

## The Surprising Reappearance of the Argente Brun Rabbit

According to history\*, the Argente Brun rabbit breed was seen in Europe during the late 1800's and stayed relatively popular for a number of years in several European countries, particularly in France and Germany. In 1920 the breed was introduced to fanciers in England and it was popular for some time but unfortunately as is often the case, when other new breeds became fashionable, interest waned and Brun disappeared. However, beginning around 1939 thanks to the dedication and efforts of a British fancier Mr. H.D. Dowle, the breed was once again recreated. Using Argente Crème and Bleu bloodlines along with some introductions of Havana and possibly Brown Beveren, after a few generations the Brun was back. I'm not sure about the actual appearance of this newly created animal because of the agouti influence of the Crème. Was the silver ticking evident over the entire pelt or did a creamy underbelly and tail prevail? The British Rabbit Council breed standard called for it to be an attractive, evenly and entirely silvered chocolate variety of the Argente group, similar in size and other characteristics to the Bleu, Crème and Noir. As is the case now, the better known Champagne was quite a bit larger with slightly softer and more open coat and therefore these were apparently not part of the new breed development. I can only assume that along with Bleu, the Beveren and Havana influence and some creative breeding, the mission was accomplished.

Unlike Mr. Dowel's imaginative and time-consuming efforts, my discovery of the Argente Brun was purely by accident. In 2005, contained in a litter of seven Champagnes, was a male chocolate coloured kit.... What a surprise! Having read a British standard for the breed sometime earlier I recognized that this youngster was quite special. Interestingly, in later discussions with respected and well-travelled Canadian and ARBA licensed rabbit judge Mr. Bob Shaftoe, I learned that this had occurred occasionally in various Champagne litters throughout North America with the off coloured young being disposed of as useless. I had been breeding this particular strain of Champagnes for a number of years with no newly introduced animals and off coloured young had never appeared before. A subsequent litter from the same pair produced two more little chocolates, this time a brother and sister. As time progressed, the original chocolate buck was mated to his mother resulting in several more chocolate youngsters and the "new" old breed was becoming established. The name Argente Brun was retained in the interest of worldwide consistency. And to be consistent, it was also decided that the breed was to be developed with weight and size similar to the North American Argente Crème.

These original Bruns exceeded the proposed standard weights and also failed in the colour of their undercoat. While the surface colour looked acceptable the undercolour was quite light and could at best be described as light tan. My initial plan to help strengthen the depth of colour was to introduce some additional chocolate genes from either Havanas or Satins into the mix. Finding neither easily available I used an oversized but deeply coloured chocolate Mini-Rex buck on some of my existing Brun does. The results were dramatic and while the F 1 generation was quite dark, two required elements were accomplished even in the first litters. First the size was reduced to weights approximating the Argente Crème and second the change in undercolour to the required 'chocolate' was immediately evident. It has been noticed that in subsequent litters F 2 and beyond, a small percentage of the progeny moult out to retain a much darker overall appearance. These are too dark to make ideal showroom specimens but

have proven most useful as breeders to maintain good colour depth as the work in progress proceeds.

The next step was to create a standard for the breed and to hopefully have it accepted by the DR&CBA as a recognized rabbit breed that could compete in Canadian shows and to pique the interest of other fanciers. My favourite definition of a breed standard is; *"A written description of the traits and physical makeup of the breeds' ideal specimen, generally based on form and function".*

In starting this part of the project with animals already available, it occurred to me that there was really two ways to write a new standard. That is, **to describe them as they are** or better still, **to describe them as they should be**. The first course, designing the standard to fit what was already there, seemed like it would be cheating and too easy. Therefore I thought it better to describe the breed as it should be and then work to develop animals to fit the description. Existing breed standards from other countries, principally European, were used as a guide keeping in mind the need to compliment current North American Champagne & Crème versions

After about four years, I'm quite pleased with the progress made to date. The Bruns have proven adaptable and current specimens are approaching the standard which after much discussion and minor revisions, was accepted by the DR&CBA standards committee in 2008. Furthermore, I'm delighted to say that several fanciers here in Canada are currently working on the breed and there is quite a growing interest from breeders south of the border. Acceptance of a new rabbit breed by the ARBA in the United States is a lengthy procedure but from conversations I've had there is at least one breeder who plans to begin the process.



**My Original Argente Brun**

**~~ And to think, one little chocolate kit started this wild ride ~~**

Ed White 2009

\*Domestic Rabbits & Their Histories- Bob D. Whitman