

Bald n' Beautiful Sphynx - Our Story...

By C. Esmond Gay - Bald n' Beautiful Sphynx - 2004

The magnificent Sphynx are one of the most unique and unusual pedigree cats in the world - their naked, wrinkly beauty bewitched both Sarah and me, and we instantly fell in love with them. And so, distressed at being unable to buy a pet in Great Britain, we embarked upon a grand project; we imported 13 of the world's best from America and the Continent, and entered the UK Sphynx fancy with furore. We quickly became the pre-eminent breeders of these cats, rearing kittens, the likes of which have never been seen before on British shores.

Neither my fiancée, Sarah, nor I are newcomers to the cat fancy. Our names and our *Sarez* prefix are synonymous with the Bengal cat, and within that field we have accomplished goals and feats that most others can only dream of. Therefore, when we ventured into Sphynx breeding in 2000, we knew that we would be just as successful; diligence, attention to detail and a willingness to take risks and work hard, helps to fulfil all of one's ambitions. *And we didn't disappoint ourselves!*

Sarah and I love all cats, but were drawn to the Bengal and the Sphynx because they are truly extraordinary breeds that stand out from the crowd; the former because their close relative is the wild leopard cat, and the latter because they're utterly bald!

Some say that Sphynx are ugly, but I beg to differ: *beauty is in the eye of the beholder* - everyone has their own perception of what is pleasant and what's not, and personally, I find the



Champion Bald n' Beautiful Darcy (Sphynx Male) - 27th August 2001

Sphynx to be enchanting, with features more reminiscent of their majestic Egyptian namesake, rather than to Dobby from *Harry Potter*, as a few insist.

Members of this breed are statuesque and regal, and their graceful frames possess all the elegance of a swan. And not content with merely bestowing these attributes upon them, Mother Nature has also used their sleek bodies as her “canvas”, onto which she’s painted a myriad of rainbow colours, ranging from pale lilacs to deep blues and vibrant reds. Their delicately sculptured heads are adorned with huge crescent shaped ears, and their large, mesmerising eyes gaze with spellbinding affect upon their surroundings. And the fine down that envelops their bodies is so silky that when stroked, one feels as though one is caressing a warm, soft peach! Quite heavenly!

The history of the Sphynx breed is as remarkable as they are from a genetic point of view. Hairless cats may sound astonishing and quite unnatural, but they have been documented worldwide for over 100 years. They are a natural mutation, and the first attempt at a breeding programme took place in the 1960s in Canada, where a black and white shorthaired cat produced a hairless kitten. However, the subsequent breeding programme that ensued was not successful due to an inadequate gene pool, and was soon discontinued.



Chanel, Spring, Roger & Broken Tail - Circa October 2001

The Sphynx cats of today are descended from two spontaneous mutations from domestic cats, and since then, cat breeders in Europe and North America have bred the Sphynx to normal coated cats and then back to hairless ones for more than thirty years, with the purpose of creating a genetically sound cat with a large gene pool and hybrid vigour. To date, the Americans are by far the best breeders of Sphynx as there are quite a lot of these cats on this vast continent, and they are robust with few health or genetic problems. But in Britain there is a much smaller gene pool and so inbreeding frequently takes place, inevitably at the expense of the kitten’s health.

Sarah and I first saw photographs of the Sphynx about 10 years ago. I remember feeling surprised at the sight of this rather odd-looking and fragile creature, but that simply made them more appealing to me as I love anything that is a little different. After the initial shock,

almost everyone comes round and sees them as the beautiful animals they are, and I did just that, and soon my fiancée and I wanted one... *but only as a pet.*

However, we quickly found it wasn’t as easy as that. It appeared that those in the British Sphynx fancy feared that we wanted to mate one to a Bengal cat and create a new breed - *we didn’t!* We learnt that even at the best of times, these people jealously guard their cats and that it’s almost unheard of for a breeding female to be sold outside of their close-knit

circles. Apparently they don't want the competition, so much so that the number of breeders in our country had barely increased over the many years that we monitored them. We explained that we just wanted a little neutered boy, yet still they spurned us.

But over the years, Sarah and I persevered. Sometimes we would become disillusioned and give up on our dream, only to return to it a while later as images of our own Sphynx running around our home, pushed their way back into our minds. This cycle continued on and on, and we made a lot of phone calls and searched for many hours, but all to no avail.

And then in January 2000, we finally lost our patience; we became infuriated with the Sphynx fancy, and decided that we would look further afield and import our own - *but not just a pet anymore...* we decided to break Britain's unjust Sphynx monopoly by becoming breeders ourselves. We became excited, remembering the exhilaration we had felt as we planned and built our Bengal breeding programme years earlier. We adored breeding cats and were good at it, so why not another rare pedigree feline, too?



