



Buying a Kitten—How to Find the Right One

Written by Brigitte Cowell, www.kirembosavannahs.com

Judges at cat shows often put it thus: health, temperament THEN type. I believe that whether you are looking for a pet, show cat or a breeder this should hold true. There are some differences depending on whether you are wishing to buy a pet kitten or a breeder kitten, but the general points to consider are as follows...

Note that this is MY opinion only, and should not be read as fact

- 1. Health**
- 2. Temperament**
- 3. Type & Pedigrees**
- 4. Cattery Visits & Websites**
- 5. Contracts & Guarantees**

Section 1: Health

Appearance

In most cases, you will initially be looking at pictures of kittens, even if you will eventually go to visit the cattery. Look at the pictures of the kittens. Do they appear healthy, bright-eyed and good coats? Any hint of redness around the eyes? Any tearing up of the eyes? Sick kittens can sometimes appear hunched over and unhappy. If the only pictures you see are a hunched over kitten then you have to wonder whether this is the normal position of the kitten and if so, if it is a sick kitten. Obviously you want more than one picture to really look at the kitten, preferably in different positions (sitting, standing, lying).

Testing

What kind of testing does the breeder do for a kitten before it leaves the cattery? Does it at least have one general wellness exam at the veterinarian? Does it have FIV/FelV testing? I never used to perform this on my kittens until I realized that this is a baseline exam. None of my breeding cats test positive but this way I KNOW that every kitten that leaves my cattery leaves negative for these diseases. If a breeder has negative results on all its breeding cats there is little chance of these diseases in any case.

What kind of testing does the breeder do of its breeding stock? My testing has evolved with my and my veterinarian's discussion. I have always at the very least done wellness exams, FelV/FIV testing, Coronavirus titers and cardiac ultrasounds. Heart health is important, it's one of the major causes of cat death, and the most frequent disease affecting the heart is Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy. Cardiac ultrasounds before breeding a cat can detect changes in the heart muscle indicative of this disease. With research, they are finally discovering some genes involved in this devastating disease, and maybe in the coming years there will be DNA tests available. In the meantime the best preventative is to monitor the breeding cats for healthy hearts. Cardiac ultrasounds may also detect heart valve defects which may also be a serious health issue. Any cat with a questionable cardiac ultrasound should not be used for breeding. Cats should be tested more than once, every couple of years is recommended to have the best chance of detecting HCM.

What kind of vaccination schedule does the breeder follow? It may seem obvious that a breeder should vaccinate their kittens, but amazingly I have known incidents where this is not true. Occasionally a breeder may decide that vaccines are dangerous and refuse to vaccinate their cats. That is their personal decision, but YOU as the buyer ought to be aware of this, and then make your own decision on how safe this is...and whether you take this kitten directly to the vet to be vaccinated in that case. And check the contract, some of those breeders may not allow you to vaccinate the kitten! Some breeders have weird ideas about vaccinations for "hybrid" kittens too. They might think that they should not give the whole dose to the kitten and give a portion of the dose every week. That protocol will not give proper immune challenge and therefore a kitten will not develop proper immunity to disease. So asking to see the vaccination records of your kitten when you take delivery is very important. If there are no vaccination records given, then assume that the kitten has not been vaccinated and make sure that the kitten gets at least two vaccinations to ensure good immunity.

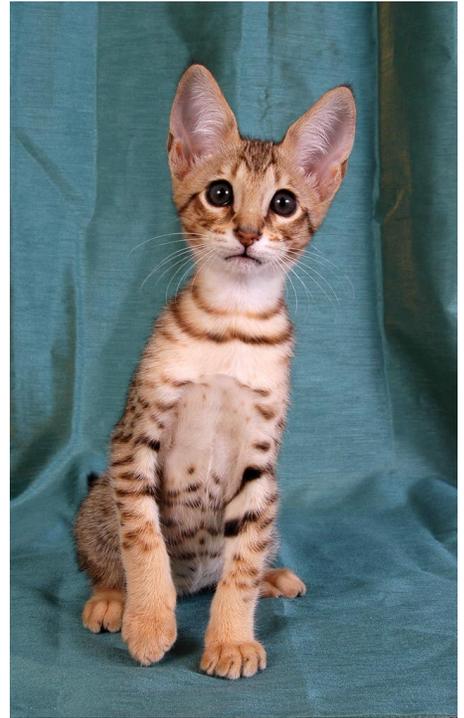
Health Guarantees

Even if you only are looking for a pet and not a breeder, you still should read the contract the breeder gives you before you hand over the purchase price. This will often prevent many disappointments and misunderstandings.

