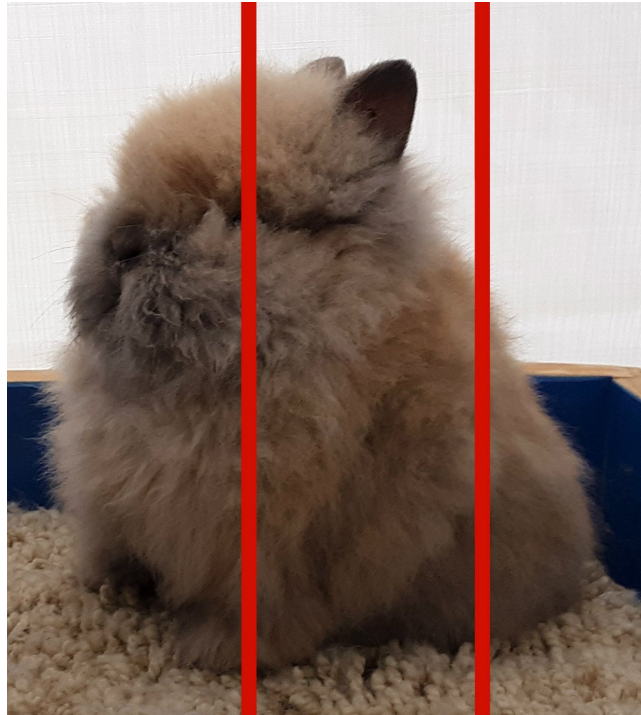


Breeding & Evaluating Lionheads

By: Jennifer Ellious, Owner of Wooly Needle Rabbitry.

Lionheads are a fun breed, but as a beginner, it can be hard to learn to evaluate them. This article will show you how to pose them and judge them according to the American Rabbit Breeders Association's Lionhead standard. This guide will be using several rabbit breeders terms. Check out our guide to rabbit breeders terms, also on this website.



Begin by posing them. They are a compact breed, that poses with a high headset. According to the ARBA Standard, they should be posed with the tips of their back toes lined up with the point on their hip, and should be standing lightly on their front feet, with their front feet aligned with their eyes. Use this photo of Wooly's WLH3 to help pose your Lionhead. WLH3's front toes are lined up with his eye, and his hind toes are lined up with the point of his hip. When posing your Lionhead, imagine lines drawn on them like this. It will help you to see how your Lionhead is posed. It may take a few tries to get a junior or a rabbit unused to posing to pose properly. You may need to let them relax for a bit before trying. If they have the correct type, it should be natural and easy for them to pose properly. If they cannot seem to get very high off the ground, or are unable to hold a pose without help, your Lionhead may have conformation issues. A common rule for breeding rabbits, is to never breed two rabbits with the same fault together. This will only give you kits with the fault even worse.

The Lionhead standard (as of October 2018) breaks the points up this way:

General Type = 40 pts, and is broken into: Body (worth 25 pts), Head (worth 10 pts), and Ears (worth 5 pts).

Fur = 45 pts, and is broken into: Mane (worth 35 pts), and Coat (worth 10 pts).

Color = 10 pts

Condition = 5 pts

As you can see fur is worth more than type, but only by 5 points. Although it may be tempting to really work on mane, the basic type is your foundation. Would you completely decorate a house that was structurally unsound, knowing that it was unsound? Probably not. This is what it is like when you only work on mane and completely ignore type. You can have a rabbit with amazing thick, long mane, clean breaks and a huge wool cap. But this rabbit can have horrible type (weak shoulders, pinched hindquarters, ect), and a good judge will notice and place the rabbit accordingly.

-General Type-

Body: Lionheads should have a short, compact, well rounded body. For a compact breed like this, they should feel like a quarter of a basketball. Their chest and shoulders should be well filled and broad, and shoulders should match hindquarters. They should be full to the table, your hand should slide from the base of the neck to the tail without dipping under the tail.

Common faults:

Long back- The Lionhead is to be very short backed and compact. It should feel like the quarter of a basketball. If your Lionhead has a long back, they cannot pose properly and will have to be kind of propped up. It is difficult for them to get into the correct pose. The best way to tell this is to pose them up. Put your fingers between the last rib and the point of the hip. Ideally, you don't want to be able to fit even a single finger in there, but it is very hard to find one that short. Being able to fit one finger is good, two is ok, three or more and the rabbit should really not be used for breeding. If you have a rabbit with a space 3 or more fingers, you should really consider culling it, but if it has something you need in your breeding program (like wide, deep shoulders), try breeding it to a very close coupled doe. Then keep any kits that have wide, deep shoulders and a short coupled body.

Long shoulders- The shoulders should be wide and short. They should allow the Lionhead to show full chest. If your Lionhead's shoulders are too long, the rabbit can't show its full chest and usually will have a harder time posing. Being able to fit one finger between the back on the head to the end of the shoulder blade is very good, two is ok, but getting long, 3 or more and the rabbit should not be used for breeding. Again, you can use it for breeding, but pair it with a rabbit with short shoulders, and only keep the best shouldered kit(s) from the litter.

