

American Cat Fanciers Association

So You Want To Buy A Pure-bred Cat?

by John J. McGonagle
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Well, now you've decided. You just fell in love with a cat. Its owner told you it was a pure-bred (or was it registered), and now you want a "registered" cat (or was it a "show" cat) just like that one -- or maybe another breed? You may have already selected "your breed" -- or maybe not. But, once you do, that's all - or is it?

Unfortunately, that's just the beginning.

What Does "Registered Cat" Mean?

In its narrowest sense, a registered cat is a cat which has had its birth registered with one or more of the associations which register cats. And that's it. A registered cat is not the same as a show cat, nor is registration a guarantee of the cat's health. What it is a guarantee of the cat's lineage.

On the other hand, technically speaking, if a cat is not registered, it is not a "pure-bred". That is because you cannot be sure about the breed of its parents without registration. So, if a cat is called a pure-bred, but is not registered, and it looks like a Burmese, for example, what you have is a cat which appears to be a Burmese. You cannot be certain that it is one.

That mean when you see a "pure-bred" cat for sale at a pet store, don't assume that it is a registered cat. And, if you see a "registered" cat at a pet store, please don't assume it is also a "show" cat. As you will soon learn, a show cat is also something different.

If you go to a pet shop, and ask about registered cats, a reputable pet store owner may tell you something like what I was told when I was preparing this piece. The owner said "A registered cat means I can sell it for more."

So, from your point of view, buying a registered Persian means you have bought a pure-bred Persian. It does not necessarily mean that the parents were show cats. It does mean, however, that the parents are also registered.

In turn, that means that, if you want a pure-bred cat, it is pretty tough to get one from a pet store.

Why Not A Pet Store?

This article does not suggest that, if you want to own a "pure-bred" or "registered" or "show" cat, you should go to a pet store. There are a few reasons for that:

- The various cat fancies officially and unofficially discourage, or even bar, their members from selling to pet stores. Given that attitude, you should wonder just who is supplying registered cats to the pet stores.
- Pet stores are almost always reselling someone else's cats or kittens. They only know what they have been told by the former owner.
- At a pet store, you deal with the staff, and the staff's focus is on sales. The

staff usually is not knowledgeable about the breeds you are considering, and really are not equipped to answer your important questions.

- Most pet stores adhere to the law in terms of your rights to return a sick kitten, or get a replacement for a kitten which is not as advertised, such as the wrong breed. But how many of us can really return the kitten if we hear, as I know some have, that the animal being returned will be "put down". Now, that may have to happen if a kitten has a highly dangerous disease. But, ask yourself if a pet store will try and make an adjustment if your kitten "doesn't fit in"? Many breeders will.

Who can you call after the sale? If you bought from a pet store, and you have a question or problem, you will be (rightly) told to call a veterinarian. But, buy from a reputable breeder, and there is someone you can call on for help. In fact, if we don't hear from you often enough about our baby, you'll find you get calls from us!

If you are buying a cat as a pet, reputable breeders will require that you neuter the cat. To the best of my knowledge, there is no pet store chain which has a neuter policy in force which has a high compliance rate. Breeders are more careful. To make sure the cat they sell is neutered, they can hold back on the registration papers (so you cannot breed "just once" to make some "fast money"), require refundable deposits to make it financially worthwhile for you to neuter the cat quickly, and even assert a right to reclaim the cat if you fail to neuter it.

What Is A "Show Cat"?

The registered "show" cat is very different from a mere registered cat. A show cat is one which can be shown in competition and which will probably win, or already has won, titles or awards in competition.

A quick lesson in the language of breeders and exhibitors about the quality of cats is important when you begin to talk about the quality of cats. The most common terms you will hear from breeders when you are looking to buy a kitten or cat are "show quality", "top show", "breeder", and "pet". Some breeders use other terms or combinations, such as "show/breeder" or "show alter".

The key here is that, regardless of what anyone tells you, there is no "standard" definition of "show quality", or of any of the other terms often used by breeders to describe the quality of registered cats. When you are looking at cats and kittens, ask what the breeder actually means by the terms that breeder uses.