Most breeders only guarantee health of the kitten as to respiratory and gastrointestinal infections for 48-72 hours after the kitten leaves the cattery. Within this time it is sug-



gested that you take your kitten/cat to your own veterinarian for an initial health exam. Why not longer? Well, because the breeder can send out a healthy kitten that then might catch a cold from any number of sources after it leaves the cattery. Stress can lower the immune system and of course leaving home is rather stressful for a kitten! They are leaving their familiar surroundings, and the cats, kittens and humans it has known for its entire life. Everything is alien to them and that can be very stressful. We know that stress affects the immune system, so stress can make the kitten more susceptible to things it normally would be fine with. The germs that might be at the new vet office, the germs your own cats have that they (your cats) are fine with. If the new owner does not quarantine then the kitten might be exposed to your cats at a time when it is most vulnerable. The breeder cannot control that, therefore health guarantees are usually only a matter of days from the moment the kitten leaves home.



Sending a Kitten Back

Be a little realistic and sensible about this health guarantee, and think carefully about whether you should return or not. Does the return give you a full refund or replacement only? Do you pay all shipping costs? But also consider, is the issue enough that you wish to give up that particular kitten? Frankly, within 24 hours I've always been so attached that I could not return a kitten, even one my head was saying "send it back". Is that wrong? Yes, from a breeder's standpoint as that was a cat that was probably not right for my program, but from a human standpoint it was my cat and I would give it a great home or make sure it got a great home. Point is, even though I did something I think my head disapproved of, my heart feels happy that I made it.

Also consider what is wrong with the kitten/cat, if it is an easily resolveable issue that antibiotics might clear up in a week then do you really want to send that cat back? So it might also depend on HOW sick the kitten is, and does your vet feel it is easily treated? What is the likelihood of a carrier status for that kitten? In many cases, if you maintain good quarantine of that kitten and treat adequately, the infection could be over and in the long scheme of the kitty's life just a tiny blip at the start.

Some breeders might also place restrictions on guarantees against infections such as FIV, FeLV and Coronavirus (which causes FIP). If your other cats have not been recently tested negative then the breeder cannot know what this kitten is then going to be exposed to. The kitten might be tested before leaving for these diseases, hence the breeder at least knows the status at that point. You can ask the breeder if they test kittens for FIV and FeLV, and if the parents have already been tested. Rarely do breeders vaccinate for these diseases. FeLV and FIV are often regarded as more of an "outdoor cat" risk and breeding cats do not have contact with outdoor cats. Coronavirus/FIP is a more controversial subject and probably too complicated for this article. It may be worth asking the breeder what their thoughts are on this subject and realize that there may not be a right or wrong answer to this issue, due to our lack of knowledge about this disease at this point of time.

Look at the guarantee the breeder is giving for genetic defects, is it adequate? Some contracts require the cat to die within the first year of life for the guarantee to be valid, while others merely state that they will give partial refund or replacement if the cat is diagnosed within the early part of its life. Look at what kind of diagnosis they require for replacement of the cat, some owners object to the concept of an necropsy while for a breeder it is the only way they know if it is a defect that they should be replacing the kitten/cat for. Some breeders might require diagnosis by a specialist, while others are content with a general veterinarian's opinion. It is not distrustful of the breeder to require proper diagnosis and validation of a disease or condition. Not only is this their "business" but additionally a kitten diagnosed with a defect or disease can mean the breeder needs to consider drastic measures in their cattery, so of course they need to be sure of the diagnosis.

If you are buying a breeding animal, then what if the cat is diagnosed with a condition that will not cause it's early death but does mean that you should not breed that animal? Does this get a replacement or refund? When you are spending a significant amount to get a cat that you can breed, this is an important point to consider. In general, a contract will require that the cat be diagnosed before it has produced kittens.

