

Judging & Handling the English Angora

To Do & Not To Do

by Betty Chu



After 30+ years of continuously raising and showing English Angora, I have seen my share of rabbits being judged and handled with great care and expert comments. I also experienced many times when I was stunned by poor judging and incorrect handling.

Though the ARBA Standard of Perfection (SOP) provides the objective guide to judging, interpretation of the wording is subjective. We could be reading exactly the same words and sentences but may come up with totally different thoughts; that would explain why judges place rabbits differently. More than once we have seen a BOB in show A placed at the bottom of the class in show B just hours apart. We cannot expect the judges to produce an outcome to our liking but we should expect skillful and knowledgeable handling of our rabbits on the judging table. Angoras, especially English Angora, are quite different from other breeds in the SOP.

I'd like to suggest the following "Do's" and the "Don'ts" during judging and handling of English Angora with photo demonstrations.

Removing from the Coop

Before judging starts, the judge has to take the rabbit in and out of judging coops. Most of the judging coops have a wire cover that lifts up or down. Metal covers are connected to the coop by J clips. There will be rough spots that could tear wool from the Angora, especially a full coated senior. Care-

fully take the rabbit from the judging coop and return to the judging coop. When lifting the rabbit by the tummy, make sure to put your hand on the top to prevent wool being torn by the wire cover. When lifting the rabbit, also make sure that there aren't any toes or toenails getting caught on the floor wire or the side wire. It's hard to see the entire rabbit when an English Angora is in full coat.

Then there are coops with wooden floors. Some judges like to request that shavings be put in the wooden coop to absorb the urine. Shavings are one of the worst enemies for the English Angora wool. They stick to the wool like a magnet. Other than spending hours to pick the shavings off one by one, there isn't another way to clean up the full coated rabbit. If there are shavings in the coop, please find a different surface to judge the English Angora or ask the exhibitors whether they would like to do some clean up of the coops.

Posing

Next is to pose an English Angora. It is not a running breed, it is not a curious breed, it is not a feisty breed. When the judge puts an English Angora on the table, most of the time the rabbit will sit and pose; just help a bit by some adjustment. It is not necessary to use your hand to grab on to their ears. *(photo 1.1 posing)*

Check Body Type

After the rabbit is properly posed, press down the wool and check on the body type as usual: top line, front legs, hind

legs, tummy, teeth, nails, Though there are only 15 points assigned to the body type, it is the base of the entire rabbit. The English Angora has a very similar body type to the Florida White; one can almost imagine a Florida White being a naked English Angora. *(photo 1.2 checking body)*

Check Density

After examining the body, fluff the wool back up and check on density. Density is good; it is the highest point assignment in the English Angora breed. It is, however, important to know how to check on density. When a rabbit has true density and in prime coat, no matter how dense it is, the judge should be able to see the skin. The judge can blow into the wool or use hands to press down and separate the wool. If you cannot see the skin even with effort, you can assume that the rabbit is webbed or felted or matted. The webbed or felted or matted coats could sometimes give the false sense of density. "Free flowing coat all the way clean to skin" is a very desirable state while "It is so dense that I cannot see the skin" is definitely not desirable.

Check Texture

The next step is to check on texture. English Angora should have a higher percentage of wool and lower amount of guard hairs compared to the other three breeds of Angora. Less guard hairs does not mean no guard hair. The right mix of underwool of guard hairs will give the rabbit a flowing wave when you fluff the wool upward and at prime the wool and guard hairs should be about the equal length. If the guard hairs are longer than the underwool, the coat is building while the coat would be slipping if the guard hairs are almost invisible. A good textured English Angora should have "crimp" on the wool; to get an idea of crimp, imagine the wool is a line, instead of a straight line of ----- it is made of many miniature v's of vvvvvvvvvvvvvvvvv. The crimp makes the coat puffy and healthy looking. *(photo 1.3 feeling texture & photo 1.4 seeing skin)*

The length of the wool should be even around the sides and the top but gradually blend into a shorter length in

Speak Angora-ese

In addition to the steps involved in judging and handling, English Angora exhibitors appreciate judges using breed specific terms. Different breeds have different terms according to SOP. When judging one breed, please do not use the terms from another breed. Here are three examples:

Example 1:

Judge A: "The wool is double coated"

EA exhibitors: "What does that mean? Good or bad?"

