

Judges Report 2023 National Show

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Thanks to everyone who attended the National and those that helped out on the day. Thankfully a disaster was avoided because Kerry and Mark went to the hall on the Saturday evening to set up the tables only to find that they were unable to open the gate to the car park since the padlock had seized up. Chaos ensued and some 2 hours later the padlock had to be sawn off! That would not have been a good start to the day! I just have this image in my mind of exhibitors forming a line and passing the chinchillas from one to another to get them into the hall!

This was my first National as a judge and I certainly (rather unexpectedly, if I am honest) really enjoyed the day. In a meeting of the National and Regional committees it was decided that it is acceptable for judges, if they so wish, to format their reports with more "general" comments, rather than being a commentary on each individual exhibit. This report will follow that format. This means less (or in my case, no) note taking which from my own personal point of view I feel slows down the judging process and the flow of judging. A more relaxed style of judging and report writing, while not for everyone, personally suits me better and assuming members do not object, I intend to continue to work this way.

We of course started the day with the Standards. In total, there were 105 entries but only 37 were Standard Greys. The number of Standards was relatively low in terms of absolute numbers and as a percentage, but my goodness there were some outstanding animals amongst them. Kerry Bradburn swept the board on all the "Specials" and none of her Standards were beaten in any class. The comment "big and blocky with superb clarity and blueness of colour, dense fur and a lovely white belly" could be applied to every single one she exhibited so very well-done Kerry! This consistency of very high quality Standards actually made judging some of the classes more difficult, it came down to minor details and careful balancing of qualities, with all 17 of Kerry's Standards, almost without exception, deserving of a 1st ribbon. The eventual Best Standard and GSC was a young female and what a beautiful chinchilla she was. As well as the usual qualities of all Kerry's chins (as above), she had bags of fur, that was long but upright. That is what made her stand out. Behind her as Reserve Best Standard and RGSC was an adult extra dark male with wonderful silky fur that I commented on had a nose like a dog (hence he became known as Dog Face, lol!). This chin had what Kerry describes as a "dolphin" smile (a wonderful area of pure white fur under its chin) and this and the white fur on its belly contrasted wonderfully with his extra dark standard fur. This male seemed to take a liking to me and when I was bending down looking over the back of all the chinchillas in the class, he sat quietly staring intently at me, which actually meant he presented himself at his best. I did mention to Kerry the following day that he had taken a real liking to me and as a result he should come and live with me, but unfortunately, she was having none of it!!!

However, although Kerry won every "normal" special award at the show, not everything on the day went well for her. In the dark colour phase Young Standard Male class, she had a beautiful boy that I commented on would have normally gone straight to the top of the table but I was only able to award it a third behind two other of Kerry's males. The reason was that he had three long prominent deep "stripes" in his fur close to the shoulder. The fur had bounced back and was upright, but the stripes had not closed. This presented a "judge's" dilemma, it was no doubt the best chin in the class but the marks on the fur would have counted against it going forward. However, since the fur had already bounced back, I felt it unlikely that this would sufficiently improve as the show went on (which was the case, the lines were still visible at the end of the show), so I felt I had to hold it back and place chinchillas that were in better show condition ahead of him. Apparently, when Kerry initially groomed him, he looked perfect but she thinks he had scratched himself very deep to the skin with a hind leg

and this had caused the stripes hence why "Tiger Stripe" only ended up with a 3rd. Speaking to Kerry after the show, I found out this male is the litter mate to the GSC female and she had nominated him for the Exhibitors award thinking he would win GSC, which would have probably been the case.

In the same dark male class, there was a young immature Standard male from Sandy that unfortunately couldn't compete with the slightly more mature males from Kerry, so only got a HC even though it was worthy of a 1st. As I said on the day, it is tough on those exhibitors that are in a very strong class where a chin worthy of a 1st, is only awarded a HC. However, it is a competition.

I must also say congrats to Denise Oaten who got a 1st and 2nd in a medium Young Standard class with two nice females and two 1sts with a Medium and Extra Dark Adult Standard Female. This was good enough to secure her the 2nd Standard Breeders award.