Section 2: Temperament

Temperament of the Savannah kitten will depend on two main factors: nature and nurture...just like all creatures really.

Nature

Genetics do play a part. When both parents are very happy, gregarious and interactive cats then there is a good chance that their kittens are going to be similar. Of course there are recessive genetics that may come into play and so then individuals of a litter are going to be different. Just like we all know families where one sibling is a clown and another is very shy and retiring.

Knowing the personalities of the parents can be hard from a website. So ask the breeder questions and hope to get descriptions that indicate that the parents are of genial nature. What you might want to hear is specifics that show that nature, rather than generalized "she's a real lovebug" type of comments. You want to hear stories about how ridiculous and happy they are as cats, how smart they are in working out ways of causing trouble. All things that show that not only is the kitty smart and fun-loving but that the breeder is involved enough to know that cat.



But then, occasionally a breeder has taken in a cat that was not properly socialized, and it may not have the friendliest of demeanors but always produce lovely kittens with no issues. At this point, the breeder becomes more important as "nurture" is going to be critical in those kittens. So don't discount a cat that is not super-friendly, but do ask for the explanation.

Nurture

Genetics can create kittens that will be friendly from Day 1, no matter what you do. Those are the easy ones! But then there are kittens that open their eyes and they are unsure of whether they want to like you or not. That is where correct socialization is KEY. These are the kittens that when given the right amount of attention completely turn around and decide those humans really are their best friends. They just need the time to learn how cool human-kitty interactions can be. So you need the breeder to be focused on doing this part right, they need to spend the time with kittens at an early age, before you get them. Unfortunately, when you get a kitten at 3 or 4 months of age...if it hasn't had proper socialization to that point then it can be a very hard road and you may never get the cat you want.

Making sure that the breeder you have selected feels that socialization of kittens is extremely important cannot be stressed enough. Some may select a breeder that raises kittens TRULY in the home, meaning that the kittens are bounding all over the rooms and causing trouble and interacting continually with the humans. These breeders will not produce so many kittens this way but those kittens will know from day one that they are pets and that they rule the household! Others may decide to choose a breeder with a larger facility, these breeders still may focus on socialization and mostly kittens really do adapt well going from a more caged situation into a life in a home. Ask questions if considering a kitten from a larger cattery on how the kittens get the human interaction time that will result in a friendly and sociable kitten. Make sure that the breeder feels this is as important as you do and generally all will be well.



I am definitely not saying here that large catteries are "bad" but that socialization is key in either situation. Personally, as a very small cattery, I feel that what I offer buyers is a different service where the kitten grows up with a maximum of human attention. I don't feel this is replicated by anything other than hours spent with the kittens, although I don't think that that then means that kittens raised in another environment are not going to be friendly and outgoing. We all have different ways of doing things. I just personally get more joy raising small numbers of kittens and spending time with them. It probably causes me more emotional pain when they leave but I think the families that take these kittens appreciate the upbringing those kittens have had.

Section 3: Type

This is not a subject that is easy to describe in a couple paragraphs. It is important for you to know what "look" is important to you. Not all cats of a breed look identical...they may look pretty similar to you at first viewing (cute and spotted) but with some familiarity with that breed there can be significant variations. This is especially true of a new breed such as the Savannah. We are still in development and it will be several more years before we achieve some level of consistency most likely.



Pet kittens/cats

So even if you are "only" shopping for a pet kitten, what attributes about this breed most attracts you? What makes it different from any other cat breed such that it appeals most particularly to you? Then search for the kitten that fits that ideal closest...and also one that "speaks" to you; that jumps out at you as the one that you want. When searching for a pet, there is an indefinable quality that has nothing to do with physical type... but is important nevertheless.

Size

OK, I know that what attracts most people initially to the Savannah breed is size. There is that attraction to a "big kitty" that most people feel, as well as that attraction to the "wild"

that Savannahs also fulfil. Servals are taller than domestics therefore the image may be that of a huge kitty that makes all your friends go "wow". So at this point I will say "stop". You want a big cat get a Maine Coon, get a British Shorthair. A Savannah is so much more than size that you have no idea what type of trouble you are getting into! With the size of the Serval you are also getting other attractive attributes, the ears, the spots the great face. And you are also getting the energy and the troublemaking capacity.... So do your research of the breed and look beyond the obvious. And realize that what may make that breed a great pet may not be the size but actually the cool personality or looks.