So you can understand what these concepts can cover, let me give you the definitions our cattery uses in its contracts:

"Top Show" means the cat is expected to be able to grand, that is achieve a grand championship, in a specified cat federation in a reasonable number of shows;

"Show" means the cat is expected to be able to achieve a championship in a specified cat federation in a reasonable number of shows;

"Breeder" means the cat is not expected to be able to achieve a championship in a specified cat federation in a reasonable number of shows. However, the cat is of good health and quality, and provides some assets to a breeding program (such as color, lineage, etc.); and

"Pet quality" means that, while the cat is a pure-bred, we believe that the cat is not suitable for show competition against other pure-bred cats for one or more of several reasons. These reasons include matters such as color and color placement, relative size or perfection of physical features such as ears, tail, etc., and other subjective, cosmetic features, measured against the standards of perfection as adopted by a specified cat federation. Pet quality does not mean that the kitten is unhealthy, but merely that we do not believe that it is suitable for showing as a championship cat.

Now having explained these terms, we also tell people that the quality of the kitten is based on the cattery's evaluation of the kitten. That is, this represents its opinion, not a guarantee. This is because many factors, such as presentation, nutrition, personality, and the rest of the field competing can affect a cat's success in show competition.

Now, you could try and show a "pet quality" cat in a cat show. However, given the quality of the cat, you are probably not wise to compete in the "championship" class - that is with the cats going for titles. You will not get one.

Rather, if you want to show the cat, take it to the household pet class, and show it there. You can get rosettes, and, in some federations, you can even earn titles and awards. The rules on how you do this differ from federation to federation. In some, for example, you may have to re-register the cat as a household pet.

If you are seriously interested in getting a pure-bred registered cat which is other than pet quality, you should never expect to find one in your local pet shop. If the shop owner is honest, he or she will tell you that the cats there are not show quality. But you'll hear that only if you ask. A shop owner will generally not volunteer that information. And that is not a surprise, because it is not good business. Unfortunately, some pet shops exploit, either knowingly or unknowingly, the confusion out there between "registered" and "show".

What Are The "Qualities" Of Pure-Bred Cats?

Any discussion about the personality (I resisted spelling it purrsonality - well, almost) of a cat is difficult. Like every other breeder, I think my own breed, the Japanese Bobtail, is the sweetest. For you, the best thing is to read up and then to see the cats.

For reading, I can suggest two good sources. First, read the breed profiles run every month in Cats. They give you a common basis on which to compare the many varieties of pure-bred cats. If you cannot get access to back issues of Cats, or cannot wait for the next profile, read Gloria Stephen's The Legacy Of The Cat. It is, hopefully, in your library. The photos of the different breeds are beautiful, and help capture the essence of many of the breeds. But, more importantly to you, the book very fairly discusses the personalities of virtually every breed of cat you can imagine.

As for "seeing", go to a cat show. You can find out where they are by looking at the calendar in the back of Cats. When you are at the show, look at the cats and kittens, and then talk with the owners. But, before you try and handle a cat, always ask the owner. Never touch one without the owner's permission.

Tell the breeders and exhibitors how you live, and what you are seeking. Most will be very helpful on how their breed fits your lifestyle. For example, do you have children - or not? Do you have another cat - or dog? Are you looking for a lap cat - or a more lively breed? The answers can make a difference.

In turn, you should feel free to ask your own questions. For example, how big will the

cat get when it is fully grown? What types of food does it (and should it) eat? How much (and what kind) of grooming or other care does it need? How much does it need the companionship of another cat, another animal, or a person? Is there any difference in the disposition of the males and the females? (There often is, but, contrary to what you might expect, sometimes the males make better, sweeter companions.) Also, if possible, ask to talk with some people the breeders have sold kittens to about the breed and that breeder's cats.

There are some real advantages in dealing directly with the breeders:

First, and foremost, you are getting the cat from the source. If you ever have a question, you can ask the person who is responsible for breeding, raising, feeding, and caring for that kitten. Second, you can see pictures of each parent, or even see the parents themselves. That means you can have an idea of what the kitten may look like when it is grown. Third, some breeders will allow you to visit the cattery, so you can see your kitten's prior home. Now, if you can not, don't worry. Some catteries are "closed", that is no outsiders come in, so that the kittens are protected from exposure to disease. Fourth, the breeders know their breed. And they know it well.

Take your time. You will have the cat for a long time, and we, as breeders, want that cat to go to the best home possible.

How Old A Cat Do You Want?

It seems that everyone wants a kitten, and only a kitten. And it seems that people want to get the kittens "as young as possible". That is because we all see kittens as little balls of fur and fun. But, you will soon find that most breeders will not sell you a very young kitten. As a rule, most breeders will not even release a kitten until it is 4 months old. Why is that?

