

Here I take a look at the Breed Standard, the "Blue-print" for the breed here in the United Kingdom.

By Don Meek

The British Rabbit Council is the governing body for show rabbits in the UK. They are charged with setting out a blue-print for each breed eligible to be shown in this country. The standard is set out with a series of points allocated from 100 to specific areas which are deemed important for the perpetuation of the breed. 100 is the top mark the animal can achieve, judges allocate these points and the animal closest to 100 is seen as the best animal on the day. Angoras have the following set of points:

ENGLISH ANGORA

Wool Quality 30 - Texture as silky as possible

Wool Quantity and Length 25 - Even and full all over and clear to the skin

Front 10 - Full and prominent on chest and sides of neck

Head and Ears 10 - Broad short head, short well wooled and tufted ears

Size & Shape 10 - Round and snowball like. Weight at 5 mths ideally in the region of kg 2.373(5.5lbs). An adult ideally not to exceed kg3.283(7.5lbs). Type and quality always to be taken into account.

Feet 5 - Thickly covered with long wool, well furnished.

Condition 10 - Clean, well nourished and well groomed.

Total 100

As well as the points above we have the following to guide us.

Eyes - Ruby (REW) Bright and Bold

Legs - Straight and well wooled

Tail - Large and well wooled

Head - Wide across the nostrils, bold appearance densely furred, wool to be long and thick between and behind the ears.

Serious Faults - Narrow wedge head, long plain ears, plain feet, matted coat, bad condition, lop ears.

Now the fun starts ! what does it all mean .

Being a breeder for some time it is very apparent to me that different people have different ideas and interpretations of the standard. This in no way is a bad thing. It means that different virtues are being represented by different rabbitries and it means that **you** as a potential breeder have all of these virtues at your disposal to create the perfect Angora in your mind.

Here then is MY interpretation of the breed standard above, simplified but concise:

Wool Quality:



Lets look at what we are trying to achieve here.

Firstly we want a silky coat, one that has a silk type lustre.

We also want a spinnable fibre that is easy to spin and has a nice handle once spun.

Perhaps more important is a coat that is good for the animal. It must be manageable, a coat that does not mat too easily and cause the animal discomfort.

I have found the best coat is a dense coat that has a good silky texture but is not overly fine. Very fine cottony coats tend to mat more easily, if you take a handful of coat on the side of the animal it should feel strong and full in the hand if it feels fine, cottony and limp you will have a coat that will knot very easily. It is perhaps hard to explain to someone who has not worked with the different types of coat at home. Basically a bit of weight on the fibre and if you roll it over a finger it should have a good shine.

Wool Quantity and Length

When I first started with Angoras in the 70's it was accepted that an Angora would be in it's prime between 5 and 7 months of age. At this age the wool is around 5 - 7 inches long and if you have good density creates a snowball around the animal making the rabbit look round from all angles.



Note the height of the back on this Chin bred by Janet Houghton. This is created by DENSITY thus creating the snowball shape so desirable in the breed.

Back then density was perhaps as important as length if not more so, to create this snowball shape. Today, 2004, it appears that length has taken more importance with adults being shown up to and in some cases beyond 12 months of age. We see coats of up to 10 inches winning adult classes. This length of coat creates an animal with a parted coat and a much lower outline. In order to create very long coats we have to lose density. An animal's skin is only able to create so much fibre. Tests with Angora goats have proved that animals with dense coats cannot produce overly long coats, less dense coats achieve the length. Clips of the two coat types produced almost identical weighted yields ie: short and dense and long and less dense = the same overall volume.

Which is correct? Well I have to say this is really up to YOU ! Which do you prefer?

There is no doubt the Angora has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. Today's winners in the UK have ultra long, ultra silky coats. The coat in itself is attractive and an adult with a full length coat is a superb sight to behold. The new lower outline takes some getting used to and the snowball shape has been redefined. An Angora shown with a parted coat in the 70' and 80's would have been laughed off the table where as today it is the norm. I have somewhat been forced to accept this new type in order to compete successfully today. It took awhile to accept this but I can now produce the type of coat that will win on the table.

Front

The front is the Angora's crowning glory. A good front doesn't simply have to be bred for, it also has to be cared for. Angoras eat their dindins and usually splatter their fronts with it, this makes for a nice midnight snack and so we end up with a chewed out frontal. An animal with a full chest and shoulders is a lovely sight, The head should be pillowed by the frontal, appearing to sit well back in a pillow of coat. The head should ideally be well off the ground, with a billow of coat under, forming a prominent chest.



Perhaps a little higher head carriage would be better, but lovely shoulders and chest on this chin bred by Christine Hamilton

Head and Ears

Oh dear now we get on to my pet subject. Perhaps one of the worse things to have happened to the breed over the years is the now common sheep faced, long, bare eared Angoras being shown. The standard calls for a SHORT BROAD SQUARE head. How on earth can that be misconstrued to mean long wedge headed, long bare eared with a sloping profile. The Angora's head should be broad across the nostrils and present a vertical, flat profile. The head viewed from the front should be wide and show an almost perfect vertical rectangle topped by a long fringe.



Shady is probably one of the best heads in my rabbitry. He has a lovely broad head with that all important vertical rectangle with good width. He also has lovely short well tufted ears.



This blue bred by Sally May shows the vertical rectangle perfectly, I would prefer a little more width for a buck.

The standard actually quotes narrow wedge head and long plain ears as a **SERIOUS** fault , judges please note !!!! It also calls for the hair to be long and thick between and behind the ears producing that lovely long fringe so desirable in the breed.

Size and shape

Size is self explanatory really, on the whole we have good sized Angoras being shown here in the UK. Shape though is very important in achieving that snowball look. The body should be short and cobby. There should be good width of chest and broad haunches. There should be a dramatic rise from the back of the neck over the hind quarters giving the desired height of back that helps to achieve the snowball effect. Below Artoise shows this high back and short cobby body that gives him his lovely round snowball shape. Janet's chin also excels in height of back and that lovely round shape. Long low backs should be penalised heavily.



Excels in height of back and roundness of shape. The head is well off the ground with substantial front ie: full shoulders and chest appearing to pillow the head. The head is broad and has a vertical profile even though this is a doe.

The last two points, Feet and Condition are self explanatory.

Angoras should have profuse feet furnishings. Long thick wool on the bottoms of their feet that can achieve quite a length. On the whole this is common and not difficult to maintain.

Condition speaks for itself. The rabbit must be clean, well nourished and be fit to be shown. Staining is something we all live with particularly with the whites. I would not penalise an adult white with a little yellow staining, if it was bad however I would not contemplate it for high honours. Matted coats should NOT appear on the show bench full stop !

There you have my interpretation of the standard. The best way for you to find yours is to take a look at as many Angoras as you can and decide what you are looking for in your perfect Angora, taking into account the breed standard of course.