Roger Remington (Sphynx Stud) - Circa Oct. 2001

We could have saved ourselves tens of thousands of pounds by importing from Europe under the pet passport scheme, as that would have cut out the vast quarantine and shipping costs. But money wasn't our concern - we wanted the best cats in the world and were willing to pay whatever it took to get them... *and so we turned to America, the forerunners of the worldwide Sphynx fancy.* We felt that it was there that we find the most perfect animals, the most naked, the friendliest and the healthiest. And we believed that they could supply us with pedigree lines that were not already in Britain; we wanted our cats to bring in valuable new blood which would help stop inbreeding, thus creating healthier Sphynx in our country. And we needed a large choice of cats so that they would all be as unrelated as possible, as we didn't want to rely on the bloodlines of any other British Sphynx breeder.



Champion Forgotten Bleu (Sphynx Female) - 9th May 2001

And so Sarah and I wrote about 200 emails and sent them to every major Sphynx breeder in the America. *The response was amazing.* Many sympathised with our exclusion from the British Sphynx fancy and wanted to help. We ploughed through reams of pedigrees, examining everything carefully. We scrutinised photo after photo, sometimes

using a magnifying glass to spot the slightest traces of hair. It took us months to decide which respondents were most suitable and whose cats fitted our strict criteria, but eventually we made our choices.█

The first was Dr. James Thoene of *Sanspelo Sphynx*, a prominent American geneticist and one of the countries most illustrious breeders. Sarah and I knew that this gentleman was different to the norm, as his outstanding genetic knowledge was evident from his complex emails. And he's also a careful breeder, and never simply puts two cats



Safira (Sphynx Female) - 28th June 2001

together as many do; instead he first studies the genetics of each proposed mating to work out the most compatible cats, and only then will he undertake a pairing. Another attraction



Broken Tail (Sphynx Female) - Circa May 2001

was that he seemed so similar to us in the way that he cares for his animals; he treats them as one would one's own children. All these factors have made his lines highly prized all over the world - *and Sarah and I wanted them!*

Until then, he had refused to sell his kittens to any British breeders, but because he had already heard of our groundbreaking work with the Bengal cat, he agreed to sell us some kittens. However, by this time, we had fallen in love with

his breeding adults because we realised that we could do far more, far quicker with these proven, top show quality cats. And so every day we badgered him and eventually he agreed to sell us six of the most important cats he had ever bred.

Sarah and I were ecstatic... the first part of our new Sphynx breeding project had begun!

Another American breeder who we bought two cats from was Stacy Aubuchon of *Classytouch Sphynx*, a lady celebrated for her exceptional show quality cats. And we also managed to find a female from a European line that was not already in Britain, and so we bought her, too. In total, we



Champion Style (Sphynx Female) - 19th July 2004



Red Dawn (Sphynx Female) - 28th June 2001

bought two males and seven females, in an array of different colours; and when the agreements were signed and the cats arrived on our shores in October 2000, years of searching and heartache was finally over!

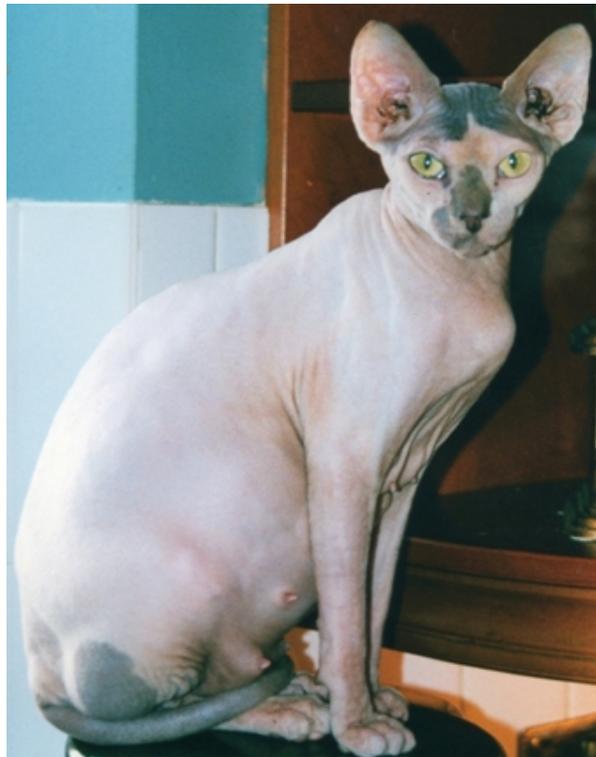
Some of our new females were also pregnant to other males when they were exported as this had been part of the sales agreement, and so a number of beautiful babies were born in quarantine, and deposits were taken before they were even a few weeks old. Many other British people had also been

excluded from the fancy, and as most could not afford the astronomical costs of importing, they flocked to us - *we had opened up the previously un-enterable Sphynx fancy.*

Our breeding programme was so successful that in 2003 we imported several more American Sphynx, again from *Classytouch*, and also from the world renowned *Bareangels* cattery. And again, none were related to each other or to our existing cats.