Narrow shouldered- Your Lionhead's shoulders should be wide and broad, and should be as wide or wider than the hindquarters, and your hand should not go in at the shoulders. Breed one of these rabbits to a wider shouldered rabbit and keep only the wider shouldered kits.

Pin bones- Pin bones are rabbit's hip bones. You should not be able to feel the pin bones on your Lionheads. Your hand ideally should pass right over the pins without feeling them. Usually it is genetic, but it can also be caused by lack of condition. Before you start culling for pin bones, first rule out if it could be caused by lack of condition. Some of the things that cause a rabbit to go out of condition include: having a litter, heat, lack of water, molting, ect. If it is not caused by any of those things, then cull out any animals with pin bones that really protrude. Feeling a slight roughness over them is ok, but you don't want any pins that really stick out.

Undercut- To tell if your rabbit is undercut, start by posing it up. Then take your hand, and starting at the base of the neck, slide it down its back. Starting from the shoulders, your Lion should curve into a compact, round shape (like a quarter of a basketball). A Lionhead should have hindquarters that are full to the table, your hand should not go underneath it. There are degrees of undercut. If you can fit 2 more more fingers in this space, your Lionhead is undercut and should not be used for breeding. 1 finger is ok, ½ is good, and no fingers is great.

Head: The head should be bold. It should not be round from all directions, but should have good width and a slight roundness between the eyes. The muzzle should be well filled. Lionheads need a high head mount, with no visible neck. The eyes should be bold.

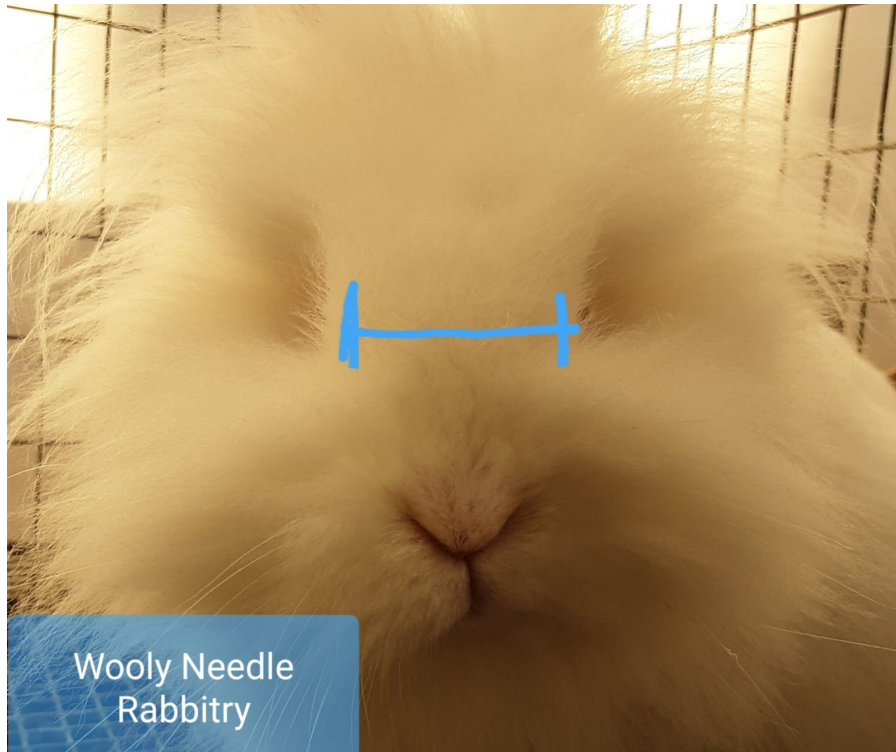
Common Faults:

Narrow head: You want your Lionhead to have a wide head. You should be able to just barely see both eyes when you look at your Lion's face head on. One way you can evaluate this is by take a picture and drawing a line from one corner of the eye to the corner of the opposite eye (shown in the photos below).



Wooly Needle
Rabbitry

Wide face (above) v.s. Narrow face (below)



Wooly Needle
Rabbitry

Long head/muzzle: You want a Lionhead to have a short head and muzzle. They should have a shorter pug type muzzle.

“Apple” head: Lionheads head should not be completely round. It should not look like a Netherland Dwarf head.

Ears:

Ears should be erect and well set, but not always touching. When relaxed, they should be carried in a slight V. They should be well furred, slightly rounded at the tips, and should be of good substance (thickness). They should balance with the rest of the rabbit.

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Common Faults:

Large ears: Ears should balance with the rest of the rabbit, and should be under 3 1/2in long.

Heavily wooled ears: Ears should be well furred, but not heavily furred. They should not have tassels.

Lopped ears: Ears should be erect, they should not lop.