Show kittens/cats

So if you don't want to breed but you do want to show off your new kitten or cat, then how do you select it? First place to start is the Breed Standard, which for Savannahs as all Breeds can be found on www.tica.org under the Breeds link at the left of the page. Read this (and it does change over the years) and familiarize yourself with what traits are important, what are given more points and what traits are clearly defined there. You could also go look at the breed standards for similar breeds to get a feel for what they look like and therefore what your breed wants to appear distinct from. For instance, the Savannah needs to look distinct from the other spotted wild-origin hybrid breed, the Bengal. So traits that are important to the Bengal might be ones to avoid in the Savannah.

Next would be to discuss the kitten you are interested in with the breeder with respect to the Standard. The breeder ought to be familiar with the Standard and also have an opinion on what traits the kitten will and won't develop. We don't have any "perfect" Savannahs yet (if ever) so there will be faults and there is no shame in admitting those. In fact it is more impressive if a breeder can be honest about their cats...what the strengths and weaknesses of their program are. This shows that they are being realistic about their breeding stock (as none are perfect) and also may be thinking of how to improve, how to correct the faults and how to maintain the good traits too.

Additionally, be wary of a breeder that believes they know at birth or within two weeks of age if a kitten is show quality. Talk to any exhibitor with award winning cats, or judges that breed, they will tell you stories of kittens they considered "ugly" at an early age that ended up amazing cats. Those breeders will generally not even consider selling a kitten into a show home before the kitten can be evaluated at at least 8 weeks of age, and sometimes even older. Of course, it can be helpful if a litter is a repeat breeding. By careful comparison of baby pics and then looking at the adult pics of the first litter



there can be clues as to how that later litter of kittens may turn out. But recognize the risk you take by making a firm decision on a kitten too early.

This can be difficult in such a sought-after new breed as the Savannah though, many breeders require you to make a firm decision at an early age. Either this may require you to make a gamble and recognize that you might lose out by having a more ordinary cat than you anticipated in your program, or you might want to work on finding a breeder that understands your requirements and is willing to work with you. Sometimes there is a compromise to be made, a breeder might be willing to wait on your decision on a kitten until they have another buyer interested...and therefore you might get to wait until 6-8 weeks before you must make that decision. Honestly, one of the BEST cats I have in my program is one that other people passed on early on, but developed so nicely that at 4 months or so when I purchased him some people were livid and wondered where I found such a kitten and how ever did they miss out on him. The flashiest kitten is not always the best type in cat.

Showing, is it important?

Obviously, if you want a show kitten, then there might be an advantage to selecting a kitten from a breeder that has at least shown once or twice. TICA does not award points or titles to breeds in the New Breed class, but at least being familiar with the process and what judges are going to look for is a definite advantage.



The process of showing in the New Breed rings is really educational. Judges not only give their opinion on each cat's type, but they often also want the breeder or exhibitor's input. They want to know what you like and don't like about your cat. This discussion of the breed's standard and what they are seeing in the cats is very instructional for a breeder. Of course, every judge has a personal bias and a good breeder should never change their program on a judge's whim, but their comments give you feedback to direct your program. I believe it is invaluable to a New Breed's breeder.

It's also a forum that makes you view your cat in a more removed manner. You see your cat (that when cuddling in your bed appears all that is wonderful) in a cage at a small distance next to other cats (and hopefully there ARE other Savannahs being shown in that ring to compare to). You also sit in the audience and see it placed on the judge's table and pulled up and stretched about and get to evaluate it from a different viewpoint. They truly look different viewed this way. So ultimately, it is not just the judge's reaction to your

cat that is important, but the process of putting your cat in that ring that allows you to judge your own cat more dispassionately. Again, I believe this is invaluable to a breeder of a New Breed.