It turns out this is a term used in Rex and Mini Rex to describe an animal with the old fur that is not totally molted out while the new fur is coming in. The terms for use with Angora are different and descriptive for the wool breeds. The English Angora rabbit may have a building coat/a prime coat/a slipping coat or the coat is free flowing to the skin/webbed/felted/matted but cannot be double coated.

Example 2:

Judge B: "Nice wool cap but the animal is wool blind."

"Wool cap" is a Jersey Woolly term; English Angoras do not have a "wool cap". Instead, English Angora rabbits have "bangs" and "side trimmings" or one can use the term "furnishings" to cover the bangs, side trimmings and ear tassels. The eyes of English Angoras are supposed to be hidden under the wool, blind or not blind, that's normal.

Example 3:

Judge C: "Angora Fawn is genetically Orange."

There is no orange in the Angora color guide, and different breeds use different names for the same genotype.

Please speak to us in "Angora-ese"



Photo 1.1 Posing



Photo 1.2 Checking Body



Photo 1.3 Feeling Texture



Photo 1.4 Seeing Skin

Photo 1.5 Checking Rear Wool



Photo 1.6 Checking Nape



Photo 1.7 Checking Ears



the belly, chest and legs.

Fine Points to Consider

If there are two rabbits on the table that are almost equal and hard to place, there are some fine points that can be used to separate the rabbits. The completeness of the coats can be checked by looking at the wool above the tail and the wool behind the ears. Though grooming per se should not be the major criteria of judging, when everything else is equal, these areas can provide some distinction between the two rabbits. (photo 1.5 checking rear wool & photo 1.6 checking nape)

Stand Back & Enjoy the View

After checking all aspects of the rabbit, stand back and enjoy the view. When a judge is standing very close to the table and the rabbit, there is a possibility of seeing the micro matter but not the entire picture. Especially if a judge is holding onto the ears of the English Angora, he/she can miss the observation of the ear carriage and the ear tassels. English Angora ears should have good substance, relatively short, be carried in a close V. It is desirable to have full ear tassels but it is highly undesirable to have weak or flopped ears. Unfortunately there are quite a large number of English Angora that have long, thin and weak ears but this feature is missed because the judge held the ears throughout the evaluation thus could not see the faults or even the flop ear disqualification. After all is said and done, stand a little away from the judging table and to get a full view of the rabbit before giving comments and placing the rabbit. (photo 1.7 checking ears & photo 1.8 standing back)

Big No-No's

There are a few more Big No-No's that we occasionally see judges do or say. Here are a few things that come to my mind when I am getting to the end of this article:

(a) Do not mess with the wool:

We don't ever see any judge pull fur off a New Zealand or a Rex or for that matter any of the short hair breeds; unfortunately for us Angora breeders we still see some judges pulling wool off our rabbits and make comments such as "I can see the crimp" with a handful of wool in hand. The judge can see the crimp by blow-

ing into the wool, you do not need to pull wool of the animal to see it. I have also seen a judge twisting and rubbing the wool on the English Angoras during judging. It's not a session of spinning (twisting the wool) or felting (rubbing the wool). Twisting and rubbing greatly damage the finish of the Angora coat.

(b) Do not discuss the length of wool relative to spinning while judging:

ARBA judges are licensed to judge the rabbits' conformation based on SOP. It is not a rabbit judge's place to tell the exhibitor whether the wool is "too long for spinning" or "too short for spinning". I love spinning and have been enjoying this craft for 27 years. A spinner could cut the wool in half if it's really too long or let the wool grow for another month if it's too short. There is nothing in the SOP indicating that the wool has an optimal length for spinning or for that matter anything about spinning.

(c) Do not discuss color genotype and use it to judge the animals:

The ARBA judging system is based on the phenotype instead of the genotype. It is important for breeders and judges to learn color genetics for breeding purpose but it should not be a part of comments during judging.

Betty wishes to thank Judge Allen Mesick for the demonstration. The rabbit in the photos is a 7-month-old English Angora chocolate tort senior buck.



Photo 1.8 Standing Back