The 37 standards were all judged in approximately 1½ hours so prior to lunch (and after the judge took a 2 minutes break to check how the jacket potatoes were doing!) we moved onto the Young Mutations. Mutations are normally judged starting with the lightest colour classes moving through to the darkest and then finishing with the AOC (Any Other Colour) class. There were 20 young mutations but only two classes (a class consists of a minimum of 3 or more chinchillas of the same mutation or colour phase). These were a class of Sullivan Violets and a class of Black Velvets. Hence, we started with the Sullivan Violets of which there were six. Andrew won the class since his Violet had some blueness of colour. As I commented on the day, there appears to be an unfortunate trend that some of the Sullivan Violets that are appearing on the show bench are becoming "brownier" with a "casty" look to them, rather than being blue. The colour violet has a blue hue and that is what breeders should be trying to achieve with this mutation.

The class of three Black Velvets were up next, with an easy 1st for Kerry's well veiled blue black, densely furred blocky chin (more on that one later), with Stephen Helmore getting a 2nd to this.

We broke for lunch prepared by myself, which hopefully everyone enjoyed despite the carrot "mystery" how can you cut up Chanteray carrots, par boil them for 10 minutes and then cook them in the oven for 1 hour and some (but not necessarily the largest!) remain al dente? It suited some, but not everyone. It was Kerry's second disappointment of the day, lol!

After lunch, all the other young mutations fell into the AOC category. There were a number of 1st awards . Hannah Whiteley got a 1st for a young clear Pink White chin, Denise with a very good Self-Black and Heather Boncey with a nice Black and White cross. Kerry's Black Peal and Beige were also awarded 1sts but the Black Velvet from the earlier class easily went on to win Best Young mutation with the Beige in reserve. Later in the show, the lovely young Blue-Black Velvet went on to win Reserve Best Mutation in Show and the John Bradburn memorial cup which is for the best Velvet at the National. This was very emotional moment for Kerry because her father always loved attending the NCS shows (and everyone loved her dad being there..... John, who was a "character", is so fondly remembered by everyone who knew him). This was even more poignant since at this particular time, her father-in-law who lives with her and Mark is receiving end of life care so being presented with her dad's trophy, brought back a mix of emotions and memories at a very tough time for all the family. Our thoughts are with them.

The biggest section of the show was the adult mutations with a total of 46 chinchillas. The 1st class was a class of 5 Wilson whites with a 1st ribbon for Sandy for what was a lovely clear white chin with reasonably strong fur. There was a 2nd for Andy Marshall for another good chin, but it didn't quite have the clarity of the 1st. A very good class of 6 Pink Whites followed which took some sorting! With Pink Whites (and Wilson whites) in classes of similar quality animals, I personally find clarity of colour

can appear slightly variable from different angles when looking at them under show lights (especially if there are variable degrees of Beige or Standard influence on the animal). As I explained to the audience, I was moving them around not necessarily in terms of changing their position in the class but to double check this. This did take some time but with some of the chinchillas being so close to each in terms of quality, this I felt was the fair way of doing it, even though it is an unconventional way of judging a class. The winner from Kerry, although for once not one of Kerry's very large chinchillas, but a decent size none the less, had exceptional clarity of colour and quality fur. The following day, Kerry admitted that she had been uncertain of what I was doing when judging this class since I had left this particular chin away from the others at the "bottom" of the table under the 2nd bank of lights for most of the time when I was judging the class. I then brought it back on later and compared it in turn to all of the others in the class and up the table it went. This was because on first assessing the class it was apparent that the chin was likely to win top spot and with each bank of lights being 4 feet long, I needed the space to assess the other 5 animals under the same lights! I thought I ought to explain my actions in this judge's report, since if a fellow judge was confused by what I was doing, then how must it have appeared to the audience! On this occasion, and for once, there was actual method in my madness! In fact, the 1st in this class went on to be awarded Reserve Best Mutation in Show, so again, well done to Kerry.

We then moved into the biggest class in the adult mutations, a class of eight Beiges. Some of the animals in the class, although having quality, had almost inevitably started to "go over" and the fur had started to oxidise. This is the curse of the Beiges! Due to this, their shelf life for being successful on the show bench is relatively short. James Buchan took the class with a nice quality chin that had thankfully managed to maintain its colour.

