The Pink White was an exceptional chinchilla, it was big (even if judged against most adult), had wonderful conformation and really good strong dense upright fur of a type rarely seen in this mutation. As well as having the quality of fur, the clarity of colour was exceptional, it had almost no hint of beige, the colour seemed to shine . The other AOC, the Brown Velvet, was only 4 months old. For a Brown of that age it had very good coverage and the fur density was pretty good although I would have preferred the clarity to be a bit better. None the less it is a chin I would say is worth holding onto to see how it develops.

With the young mutation having all being judged, it was time for the adult mutations. First up was a class of Beiges, all of which received ribbons. The 1st (F9 – Kerry), was an animal that had superior fur quality compared to the others, good strong stand up fur with good colour and clarity. The 2nd went

to Cameron for F6, it did not have the fur strength of the 1st and was just starting to go over . It had a bit of a salt and pepper appearance to the fur. Nonetheless a nice animal. Georgie got a HC for F46. The fur was somewhat weak and lying down around the hips and sides. The beige veiling could have been better being incomplete down the sides and unfortunately it was somewhat tinged.

Next came a class of 3 adult Black Velvets . Two ribbons were awarded. A 3rd for Lorraine for a chin that was a bit small and wedgy and not a blue black, it was also slightly tinged. A HC was given to Stephen . This chin lacked fur strength and clarity of colour and also had a band of grey in the neck.

After the adult blacks, it was onto the only Novice animal being judged in the show, a Black Velvet from Charlotte Compton. This chin was awarded a 2nd ribbon and was actually a step up from the main bench adult blacks. It had good size and conformation with decent fur strength. It was a bright animal with reasonable colour, unfortunately, I had to withhold the 1st ribbon because for an adult (albeit only 8 months old) it was lacking veiling in the neck and over the hips. After the show, Charlotte told me that up to a month or so ago it had hardly any veiling, so it will be interesting to see how this chin develops.

The next class was the AOC adults (7 in total). Two adult Sullivan Violets resulted in one ribbon, a generous HC for Georgie for an animal which was really too small and lacked conformation, it was not clear and while it had reasonable fur strength, it was sadly lacking in many of the other areas we judge for. There were two Pink Whites with just one award being given, Kerry achieving a very easy 1st . Ever had that feeling of deju vu? I certainly did, as I said in my judging comments on the day if I was a betting person I would wager that this animal was related to the young Pink White of earlier. It had size, conformation, strong dense plushy stand up fur and great clarity (see earlier comments!). Next was a homotan ebony from Lorraine. It was a bit on the small side, the fur was somewhat weak on the sides, but the clarity of colour was good and given the difficulty in breeding a good animal of this mutation, I felt it deserved/justified a 2nd ribbon (I can hear people using the expression a chinchilla is a chinchilla etc. etc. but I feel recognition should be given where it is due ... what a controversial comment for my first judging appointment, lol!).

The last chinchilla to be judged for the first time was an eight month old adult Brown Velvet from Kerry. This resulted in me having an internal debate of “mean judge”/”generous judge”. The animal was of decent size and conformation, good fur strength and density, it had a nice white belly and very good but not perfect veiling. However, it was just starting to show the signs of “going over” (the curse of beiges and browns!). In the end “mean judge” won out and it got a 2nd sorry Kerry, I know you thought that was a bit harsh!

I then had to judge for Best Adult Mutation. This was between Kerry’s Pink White and Beige. I just had to give it to the Pink White with the Beige becoming Reserve Best Adult Mutation . It had to be done even knowing exactly what I was setting myself up for.....the Best Mutation award was between the young and adult Pink Whites. Comparing them, they were so similar in so many wayssize, conformation, fur density, fur type etc. However, the deciding factor was clarity of colour and the youngster just won out, being very slightly brighter than the adult.

Judging for Best in Show it was an easy decision to choose the very exceptional Adult standard male. Unfortunately, the presentation of the Reserve Best Standard (the young standard male), had

deteriorated since the morning's judging . This just tipped the balance sufficiently to make me feel that the very exceptional Pink White should take Reserve Grand Show Champion.

Congratulations to Kerry for taking all the Special awards, this was very well deserved. On seeing the results it was also lovely to see that so many people did very well, taking very good awards with some very good animals. It was a show of quality chinchillas.

Thanks for everyone's support in my first judging appointment and for providing a sea of friendly faces which helped put me at my ease. Hopefully for the audience this meant it felt like a usual West Midlands and Wales relaxed friendly show. I must mention Karly again for taking on the work in the kitchen, Craig for being a steward for the very first time and of course the usual stalwarts of the region Stephen, Kerry and our registrar Hannah.

Thanks everyone !

Siân Allcoat

Junior Judge (it's now official, yeah!)