TICA Sphynx Breed Presentation

Illustrated and presented by Shauntay Burris
While the appearance of hairlessness is the first remarkable impression of the Sphynx, among enthusiasts of the breed they are most recognized for their overtly affectionate disposition. The breed is often described as being part monkey, part dog and part baby. This illustrates a beautiful picture of what one can expect when sharing their life with a Sphynx. This is a very needy and dependent cat, which requires enormous amounts of interaction and affection. Ask any Sphynx breeder or owner about their devotion to the breed and you will find a commitment, love and enthusiasm towards them like no other.
The Sphynx is not truly hairless. The skin should have the texture of chamois. It may be covered with very fine down which is almost imperceptible to both the eye and the touch.

On the ears, muzzle, tail, feet and scrotum, short, soft, fine hair is allowed. Lack of coat makes the cat quite warm to the touch.

Whiskers and eyebrows may be present, broken, or may be totally absent.

The cat should not be small or dainty. Males may be up to 25 percent larger so long as proper proportions are maintained.

The Sphynx is sweet-tempered, lively, intelligent and above all amenable to handling.
Sphynx in History

Curare Van Jetrophin (Devon Rex) and Punkie.
Punkie was born in 1980 and was bred to Curare, which successfully produced a litter of F1 kittens. Almost all modern day Sphynx trace their history back to this breeding.

Offspring of Curare and Punkie

Q. Ramses, F1 Sphynx pictured at 12 years
Q. Ramses, produced by Curare and Punkie, is a prominent male in most Sphynx pedigrees today.

Jezebel was a domestic shorthair found in 1975 in Minnesota, who was a natural Sphynx gene carrier. She gave birth to Epidermis, who in turn was bred to a Devon Rex and produced TICA's first Sphynx Outstanding Dam, Z. Stardust Winnie Rinkle of Rinkurl.

Jezebel and Epidermis of Z. Stardust

Epidermis of Z. Stardust
Sphynx in History

Z. Stardust Winnie Rinkle of Rinkurl
TICA's first Sphynx Outstanding Dam
Pictured at 13 years old

Z. Stardust Gizmo of Rinkurl
1987/88 Alter Breed Winner

Amenophis Clone
1989 Breed Winner

Amenophis Demonia
1989 Kitten Breed Winner

Rinkurl Hot Rod
1991 Breed Winner

Mar-rob Double Delite
1992 Breed Winner

Rinkurl Orel Fyxation
1993 Breed Winner

Rinkurl Uppenkhummen
1994 Breed Winner Outstanding Sire

Rinkurl New Age Girl
1996 Breed Winner
Sphynx in History

Rinkurl Parachute Dancing
1997 Breed Winner

Rinkurl All That
1998 Kitten Breed Winner
Pictured at 13 years old

Rinkurl and More
1999 Kitten Breed Winner

Apophis Nordstrom
1998/99 Alter Breed Winner

Jinjorbred Jimmy Buffet
2000 Breed Winner
As of May 2020, two proposals I wrote were implemented into the breed standard. The first change was to remove the 5 points we previously had in color and move them to Torso instead, to better signify the importance of the unique description in the breed.

“The abdomen is well-rounded, having the appearance of having eaten a large meal, but not fat.”

The second change was rewording the description of the profile to paint a clearer visual of what is desirable and ideal for the breed. The description now reads; “Slight to moderate change of direction at bridge of nose. Some degree of fuzz on bridge of nose.” The fuzz, or slight coating on the bridge of the nose is a unique expression of Sphynx “hairlessness” and not seen in other “hairless” breeds, like Born Bald Donskoy or Naked Peterbald.
Head - Shape

- Slightly longer than wide
- Skull is slightly rounded with a rather flat forehead
- Medium-sized Modified wedge with rounded contours
- Distinct whisker break
- Prominent cheekbones
Head - Shape
The head is narrow and long, lacking in distinct whisker break. Muzzle is long and snipey. *A narrow head is a penalization in the breed standard.