Be wary of a breeder that brags about "winning" ANB awards, as this is a dubious honor. Many shows will only have one or two Savannahs on show, therefore a cat might win the award without actually competing with another cat! This is intended to be an Evaluation ring, for judges to give opinions on what they are seeing (and what they are not seeing), feedback for the owner/breeder, and education of the judge on this new breed. It is not competitive like the breeds that are shown in Championship rings. Although if a breeder has a cat that was hauled out repeatedly to a number of shows then there is a greater chance this cat is actually what is perceived to be a nice Savannah. There is no joy to be had showing a cat that judges don't like and feel is inferior in quality. Either the owner is clueless and unaware of the disapproval or the cat is nice enough that the comments were positive and the person thought it worth continuing to show. Remember, as we gain no points nor titles, showing is very much a "labor of love" for our breed.

Right now, the Savannah remains in TICA's new breed program, we are currently in Advanced New Breed. This means that only certain registration codes are allowable in the show ring, and obviously your breeder should be aware of this restriction. In the coming years we likely will advance to Championship Status when only "purebred" or SBT (Stud Book Traditional) cats will be eligible for the show ring.

Breeder kittens/cats

This is the most complicated category to be shopping for. It may combine the qualities of the pet and the show kitten, but also be even more restrictive in what you want. If you intend to be a small-scale breeder where your breeding cats are also your pets then you firstly must be sure that the kitten appeals to you as a pet and that socialization is well-attended-to. Next, you want the kitten to conform as close as possible to the Breed Standard, yet you may make decisions at this point about what traits are more important to your program. THIS is how it differs from a show kitten. A show kitten you want one that conforms the most to the Breed Standard, but for a breeder you might not care so much for every characteristic but want absolutely the largest upright ears you can find (for example). You need also to consider pedigrees very seriously for a breeder kitten, in terms of the outcrosses used and in terms of the colors in the background. Are non-standard colors or patterns in the five generation pedigree? This may make it more likely that you will produce those colors or patterns...and this affects how easily you will sell the kittens you produce.

You also need to consider what you will potentially breed that kitten to? For example, you already have a queen that has great

contrast but her legs are a tad short...so instead of looking for the perfect stud that has all-round appeal you might decide to concentrate on finding a really leggy boy to offset the legs of your queen. So you can see that selecting a breeding kitten or cat is different from a show quality kitten or cat. Both need to be nice but often in different ways.

Pedigrees

Whether you are looking for a pet, show kitten or breeding cat the pedigree is important, and often very interesting.

As a pet, you can get clues about the influences in the kitten's background by looking at the pedigree, especially with the Savannah being such a new breed, therefore other breeds as outcrosses still feature in the pedigrees of many Savannah kittens. So seeing a lot of Bengal cats in the pedigree might indicate a different look than that of a lot of Oriental Shorthair or Serengeti cats.

As a show kitten, then these influences are obviously more important. You need to really think how this might affect the type as compared to the Savannah Standard, and what features to concentrate on as potentially problematic in this particular kitten. In a kitten whose pedigree features a lot of Bengal, you might be wary of large spotting that might develop into rosettes, or coat texture such as glitter...both traits which are faults in our breed standard while highly desirable in the Bengal breed. In terms of Oriental Shorthair (or Serengeti) heritage, you might be more careful of ear set or coat texture as the Oriental has an earsset out to the side of the head while we want very upright ears, and the coat texture of the Oriental is very short and close-lying whilst we prefer a slightly longer hair strand and a looser type of coat more similar to the Serval. These are of course examples, and don't cover all the points you might want to look for in pedigrees and how that affects how you look at a kitten.

For a breeding kitten, the pedigree is yet again MORE important! You may not just be choosing that kitten for its looks as a whole, but wanting that kitten to potentially balance the other cat you have chosen for your program. So if you currently have a stud that is a tad too compact and sturdy, then a kitten that is leggier is going to be a better option. Therefore a pedigree that shows some Oriental might be a good idea. That's just an example, it is obviously more complicated than this article can cover concisely.

When selecting a breeder, you also want to be aware of inbreeding. You need to compare the pedigree of the kitten you are interested in to the pedigrees of the cats already in your program, too much crossover and then you really need to think. Do you want to inbreed? This is something that some breeders do deliberately, to set a certain trait, but then it comes with risk. You can also bring out undesirable recessives and defects. So it is not to be done lightly, nor is it a good idea for the inexperienced breeder.