In total, we bought the following adults (in order of adoption):

- 1) **Quadruple Grand Champion Sanspelo Stargazer**, a blue mink and white stud.
- 2) *Sanspelo Always Springtime*, a blue and white female.
- 3) *Sanspelo Red Dawn*, a red tabby and white female.
- 4) *Sanspelo Broken Tail*, a brown tortie female.
- 5) **Champion Sanspelo Forgotten Bleu**, a blue and white female.
- 6) **Champion Sanspelo Chanel**, a seal mink female.
- 7) *Classytouch Roger Remington*, a black and white stud.
- 8) *Classytouch Matryona*, a black and white female.
- 9) *Safira d'Anjou*, a black tabby and white female.
- 10) **Champion Classytouch Sapphire Eyes**, a red mink and white female.
- 11) **Champion Classytouch N Style**, a calico female.
- 12) *Classytouch White Lace*, a white female.
- 13) *Bareangels K.J.*, a calico female.



Always Springtime (Sphynx Female) - Circa June 2001



Ch. Chanel (Sphynx Female) - Circa April 2001

walks away; instead I work and work until I find another one to open. And it is ironic that those who wanted to keep this beautiful breed to themselves, ended up forcing us into becoming the most significant breeders of Sphynx in Britain - within a short space of time, Sarah and I owned the largest collection and most diverse gene pool in the country.

And life with these cats is more delightful than we could ever have imagined! They're gentle and patient, they're extremely intelligent and very playful. And one would be hard pressed to find a more affectionate breed... they seem to fall in love with anyone who strokes them! And even though they may look fragile and delicate, in reality ones that are from good lines are as hardy and healthy as other pedigree cats are.

We also used to wonder how they'd cope with the British weather, but soon found that Sphynx are resilient and that if it's warm enough for us, then it's warm enough for them. Anyway, when they do feel cold, ours find a nice warm lap or they cuddle up to us under the sheets at night - *we have no need for an electric blanket anymore... these cats are our purring, "suede hot water bottles"!*

We're so proud of our cats and will be eternally grateful to those who gave us the privilege of adopting their breathtaking animals. *And Sarah and I are proud of ourselves, too* - for refusing to take "no" for an answer, and for fighting for our dream, taking all necessary risks and any expense, in order to achieve it. And the results are our beautiful, imported cats whose blood will aid the health, the gene pool and the quality of *all*

And true to the word of the breeders who sold us the cats, many of the kittens that we've since bred have won numerous prizes in Britain, including:

- 1) *Bald n' Beautiful Darcy - **Champion.***
- 2) *Bald n' Beautiful Jen-Isis - **Best in Show.***
- 3) *Bald n' Beautiful Imotepsrunnibare - **Best in Show.***
- 4) *Bald n' Beautiful Desert Red - **Best in Show.***

Some of the British Sphynx breeders were annoyed at what we had done, but we had already experienced the wrath of bitter Bengal breeders over our other achievements, and so we were not perturbed. We had been pushed into this. Once a door has been closed in my face, I am *not* the sort of person who simply



Kitten Gay & Bald n' Beautiful Manky - 2nd March 2001



Q.G.C. Stargazer (Sphynx Stud) - 23rd July 2001

Sphynx in Britain for many years to come; cats deemed to be so important that even those who at first refused to sell to us, now want to be a part of what we are doing and want our lines.

And our kittens have made the dreams of many other British Sphynx lovers come true as well, and that gives us great satisfaction. Sarah and I have no regrets... except perhaps, that we did not import these astonishing cats 10 years ago! And even though we

never set out to become Sphynx breeders, now that we are, we relish every second of it!

The Sphynx's outrageous look is their attraction, and is what draws devotees from all corners of the globe. And with just one stroke of their luxurious hairless skin, even their most seasoned of detractors are instantly silenced... and smitten!

The prefix that Sarah and I chose for our Sphynx breeding programme, truly sums up these fascinating creatures - they are bald and beautiful... and so much more...

C. Esmond Gay

Bald n' Beautiful Sphynx

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Dedicated to all our Sphynx

Retirement Addition (2008)

Sarah and I accomplished a great deal during the 4 years that we bred Sphynx. However, looking after our many animals entailed working up to 18 hours a day, 7 days a week, and with few breaks or holidays. In hindsight, we took on too much as the enormous stress that we put ourselves under took its toll on us mentally, emotionally and physically. By 2004, we were suffering from severe exhaustion and so reluctantly, we retired. We hoped for a quieter life in Latin America, living and working with their endangered cats.

Our larger wild felines went to wildlife parks, our rescued animals went to sanctuaries and private homes, many of our Bengals and leopard cats went to Pauline and Frank Turnock of Gayzette Bengals, whilst our Sphynx went to an established breeder.

For the short time they were with us, our Sphynx cats made a huge impression on us. They were loving, they were a pleasure to be around, and it was an honour and a privilege to share part of my life with them. I miss them deeply, but am grateful for the few years they graced our home... *and for the fond memories that they've left me with.*

C. Esmond Gay