Above are both excellent examples of ideal Sphynx profiles. The left demonstrates a slight change of direction, where as the right demonstrates a moderate change of direction. Both are correct as per the standard.

Correct head type, modified wedge with rounded contours. Slightly longer than wide, with distinct whisker break.

The profile on the left is too long, and the bridge of nose is too straight into the forehead with no change of direction. *A straight profile is a penalization in the breed standard. The chin is weak and lacking in substance. The profile on the right is far too short, brachycephalic, which often goes hand in hand with malocclusion.
While there are no points in our breed standard for cheekbones alone, they are a very important aspect of the facial structure in the breed. The description of the head shape calls for the cheekbones to be “prominent”.

Head - Cheekbones
Head - Cheekbones
Illustrative Comparison

Prominent, rounded cheekbones that frame the eye beautifully and lend to the strong visual of a whisker break. The cheekbones being prominent are a critical component to the structure of the face, as without prominent cheekbones we lose width in the face as well as some of the whisker break, and balance is lost.

The cheekbones are lacking, and this gives the face a gaunt appearance and immediately gives the impression of more refined boning which is incorrect for the breed. The head appears much more narrow, and the whisker break is not as defined.
**Head - Muzzle and Chin**

“Strong rounded muzzle with distinct whisker break and firm chin.”
Head - Muzzle and Chin

Illustrative Comparison

Strong rounded muzzle, distinct whisker break, firm chin. Muzzle is in balance with the head.

Muzzle is wide, but lacks roundness, giving more of a rectangular impression and the whisker-pads are not full.

Muzzle is narrow, and too small for the head. The chin and muzzle are both lacking in fullness and this throws off the balance of the head.

While the muzzle is nice and round, and the shape is pleasing, the overall size is too large and out of balance with the rest of the head. Balance is key in every aspect of the standard has to come together in a cohesive package. More is not always better.
“Very large, broad at base and open. Set upright, neither low set nor on top of the head. The interior is totally hairless. Slight amount of hair allowed on lower outside edges and on the back of the ear.”
This ear-set is flared, and incorrect for the breed.

While these ears have a nice size and set, they are overall too small for the size and not in balance with the head.

These ears are too narrow at the base, which gives them a “rabbit” like appearance and makes them look conical.

While these ears have a nice size and set, the ear-tips are too pointed. This is not specifically addressed in the standard, but the shape of the tips can drastically alter the overall look.

Very large, broad at base and open. Set upright, neither low set nor on top of the head.

This is another example of beautiful ear-set and shape and size. When viewed from the side, the outer corner of the ear should line up horizontally with the outer corner of the eye.

This ear-set is too high on top of the head, and incorrect for the breed.
“Slight to moderate change of direction at bridge of nose. Some degree of fuzz on bridge of nose.”
Head - Profile
Illustrative Comparison

Slight change of direction at bridge of nose. The chin is firm and well developed, lining up with the muzzle/nose. This is a correct example of a Sphynx profile.

This profile is too long and straight. There is no change of direction, the chin is weak and lacking in substance. *A straight profile is a penalization in the breed standard.

This is another correct example of a Sphynx profile, demonstrating a more moderate change of direction, compared to the above example. Both are perfectly acceptable within the standard, and personal preference may dictate an individual's choice between the two.

This profile is far too short and extreme. The nose break is prominent and gives the cat a more severe appearance. This head type typically goes hand in hand with incorrect bites, i.e., mesiocclusion.
“Large, rounded lemon shape. Slanting to outer corner of ear. Slightly more than an eye width between eyes.”

Not all lemons are the correct shape we are looking for when it comes to the proper Sphynx eye. The standard specifies, “large, rounded lemon shape.” The biggest distinction between a rounded lemon shaped eye and a round eye, are the points created by the medial and lateral canthus that are lacking in round eyes.

Pictured above is an example of “lemon shaped” eyes as per the Eye Shape Chart in the TICA Standard Guidelines.
This is a correct example of the proper Sphynx eye shape, size and placement. The eyes are large, rounded lemon shaped, set on a slight bias slanted towards the outer corner of the ear. The large, open eye gives the cat a sweet and friendly expression.