Section 4: Cattery Visits And Cattery Websites

Cattery Visits

Best case scenario to determine health, temperament and what the cats REALLY look like is to visit the cattery. It's much harder to hide sickness that way, you get to see if the whole place is clean or just the room they take the kittens to for "photo time"... BUT, do understand that catteries are not petting zoos! You can't just call up someone and expect to come over and look them over just like that! Every breeder gets many many calls every week wanting to come by, it could be a full-time job if one lived in a city, to sit there and let in visitors to your cattery! Nevermind that a normal house-proud individual wants to do extra-special cleaning and tidying before strangers come to the house, so add those hours, and then making sure all is ready an hour before the



visitors arrive (in case they are early) or waiting an hour when traffic delays them...and then it is never a five minute visit. Each visitor takes hours of time, so please understand why a breeder might be reluctant to just agree to it on the first contact. Most responsible breeders want to know who you are before letting you into their home, and want to make sure you are serious about wanting a kitten and not just looking for random entertainment. Some breeders might even require you to have a deposit on a certain kitten before you are allowed to visit, or at the very least to have a kitten available of an appropriate generation and price before you come over. Please do remember that in most of the cases you are coming to their home, not just a "place of business", would you allow anyone that found your phone number to come right over to your house?



Add to this, some breeders have other jobs/careers outside their home. So their free time is precious, and sometimes they have multiple calls on that time. Family and personal issues intrude. Possibly the breeder actively shows their

cats, which can be a positive thing for the quality of the cattery but it also means that the breeder is not always available on the weekends, as that is when cat shows are held. In that case, sometimes you can simply arrange to visit with that breeder at the cat show, and then meet a few of their cats and get to talk with them in person.

In today's world many breeders have become very wary of folk wishing to visit their cattery, it's not just a matter of personal safety (although many breeders do live alone and this is a risk), there are a number of Animal Rights activists that use this as an opportunity to gain entry and cause trouble. It simply is too dangerous for some to consider it worth allowing a stranger into their home. Please understand that this is not personal, after all how can they know you are genuinely interested in their cats and don't have an ulterior motive?

Some breeders additionally have fears about infections, there are a number of diseases that could be brought into a cattery on people's hands, shoes or clothing. A cattery generally has kittens which have more vulnerable immune systems and possibly have not had full vaccination series, therefore are more susceptible to infections. Visits may be limited to when all kittens at that cattery are older and considered safer to be handled by strangers.

Given all the above, it is reasonable to expect that you need to establish some sort of communication or "relationship" with the breeder before you might suggest a visit. You have the opportunity also then of confirming that this is the breeder you want to work with, therefore you will not be turning up to their cattery and then feel obliged to agree to taking a kitten. Some people have told me how they felt obliged to agree to a kitten simply because they were so horrified by the conditions of the cattery they visited, they didn't feel that they could leave the kitten. Most times this was a situation where they had not done any prior research but called up and arranged a visit on a whim. So the caution must go both ways!

Be prepared to say no then. If the kittens are not what you expected, not what you want then just say so. You spare yourself the long term disappointment of purchasing a kitten you didn't want, and you also will spare the breeder wondering what the situation is. Better the apparent embarrassment of saying "thanks but no thanks" than confusion or bad feeling on either side.

When you visit the cattery, hope to see both parents of the litter. If you are lucky, maybe even a previous kitten from the same pairing, an older sibling. Sometimes the stud might be somewhere else, as some breeders possibly share that stud or they've sold that stud since he bred the queen... but ask the question and feel satisfied with the answer. I cannot think of many reasons that you couldn't at least see the mother of the kitten(s) you are looking to purchase. Viewing cats of different generations can give you a feel of what your potential kitten might look or act like.

Cattery Websites

If you can't visit the cattery because of distance or scheduling issues, that doesn't mean that that breeder should not be an option. Rely instead on conversations with the breeder (both email and phone) to learn how the kittens are raised, how things are done and if that breeder sounds like they are focused on the kittens' welfare and socialization and health to the extent that you are comfortable. Most breeders can also supply references, past clients that own cats of their breeding. Breeder's websites may also feature pages of "previous kittens" that allow you not only to see the type of kittens that they have produced, but also how they turned out as adults.