However, James' *pièce de résistance* was in the next class, a class of 6 adult Black Velvets, with James taking the top three spots ahead of Kerry, Denise and Joanne, who all received HC's. This was the only class in the entire show where another exhibitor's chinchilla (never mind more than one chinchilla!) was placed ahead of one of Kerry's, so congratulations to James on achieving this accolade. I am sure Kerry won't mind me mentioning this! However, Kerry's young Black Velvet had to automatically take the John Bradburn trophy over James' adult. The logic being that the young black was placed above the Reserve Best Adult Mutation (Kerry's Pink White) and the Pink White had already been placed above James' 1st ribbon Black Velvet. That takes some thinking about, lol!

We then moved onto the adult Self Blacks / Ebony. These were colour phased into mediums and darks. Of the 5 mediums, three ribbons were awarded, a 1st and 3rd to Denise and a HC for Andrew. Awards were withheld from the other two since they had incomplete wrapping of colour, just off-white bellies. Having ebony "influence" is insufficient to do well on the show bench irrespective of colour phase, the colour must wrap around the body of the chinchilla. However, just because a chin can't do well on the show bench, does not necessarily mean they are not useful in a breeding programme if they have qualities that you are hoping to breed into the herd.

The 4 dark Self Blacks from Heather Arnstein were up next with all four receiving ribbons. On asking the age it became apparent or at least very likely, that the two who ended up with a 1st and 2nd were litters mates (as were the 3rd and HC). As I commented on the day, it must have been gutting that one had much better size and conformation while the other had much better colour. What was needed was the colour of one on the body of the other. Heather later told me she'd had said the exact same thing to someone before the show! Unfortunately, because of this, when comparing the 1st ribbon winner with Denise's young Self Black, on balance the young one had to take the trophy for the Best Ebony in show. This award is in honour of the memory of the late Barry Thornton who actually helped mentor Denise when she first started out. So very well-done Denise!

Next up was the AOCs of which there were nine. Just one 1st ribbon was awarded which was to Kerry's Black Pearl. Anyone who has seen a good Black Pearl in the flesh will tell you that the dense intense blue black coloured fur contrasting with the pure white belly is stunning and this chin was no exception. What was exceptional about this one was the fact that it did not "suffer" from the "typical" Black Pearl weaknesses, lack of size, poor conformation and fur length (generally they tend to be short furred). The conformation was good, the fur length was good and the size very acceptable - not an extra-large animal, but certainly big enough and even more surprisingly it was a male! (The male Pearls in particular tend to be small and wedgy in shape).

When judging for Best Adult Mutation and then Best Mutation, this stunner had to take it even though Kerry's young Black Velvet did hold its own but was just pipped into Reserve (usually a good Black Pearl up against a Black Velvet will make even a good Velvet look "dull").

There were a number of other mutation trophies to be decided. Heather A, although she missed out on the Ebony cup, on judging for the Best Violet in Show won with her young blue Sullivan Violet, so big congrats to her. A new trophy this year was for the Best White in Show. This is in memory of the late great Georgie Busher who was an integral part of the NCS for decades and who even achieved her ambition of judging a show in her 90th year! What an achievement and one I very much doubt I will realise or even aim to accomplish. As with the other special mutation trophies, this award was for all mutations that carry the relevant gene so in this case included Wilson Whites, Pink Whites, Black and White crosses etc. (including RPA versions). For the same reasons/logic as with the Black Velvet trophy, the trophy was automatically awarded to Kerry's lovely Pink White.

I am sure everyone would like to congratulate Kerry for her well-deserved clean sweep of all the usual special awards at the show. As well as the individual animal awards, Kerry also won the Standard Breeders, Mutation Breeders and Exhibitors awards. The high calibre and consistency of the quality of the chinchillas she benched, meant she was unbeatable on the day. An amazing achievement. Denise should also be congratulated for coming in second in both breeders' awards and in the exhibitor's award. The points for the Exhibitors award were in fact quite close because of Kerry's nomination of "Tiger Stripes". Not winning the Exhibitors award could have potentially been her third disaster of the day, lol!

It was a real pleasure to judge my first National and the friendly atmosphere and occasional banter contributed to this and helped put me at ease. Well done to everyone who exhibited and a special thanks to all those that helped officiate the show, helped in the kitchen and with cleaning up. A special mention for Heather A. for making what was obviously a delicious chocolate cake by the rush to get some, and which unfortunately I was too late to get a piece of!



The hall was cleaned, shut up and everyone was away by 5.00 p.m., although unfortunately those travelling south on the M6 got caught up in a traffic jam caused by an accident. How I hate that motorway!

Thanks to everyone who attended and made what was a very pleasant day for myself.

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