There are several reasons for this:

We want to make sure that the kitten is healthy, and has had all of its shots. We cannot usually ship a kitten which under 3 months old by air. Taking care of a very young kitten is not always as easy - or pleasant - as you might think. It requires a lot of time, experience, and dedication (and love). If a kitten is too young, the trauma of moving - and there is trauma, can be a bit much.

The last point is an important one, and one which any buyer of a kitten should be aware of. Many kittens, on being sent to a new home, may come down with diarrhea, a low-grade fever or cold symptoms. That does not mean the kitten is sick. Actually, it is somewhat routine. It is usually due to a combination of the stress and trauma of leaving the cattery, the travel, and the immediate adaptation to a new environment, new food and new owners.

As breeders, we get calls on that all the time. To help every one avoid worries about a new kitten's health, breeders may suggest (or even require) that the buyer has the kitten seen by a licensed veterinarian soon after taking it home.

There are pure-bred cats available which are not kittens, but are older. Don't immediately reject the idea of buying a cat, instead of a kitten. As a cat gets older, it does not get "worse". Cats are like people - they are all different.

Why will breeders be selling a cat, not a kitten? There are a number of reasons. One

of the most common is that, a breeder may be selling a "retired" cat, that is a male or female which has been shown and/or bred. Most commonly, this cat has been neutered, or will be sold only if you agree to neuter it.

Don't reject this out of hand. These cats are often ones which can get used to a new environment very quickly, and which can make excellent companions, particularly if you are not the kind of person who can take the initial frenzy of kittens in your life. Also, just imagine the thrill of telling your friends that your new cat has sired 5 champions, but not having to deliver any of them!

Pet Insurance - The Pros And Cons

While discussed more often in publications like Cats, "pet insurance" is still not widely used. As animal owners, we think that it is useful, if for no other reason than it protects us, from ever having to worry that we might hold off on critical medical treatment for financial reasons.

Because of that, I do not analyze insurance in terms of its "payoff". When one of my animals is ill, I am happy that insurance is there. The best payoff would be never having to have to file a claim -- which means my beloved animals would never have been sick.

There are other benefits. If I have someone else taking care of an animal, he or she knows that, if anything happens, they can take it to the vet, and the vet will care for it, because the vet knows there is some insurance on the pet. Some vets even take direct pay from the insurance companies, which means they bill the insurance company, and then you for anything not covered by the insurance.

As with your medical insurance, pet insurance is not perfect, but it is much better than nothing. It does not cover routine shots -- but that is because you should be doing that anyway. It does not cover pregnancy, because either (a) the cat should not be getting pregnant -- it should have been neutered, or (b) the pregnancy is a planned breeding, which is a business decision, not a health emergency. I can't say that I disagree.

You should consider these argument when you will be buying a kitten. As far as I know, no pet shop sells a kitten with insurance. However, you could buy insurance for that kitten from one of the several companies as soon as you buy the kitten (for information on pet insurance, see the articles mentioned in the sidebar).

A few breeders already have insurance on their kittens (and cats). Under some policies, they can just transfer that to you so that the kitten is covered immediately. In other cases, you will have to buy a new policy. Find out which before you buy the kitten. In either case, you have a little additional assurance about your ability to care for your new kitten.

Our cattery has adopted a policy that requires that the insurance we put on a kitten must still be in force if the kitten is returned to us for any reason. This is to protect us from any problems that may accompany the returned kitten.

Your Rights As A Buyer Contracts

More and more breeders insist that you sign a contract when you buy (or adopt) one of their cats. They increasingly use contracts for many reasons:

local law may require that the sale (or some aspects of the sale) be in writing; a contract gives breeders a way to make sure you have all the information you need, shot records, etc., about your kitten in one place; it allows breeders to help control the careful breeding of their breed, and, by neutering agreements, to prevent "accidental" breedings; it explains your obligations as an owner; and it sets out your rights if there should be a problem with the sale.

So don't be surprised if a breeder presents you with a document ranging from 1/2 page to 7 pages in length before accepting your check.

State Laws

Regardless of whether you buy a cat from a pet store or a from a breeder, you have rights. That is because you have just made a purchase - you are a consumer.

In a few states, pet stores (and even some breeders) may have to give you a medical history on the cat, as well as explain your right to return a sick kitten. These requirements vary from state to state. (See the box for references to articles on this and other important subjects.)

Even if you don't live in one of these states, make sure you understand everything involved in buying that new kitten -- before you buy.

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