
IT'S SHOW TIME



Teacher's Pet Ferretry's Aria of Shady Hollow is a sable point, adolescent breeder jill. Aria was selected for a breeding program because of her rounded skull, good skeletal conformation, and body mass.

and adult breeder and all adolescent ferrets have 40 percent of their score in conformation categories. In all championship classes only 5 percent of the total score is for color and pattern because these characteristics have no effect on the ferret's overall health, soundness, or welfare and are merely aesthetic.

What makes a show quality ferret?

*by Sally Heber, Shady Hollow Ferretry
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Your veterinarian says he's in great health. He can clear the coffee table with a single, muscular leap. Your friends ooh and aah over his silky coat. You have a handsome hob, but is he a show quality ferret?

Show quality ferrets are not a special type of ferret. They can come from a pet store, breeder, or shelter. In fact, most ferrets are eligible to enter the A.F.A. championship classes, and their owners should consult the A.F.A. Exhibitor Guidebook for rules and regulations. (A.F.A. specialty classes are judged primarily on appearance and do not accumulate points toward championship level.) A.F.A. judges strive to select the absolute best in every judging category, thus rewarding the best breeding (apparent primarily in a ferret's conformation and health), temperament, and maintenance.

The A.F.A. judging standards have been developed and implemented to promote the breeding of healthy ferrets that conform to the structure of what the ferret was meant to be. Anything outside the norm (such as curly coats, miniature body sizes, and long-haired coats) is marked down to discourage selective breeding of traits that are not normally found in the species *Mustela putorius furo*. Conformation is important for the health and soundness of the ferret; for example, a strong skeletal structure is required to support the body mass of a normal-sized ferret. Alter adult ferrets have 30 percent of their score in conformation categories,

judging categories account for a large portion of each ferret's score in A.F.A. championship classes. These categories comprise 60 percent of the score for altered (neutered or spayed) adult ferrets (one year of age to their sixth birthday) and 50 percent for breeder adult and all adolescent ferrets. This means that human caretakers control a large portion of their ferrets' scores and that good health and maintenance are rewarded.

When scoring for health and maintenance, judges check that the ferrets are spotlessly clean [all 20 toenails trimmed; ears and teeth clean; gums pink and disease free; healthy, shiny coat (a winter coat is not preferred over a summer coat)], that there are no signs of illness or injury, and that the ferret has an appropriate muscle:fat ratio. The muscle:fat ratio is a very important part of the health and maintenance category in that it reflects the ferret's genetic makeup, as well as his nutritional status and the quality of exercise and long-term care that are being provided. The muscle:fat ratio best reflects the ferret's overall health and soundness, so it carries the most weight on the health and maintenance score.

A ferret's temperament has both genetic and learned behavior aspects, so ferret owners can also affect this area of scoring. A ferret should allow the judges to examine him or her and should be alert and somewhat interested in his or her surroundings without being overly tense. A judge is rarely

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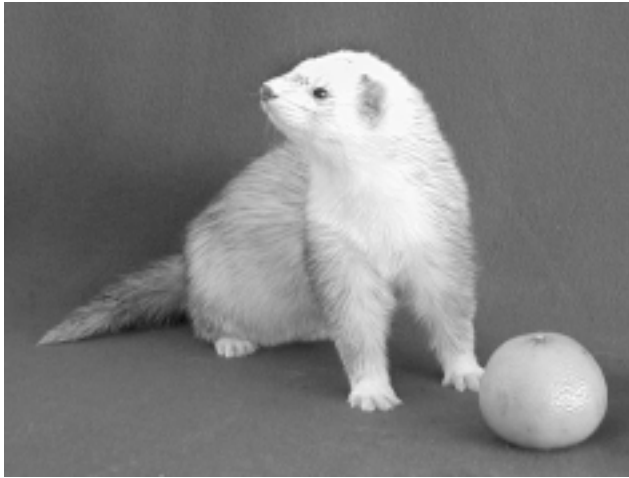
bitten by a ferret, but biting is grounds for immediate disqualification from a ring. All classes of ferrets are expected to display good temperaments but a higher activity level is permissible in youngsters.

An altered ferret is judged differently than an intact ferret. Age, sex, and at what growth stage a ferret was altered contribute heavily to how that ferret is judged. Ferrets altered

before four months of age generally do not have the muscle and bone density and sex specific skeletal frame of unaltered ferrets or ferrets altered after four months of age. I.e., a male neutered before four months of age is more similar in skeletal structure to a female ferret than is a late neutered or intact male. Nor do early neutered ferrets have the amount of muscle mass or the muscle:fat ratio required in a breeder ferret. Muscle cover and the muscle:fat ratio are different for adolescent alter ferrets, adolescent breeder ferrets, adult alter ferrets, and adult breeder ferrets. Expectations are different for each of these categories, so the categories are judged and scored differently. The older a ferrets gets, the more muscle mass and density are lost, and this leaves older ferrets feeling a bit bonier than younger ferrets. Therefore, a ferret that is four years old or older will be given some allowances for lower muscle mass.

Each ferret's skeletal structure and bone density is also judged according to the alter status, sex, and age of the ferret. All ferrets, regardless of category, are expected to exhibit proper skeletal structure. The rib cage and hip structures should be appropriately sized for that particular ferret, and the ribs and hips should be shaped correctly and proportional to each other. All the parts of the ferret should match in size and

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Shady Hollow Ferrettry's (SHF) Montreaux (top left) is a black roan mitt, adult breeder jill. SHF's Special Edition (left) is a sable point, adolescent breeder hob. He has a big frame and a balanced, symmetrical body shape. SHF's Kirby (below) is a sable jill with a beautiful head, which is feminine but also wide and deep with exceptional feature size and placement, according to her breeder. Coincidentally, all of these ferrets have American, English, and Swedish bloodlines.



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width to create proper symmetry. The head of the ferret is judged for size, width, depth, and feature size and placement according to the sex and alter status of the ferret.

Please consult the A.F.A. exhibitor guidebook for complete details for A.F.A. championship ring and overall show rules and regulations. This booklet also outlines preparing your ferret for a show (see also "Preparing your ferret for a show" on page 24); has a general overview of show procedures; describes A.F.A. ferret colors and patterns; provides general information on the judging, show etiquette, and disqualification rules for championship rings; and outlines the A.F.A. titling system.

Shady Hollow Ferretry's (SHF) Knight in White Satin (right) is a dark-eyed white, adult breeder hob. This picture was taken to illustrate the desired deep and rounded head shape for the "bulldog" shape of ferret. SHF's D'Artagnan (below) is a black mitt, adolescent breeder hob. He also shows a well-shaped head with depth, large eyes, and good feature placement.