While the size and placement of these eyes is nice, they are too round and lack distinct corners at the medial canthus and lateral canthus that is required in a lemon shaped eye.

These eyes are too small. The standard specifies “large”, and too often we see Sphynx with squinted or beady eyes and it detracts from the sweet, open expression of the breed.

These eyes are almond shaped, with hooding on the upper eyelid. Wrinkles above the eyelid can sometimes alter the curvature of the upper lid, causing it to droop downwards. This can obstruct or limit the cat’s vision and lend to chronic conjunctivitis. We must be cautious to avoid extremes and maintain balance between wrinkles, and the cat’s ability to live in comfort without any hindrance of normal function.
“Medium in length, rounded and well muscled. The neck arches from the shoulders to the base of the skull and is powerful, especially in males.”
Body - Torso

Helmi Flick
Body - Torso

Helmi Flick
**Body - Chest**

“The chest is broad, may tend toward barrel chested.”

Another way to evaluate the breadth of chest is to assess the width of the shoulders from behind. A broad chest requires broad shoulders to accommodate the proper placement of the front legs, which should be wide set.

The chest having a tendency towards being “barrel-chested” means that the circumference of the ribcage is more so rounded than oval, as seen on the male pictured on the right.
Body - Legs

“Length in proportion with body, with medium boning and firm musculature. Hind legs slightly longer than front. Front legs widely set. Females may have slightly finer boning.”
"Medium in size, oval shape with long, slender toes. The paw pads are thicker than in other breeds, giving the appearance of walking on "air cushions". The toes are very long, slender and prominent."
Correct rear structure VS Cowhocking

Cowhocking is a misalignment of the rear legs. It has a range of severity, from negligible/cosmetic to severe. In moderate and severe cases, joint and spinal damage can occur. In TICA, excluding Household Pets, cats with cowhocks should be penalized or disqualified from competition, depending on severity, as per show rules 216.12 and 216.12.8.

“216.12 ...Except as otherwise stated in this rule, judges shall penalize or disqualify, depending upon severity, championship cats, non-championship kittens, Preliminary New Breeds (PNB), and Advanced New Breeds (ANB), [see TICA Standing Rules 701.4.3], and shall penalize championship alters for the following:”

“216.12.8 Abnormal positioning of the legs and feet while standing. Examples include, but are not limited to, bowed or cow-hocked legs, splaying of the feet, or obvious toeing in or out of the feet.”

This is a great example of strong, excellent rear leg conformation. Proper structure provides the cat with superior lateral strength, speed and stability.
Body - Tail

“Whippy, tapering from body to tip (rat-tailed). Length is in proportion to body. A lion tail (puff of hair on tip) acceptable.”

- Short, soft, fine hair is allowed on the tail.

- While tail faults are not explicitly a disqualification in our breed standard, Show Rule 216.12.4 addresses this concern.

- 216.12.4 Visible or invisible tail faults are a disqualification, at the discretion of the judge, or as required by a Board approved standard.

- Tail faults are not limited to kinks at the end of the tail. Common tail faults in the breed include stiffness, corkscrew or “cinnamon roll” tails.
Body - Musculature

“Hard and muscular, not delicate.”
*Frail-appearing or delicate are penalizations.

Above are correct examples of proper musculature in a Sphynx. Males may be up to 25% larger. The loose skin can lend towards the impression of a softer build, but they should be strong and powerful none the less.
This is a correct example of a Sphynx body. The body is medium in size, medium to medium long in length. The abdomen is well-rounded, but it should not appear bloated, nor should the cat be fat. The length of the legs is in proportion with the body and the hind legs are slightly longer than the front, with medium boning and firm musculature which should carry throughout the body. Females may have slightly finer boning than males. The feet are medium sized, oval in shape with long, slender, prominent toes. The pawpads appear noticeably thicker than in other breeds. The tail is whippy and rat-like, tapering from the body to the tip and should be in proportion with the body. A lion tuft at the end of the tail is acceptable.