Some breeders have websites that feature multiple pictures of their cats, this can not only tell you a lot about how that cat looks, but also how they are kept. Do their cats look happy and healthy? Are most of the pictures of the cats on beds, in baths, on



couches...or are they on posed backgrounds or in cages? Is there only one picture of each cat, in that case consider asking for more pictures. One picture can be carefully chosen to hide bad features or to exaggerate good features... more pictures give a fuller view of that cat. They also can show more of the personality of the cat...especially if some pics show the cat in play or interacting with other cats.



Look for attributes that are important to you in those pictures, if legginess is a feature you want, do any of the pictures show the cat standing up? Lying down or stretched out can distort the proportions of the cat or kitten (although valuable in demonstrating that the cat is comfortable and not tense and anxious). If ears are important, is the cat looking at the camera? Same for eyes, looking down will add hooding that may not be so strong if the cat is looking directly at the camera. Contrast of spotting is an easy feature to play with in Photoshop, but in general I wouldn't expect most cat breeders to be up on too much photo manipulation.

Section 5: Contracts and Guarantees

While guarantee of health has already been discussed in the Health section (Chapter 1), there are often other issues covered in a contract. For all kittens, health is the most important issue. For a show kitten/cat there is additionally no real guarantee that the kitten will grow into a cat that will win titles. I don't think any breeder should guarantee such a thing, it is beyond their control. For breeding cats, then there are additional points to consider.

Fertility

For breeding animals, the breeder often includes guarantees for fertility and ability to be bred. As discussed previously, healthwise there can be conditions that would not impact its life as a pet but would prevent the cat being used in a breeding program. Additionally, fertility ought to be addressed in the contract, and this should be specified rather than assumed that both parties perceive this as being the same thing. Do not feel shy asking for this to be spelled out in the contract, better a little awkwardness up front than a lot of ill-feeling and misunderstandings later on. In most cases, a breeding cat is going to be a larger investment than a pet cat, therefore you ought to take the contract and guarantees very seriously.

Male Cats

For a male stud cat, how many years old does the male need to be before you decide he is just not "performing"? Most studs sire their first litter by a year old but then in some breeds it might be two or three years old before they start producing. So age of the cat needs to be specified. Additionally, do the females the male is introduced to need to be experienced proven females? How many should he have the opportunity with before you give up? Should you have to prove infertility by taking to a reproductive specialist and having the electroejaculation procedure performed on the stud male? And at the point where both buyer and seller agree the cat is infertile, what then? Do you get a full refund, a partial refund or a replacement? If a replacement who decides what is an adequate replacement? You or the breeder? And within what time frame from the time of proof of infertility does the replacement have to occur? So then, are you to grow a male kitten up for two years, waiting in vain...then to get another kitten to wait another year or two and hope that this one is fertile? And is that "replacement" stud also guaranteed to be fertile or not? Some breeders expect to give one replacement and then that is at an end and that the replacement stud is not then guaranteed for fertility.



On the other side, this is not that much fun for the breeder of that male cat either. They are waiting also to know if they need to come up with a suitable replacement, which means that they need to anticipate having the cats to produce a potentially suitable replacement kitten. Ultimately, IMHO the fairer situation is a more recent evolution in the sale of stud males...particularly in the Savannah breed where male fertility is often questionable due to generation away from the wild cat. The buyer pays only a proportion of the total price up front for the kitten, usually this amount is ~50% of the total price and often corresponds to the "pet price" for that cat. The remainder is due on proof of fertility and usually the breeder holds coownership of the cat until the remainder is paid up. This way the buyer is not taking such a risk, and the breeder is not required to supply any replacements. If the cat never produces then the buyer places the cat as a pet and goes looking for another stud. They can choose to take another from the same breeder, or maybe at that time their program has progressed in a different direction and they want a different type of cat. I believe it is a more flexible fairer situation for all concerned.

Female Cats

Things are a little simpler when buying a breeding female but still fertility ought to be addressed. Is it guaranteed? If so, how old should the female be before it is considered infertile? How many proven stud males should it have been introduced to? Some breeders may require the female to be returned for the breeder to attempt to get it bred successfully if it is thought to be infertile. Fertility also needs to be defined as how many kittens and how long are they viable? Something like at least two kittens in the litter and living for at least two weeks is often thought the minimum.