Mane/Coat:

A Lionhead’s mane should have a medium-soft texture and an evident crimp. They can also have guard hairs, but they should not cause coarse feeling wool. Juniors may have softer wool. The mane must be at least 2in long and make a full circle around the head, and may extend to a V at the back of the neck. The greatest possible density is desired. Lionheads may have a wool cap, but the wool should not extend more that 1in in the center of the face. They may have side trimmings and a bib (chest wool). They may have shorter wool on the sides of their hindquarters, called transition wool or skirt. The skirt has no minimum length, and must not be over 4in long. They must have a “break”, a section of fur between the mane and the skirt. The break will be below the mane, and across the front leg. Juniors must have at least the start of a break, seniors must have a clear break. They should have a roll-back coat.

Color:

Note: Wool lightens colors, so the mane/skirt will be a lighter color than the rest of the body.

Recognized Colors (as of Jan 2019):

Ruby Eyed White (REW)- Pure white rabbit with pink eyes. Genotype: _____cc_____.

Tortoise (Torts)- {Black, Blue, Chocolate, Lilac} Black and Choc should be a rusty orange on the saddle. Blue and Lilac should be a light fawn on the saddle. All varieties should blend to a

shading of a darker color on the lower rump, haunches, belly, and feet. The color should extend down the hair shaft to an off-white undercolor. Top of tail should match the body color, bottom should match the shadings as closely as possible. Shading on the head should be darkest at the whisker bed, blending to a lighter shade along the jaw and darkening again at the ears. Black and Chocolate should have brown eyes, Blue and Lilac should have blue-grey eyes. Genotype: Black- aa B_ C_ D_ ee, Blue- aa B_ C_ dd ee, Chocolate- aa bb C_ D_ ee, Lilac- aa bb C_ dd ee.

Seal- Rich sepia brown on the saddle, from the end of the mane to the tail, shading to a slightly lighter tint on the flanks, chest, and belly. The color should carry well down the hair shaft with an undercolor to match shadings. Eyes are to be brown, a ruby cast is permissible, but not desired. Genotype: aa B_ cchl cchl D_ E_.

Chocolate- The surface color is to be a medium chocolate over the entire rabbit and extending well down the hair shaft. The undercolor should be a dove-grey. Toe nails should all be a uniform dark brown. Eyes are to be brown, a ruby cast is permissible. Genotype: aa bb C_ D_ E_.

Siamese Sable- The surface color is to be a rich sepia brown on the head, ears, back, outside of lages, and the top of the tail. The surface color will fade to a lighter sepia on the sides, chest, belly, inside of legs, and the underside of the tail. Dark face is to fade from eyes to the jaws, and all blending of colors should be gradual and without blotches or streaks. The undercolor will be slightly lighter than the surface color. The eyes should be brown, and a ruby cast is permissible, but not desired. DQ: white underside of tail, martinized markings. Genotype: aa B_ cchl_ D_ E_.

Colors with a COD (as of Jan 2019):

Black: Has had one successful pass at 2018 Convention.

Blue.

Smoke Pearl.

Sable Point.

Blue Eyed White (BEW)

Color Crossing rules:

If using a BEW or vienna marked or vienna carrier for breeding, all kits in the litter must be marked as a VM, VC, or possible VC, even if they don't have any vienna marks. The reason for this is because vienna can hide for generations and then pop up again in a litter of show rabbits.

If breeding BEW, do not breed or buy anything chocolate or sable. Chocolate and sable have ruby casts to their eyes, and when bred to BEW, can cause BEWs to have a ruby cast. This is a DQ in BEW, and causes violet colored eyes.

Do not breed chocolate to sable. Chocolate sables look just like normal chocolates, and can be hard to tell apart.

General Breed Info:

Be prepared to grow lots of kits out. Most quality kits don't get their breaks until 5+ months. You will need to hang on to the good typed fuzzy kits until they shed out.

Do NOT pluck your Lionhead's coat to make it fit the standard. If you Lion has no break, don't "fix" it by plucking it. This is a form of altering your Lion's coat, and is illegal per ARBA rules.

Lionheads can be single (Mm) or double mane (MM). Single manes have one copy of the mane gene and tend to have shorter/thinner manes. They often lose their manes as they get older. Double manes have 2 copies of the mane gene. They usually have longer/thicker manes. Most keep their manes longer than a single mane. Unfortunately, due to the fact that these mane types can look very similar, the only way to be positive on mane type is when the rabbit is a kit. When they are about 3 days old, a double mane will have hairless sides, cause it to have a v-shape of fur on its back. A single mane (or maneless kit) will look like a normal kit, covered in fur. These differences only last until they get their fur completely in at about 1-2 weeks.

There are also Teddy Lionheads. This is a term breeders use to describe a Lionhead that has not shed out its wool on its back, face, and breaks. It will look kind of like a ball of wool. These Lions can be used in a breeding program, but care must be taken to not create more Teddies. The extra wool is caused by modifiers, it is not caused by the type of mane it has. Junior Lionheads may look like Teddies for a few months until their coats shed out.

Mane (M_) and wool (ll) are on separate genes. Thus, you can get a wooled, maned Lionhead. These are not accepted by ARBA, and should not be bred for.