This body is too refined and delicate. The boning is fine, and the torso is tubular in shape, lacking the proper Sphynx abdomen. The torso is a critical feature of the breed, and as such is allotted 25 points in the breed standard. An overall small cat, a body that is too thin, frail-appearing, delicate or fine-boned, or too foreign, are penalizations in the breed standard. Conversely, a body that is too cobby should also be penalized. Balance is key, and “medium” plays a big role in the breed standard.
Coat
“Appears hairless. May be covered with short, fine down. May have puff of hair on tip of tail. Whiskers are sparse and short.”

“Chamois-like. A feeling of resistance may be felt when stroking the skin of some cats. The skin is very wrinkled in kittens. Adults should retain as many wrinkles as possible, especially on the head, although wrinkling should not be so pronounced that it affects the cat’s normal functions.”
“The skin is very wrinkled in kittens. Adults should retain as many wrinkles as possible, especially on the head, although wrinkling should not be so pronounced that it affects the cat’s normal functions.”

While the breed standard doesn’t specify the desired thickness of the wrinkles, a thick and supple skin feels much nicer to the touch than thin, delicate wrinkles. Thin wrinkles can also be a sign of dehydration.

While other coated breeds of cats can hide any number of scars or blemishes under their coat, the Sphynx shares no such benefit. It is preferable for the skin to be smooth and without blemishes, but allowances should be made for minor scarring.
Wrinkles

“The skin is very wrinkled in kittens. Adults should retain as many wrinkles as possible, especially on the head, although wrinkling should not be so pronounced that it affects the cat’s normal functions.”

It is critical that the wrinkling is not so pronounced that it has a negative impact on the cat’s normal functions. Overly heavy wrinkling can impact the health of the eyes, leading to chronic conjunctivitis and entropic eyelids. Deep folds around the muzzle and eyes can result in yeast and bacterial infections.
As of May 2021, color no longer holds any points in the breed standard. All colors and divisions are allowed.

Color can be difficult to determine on a Sphynx, pigment is not as saturated on the skin as it is on coat. A good trick to determining color would be to defer to the pigment on the leather of the nose, pawpads and rims of the ears as being more true to genotype.

Breeders should make use of genetic color testing to ensure pedigrees and registrations are accurate.

Often times, eye color alone is not a good indication of which level of colorpoint is at play. Some sepia Sphynx have aqua eyes instead of gold or green. Some mink Sphynx have eyes which are more gold in tone than aqua, and some pointed Sphynx have pale blue eyes that lack the richness in pigment that other pointed breeds achieve.
Illustrative Standard Review

- Slightly longer than wide.
- Very large ears, broad at base and open. Set upright, neither low set nor on top of the head.
- Slightly rounded skull.
- Large, rounded lemon shaped eyes.
- Prominent cheekbones.
- Medium sized, modified wedge with rounded contours.
- Strong rounded muzzle with firm chin.
- Broad head that accommodates more than one eye width between the eyes.
- Distinct whisker break.
Illustrative Standard Review

- Rather flat forehead
- Slight to moderate change of direction at bridge of nose.
- Firm chin.
- Broad chest.
- Oval shaped feet with long, slender, prominent toes.
- Legs have medium boning, strong, firm musculature.
- Neck medium in length, rounded and well muscled.
- Medium sized, medium to medium long in length.
- Medium sized, medium to medium long in length.
- Hind legs slightly longer than front.
- Thick pawpads, like air cushions.
- Rounded abdomen, not thin or frail.
- Whippy, rat-like tail.
Permissible Outcrosses

We have *several permissible outcrosses in the Sphynx breed, the Devon Rex and the American shorthair* and as the Sphynx is a Category 3 breed marked by an asterisk (*), we are also permitted to use Domestic Shorthairs for outcrossing purposes.

**Registration Rule 307.4.2** “...Breeds marked by an asterisk (*) have an unusually limited gene pool and thus may still benefit from augmentation of the available gene pool by inclusion of cats conforming to the standard but which are of unknown or unregistered ancestry.”