From the breeder's perspective, they may want some sort of wording guaranteeing that this female will be introduced to more than one male, and at least one proven male. They may also require this female to be introduced to these males before the female has cycled repeatedly unbred. In the case where a new breeder buys a young female and young male, then if there are no kittens it might be an infertile male, an infertile female or simply incompatible cats. Without there being options for both female and male there is no way to

know and therefore no way to know if a guarantee needs to be honored.

It is important for a new breeder to note that if buying a breeding female, then having a functioning stud male available at the time the female reaches sexual maturity may be key to success. An intact female cat cycling over and over without being bred can be at risk of uterine infection (pyometria), which can reduce fertility as well as endanger the queen's health. Therefore if the female is cycling and the male is too young to quite work it out yet, then the female might contract an infection and infertility result before the male is ready. So do not be surprised if the breeder of the kitten requires you to also take some responsibility in this fertility clause. Either plan on having the male kitten you buy in advance of any females you then purchase, or have an alternate plan in place. Arrange with another breeder the ability to borrow their functioning stud male in the case that you need it, for example, but be aware that most breeders would not consider loaning out their precious stud male(s). Consider looking for an adult proven male for sale to "pinch hit"... at least until the younger male you've carefully selected is old enough to work for you.

Kitten Back Clauses

This is the contract requirement that I think I have heard the most controversy about. It seems such a simple concept but it can cause so much trouble! It really does seem easy, for a reduced price you agree to give back to the breeder a kitten from the breeding cat you are purchasing. What could go wrong you wonder? Oh so many things!

It really is important to spell out how this situation would work. You are agreeing to give the breeder a kitten, does this specifically mean a kitten from the cat you are purchasing, or any equivalent quality kitten from another cat's litter? If another cat, do you choose that other cat or do they get to pick and choose? When choosing the "kitten back", do they get first choice of the first litter, or do they have two or three litters to choose from? If "first choice", then by what age of the kittens of each litter does the selling breeder have to make the choice? How are they making the choice, do you agree to supply X number of pictures via email or post? Weekly or at the age they must make the choice? If there are no suitable kittens in the first litter does the breeder get to waive their choice to the second litter? If they wish to waive their choice of that first litter should they have to tell you by Y weeks of age of the kittens or not? Do they specify whether they wish for a male or a female kitten, or do you have to hold the entire litter for say 12-16 weeks until their choice is made? When they take that kitten is there any guarantee of that kitten, in regards to health and genetic defects or in regards to fertility? In most cases, that is not the case... genetic defects directly reflects on the cat that was sold to you and somewhat so does fertility. So usually in the case of kittens back, there are no guarantees of you the buyer on that eventual kitten. It always pays to discuss all of this before you buy that original kitten!



And somewhat obviously, if the breeding cat you buy with that "kitten back" clause never produces a kitten then you should not owe any kitten back. You may wish to ascertain that though, as some breeders expect that you may owe them a kitten from another cat you may own, or they may have a "forfeit" amount that you are required to pay if you never deliver that "kitten back". So always have this specified in the contract to save future arguments. It is almost always better to ask the questions before you hand over the money!

If the breeder is to get a kitten back, are they relying on your honesty or are they holding coownership of the papers of that cat? In most cases it would be the latter, most breeders have discovered that no matter how close the friend it is always better to keep these breeding relationships on a business-like footing. Long-term, I do think friendships last longer that way. When coownership is the case, then you cannot register that first litter without the signature of the breeder. Hence, until you pay up any money owed (on proof of fertility as in the case of many stud males) or agree to the kitten back (in the case of many stud females) you may not be able to get that signature to register that litter. It is a way of making sure that all goes as planned. Make sure the contract reflects that when the appropriate remuneration is given, the cat's full ownership reverts to you.

Conclusion

What was surprising to me is how long this article ended up! I know that I have probably missed quite a lot too...but when I started writing there were more and more points I wanted to include. When I first bought my initial breeding stock I did not know most of the points contained in this article. I wrote this as the kind of thing I wish I had read when I was new to cats. I hope it helps, whether you are considering buying a pet, a show cat or starting a breeding program. Good luck!

Written by Brigitte Cowell, Ph.D.
www.kirembosavannahs.com
www.svrescue.com