**Registration Rule 37.4.1** “Purpose. This category is for breeds which typically differ from one of the older established breeds or from the general feline population on the basis of a single gene locus. Many of these breeds have originated as spontaneous mutations within the domestic cat population. Others have appeared within established breeds and may be the result of earlier mutations or outcrosses. Regardless of origin, these breeds are still in active development and may need to cross back to a parental breed to improve type or augment a limited gene pool. With few exceptions these breeds generally have little to gain from use of cats of unknown backgrounds.”

While the Sphynx no longer has a very small gene pool, we still benefit greatly from the ability to outcross for genetic diversity and health. In December 2020, a DNA test became available for a novel mutation in ALMS1 that is contributory to roughly 60% of the HCM cases in the breed. As of mid 2021, approximately 70% of DNA tested Sphynx are either heterozygous or homozygous for this mutation.
Penalizations

- Overall small cat.
- Body that is too thin, frail-appearing or delicate or fine-boned; too cobby or foreign.
- Lack of wrinkles on the head.
- Straight profile, narrow head.
- Non- amenable disposition.
- Significant amounts of hair above the ankle.

Disqualify (DQ)

- Any evidence of depilating, plucking, shaving or clipping or any other means of hair removal.
- Inability to handle.

Withhold All Awards (WW)

- Any indication of wavy hair or suggestion of the Devon Rex, or Cornish Rex in molt.
Over bathing is a common issue in Sphynx husbandry, to the detriment of the cat. Over bathing alters the PH balance of the skin, which causes an overproduction of sebum and an unappealing tacky feel to the skin. Sebum is a natural, and necessary component to healthy skin. It helps moisturize, creates a protective barrier against UV radiation, and many of the fatty acids in sebum have antimicrobial actions.

Though skin quality does vary greatly from one line to the next, diet and environment do play important roles in skin health as well. It’s generally far more effective to keep the environment clean, than to over bathe your cat. Most Sphynx only require bathing once every couple of months. As skin quality is also genetic, this should be a point of priority for breeders, to produce clean and healthy skin. After all, the skin barrier is one of the first lines of defense against invasive pathogens.

Ears should be cleaned weekly with a good quality enzymatic otic solution. A study performed in 2019 by Dr. Older et al, determined that Sphynx do have higher diversity of bacterias in their ears than other breeds in the study. With the lack of hair, large openings of the ear, and high wax production, special attention should be made to ensure they are clean, and free of excess wax and debris.

Sphynx nails can become stained and should be wiped clean as needed. The deep wrinkles around the toes and over the nail bed can lead to an accumulation of dirt.
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<th>Common Breed Misconceptions</th>
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<td><strong>Non-Allergenic?</strong></td>
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<td>Sphynx still produce the Fel d 1, 2 and 4 proteins that triggers cat-allergy sufferers. The levels of these proteins vary from cat to cat, even within a litter, but generally paler colored cats and female cats will produce less of these proteins.</td>
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<td><strong>Higher body temperature?</strong></td>
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<td>Though Sphynx feel warmer to the touch than their coated counterparts, they do not have a higher internal body temperature.</td>
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<td><strong>Easily chilled?</strong></td>
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<td>Being mostly hairless, Sphynx are more sensitive to temperatures than your average domestic shorthair, but the general rule of thumb is if YOU are comfortable in the ambient temperature of the environment, then THEY will be comfortable as well. They do have some insulation provided by their thicker-than-usual skin. It is important to note, some show halls can be quite chilly, and often times Sphynx exhibitors will wait towards their second call before bringing up their cat to avoid unnecessary waiting in cold ring cages.</td>
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<td><strong>Gluttons?</strong></td>
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<td>Finally, a rumor that holds truth. Sphynx are known for their gluttonous appetites, and this is a characteristic of the breed due to their lack of coat. They have higher metabolisms, and thus have a higher caloric need than most other breeds.</td>
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Thank You!

A special thanks goes out to Lisa Bressler of Rinkurl cattery for providing me with most of the photographs of historical Sphynx Breed Winners.

I’d like to thank the following catteries for allowing me to use photographs of your beautiful cats:

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