

Standards of excellence for judging pet rats

Pet rats are judged against 5 areas. These areas are weighted with the rat's temperament and tractability (its personality) making up 55% of the score and the rat's health, preparation and condition (its physical characteristics) accounting for the remaining 45%. The areas are as follows;

Tractability (15%)

A tractable rat is easily handled, straightforward to pick up and yields to human hands. It will demonstrate a friendly and relaxed disposition when approached in the tank, and will not resist being lifted out.

Degrees of intractability are demonstrated by:

- Defensive or offensive posturing in the tank, and "warning off" behaviours.
- Skittish behaviour, including excessive shying, avoidance or running away from human hands.
- Vocalising protest when picked up.
- Tense or resistant posture when picked up.
- Aggression, including nips and bites.

Notes

A perfectly tractable rat is completely at ease and cheerful inside the tank, responds favourably to all advances made by the judge, is relaxed and enthusiastic about being lifted out.

Tractability should not be confused with extremely quiet and docile temperament. A busy and explorative rat can also be completely tractable.

If the judge is unable to get a rat out of the show tank after several attempts (and the rat will not come out voluntarily), it should be removed from the show bench and returned to its owner via the show secretary.

Rats should be approached with verbal cues. This will avoid the rat being startled and acting out of character.

Rats should be approached gently and respectfully, and where a rat is startled by environmental factors (like grating show tank lids) it should be given a minute or two to calm down before being assessed.

Health (10%)

The rat should be completely free from signs of stress, injury or ill health. These include:

- Porphyrin staining around the eyes and nose, or staining of the coat.
- Infestation of lice.
- Scabs under the chin or around the head and shoulders, indicating an outbreak of mites.
- Hair loss with underlying skin changes, redness or sores.
- Lumps of any size or position, including cysts, abscesses and tumours.
- Repetitive sneezing.
- Laboured or noisy breathing.
- Fresh wounds or healing wounds. Fully healed operation sites where the coat is sparser should not be penalised in terms of health.
- Discharge or bleeding from anywhere on the body.



Notes

Health issues which do not pose an immediate risk to the rat, or to other rats present, may be penalised and noted and the rat may continue on the bench. Any problem which is likely to deteriorate, needs immediate attention, or poses a threat to the other rats, should result in the rat being returned to the owner via the show secretary immediately.

Rats with permanent disabilities that can clearly be shown not to be acute problems (such as only one eye or a tail amputation) may be shown in the pet section and should not be penalised for their disabilities.

Preparation (10%)

Preparation is taken to be an indicator of relationship between the pet rat and their owner. Preparation should include:

- Overall cleanliness – it is not necessary for rats to be bathed prior to entry into a show but they should be presented in a clean condition. Most rats kept in hygienic conditions will keep themselves reasonably clean.
- Tail – free from grease and grime. A rat will often neglect its tail when grooming and the owner may need to help out in this area.
- Nails – short or show signs of having been trimmed.

Notes

A perfectly prepared rat should be clean, with a clean tail and short blunt nails (although nails can sometimes feel sharp despite having been trimmed).

A rat with a stained or dirty coat, long sharp nails and a dirty tail should be noted as having no preparation.

Pigmented rats have more pigment in their tails than paler varieties. This should not be confused with dirt.

Condition (25%)

- Overall fitness: The rat should have good muscle tone, and look bright and alert with clear, bright eyes. They should have abundant energy and vitality. Older rats will naturally be slower, but should still be fit, active and well toned.
- Weight: The rat should be a good weight for its build; neither underweight nor overweight.
- Coat: The hair should be short, smooth and glossy. Greasy, long, dry, thinning coats and dandruff reflect lack of condition. Rex coats are wavy or curly, but should still have a good quality to them. Thinning in older rexes is acceptable. Some orange buck grease is normal at skin level. Bucks should naturally have a coarser coat than does.
- Skin: The rat should be well hydrated, and the skin clear and free from dryness or flakiness. This includes the tail, which should be smooth and not excessively dry or scaly. Rex rat tails will feel rougher due to the curled hair.

Notes

Where lack of condition exists to a degree that is likely to indicate an immediate underlying health or dietary problem, the judge should inform the show secretary so that the owner is aware of the problem on the show day and able to discuss it if needed.

It is expected that judges use the critique form to highlight any potential condition issues that might affect the rat's long term health, such as obesity or dry skin, etc.

Temperament (40%)

Excellent temperament will be a combination of a number of positive temperamental traits (see below). A rat who scores well on temperament must demonstrate a happiness to interact with the judge as well as other desirable behaviours. It is down to the judge's discretion how important each of these traits are to them, provided they judge the rats consistently throughout.

Interactive behaviours

- The rat is relaxed and at ease, regardless of whether it is active or settled with the judge.
- The rat seeks interaction with the humans present.
- The rat demonstrates a desire to engage with the humans present by behaviours such as exploration (of the judge), eye contact, mouth contact, grooming, licking, bruxing and returning to the judge after exploratory excursions.

Positive temperament traits

- Curiosity: A well-adjusted rat is usually curious and investigative.
- Confidence: When a rat is relaxed and comfortable they will demonstrate self-assurance and boldness.
- Friendliness: An excellent pet rat will be amiable, affectionate and enthusiastic in relating to people.
- Calmness: Some confident rats are extremely relaxed and calm.
- 'Humour' and cheerfulness: Some rats are natural comedians, and are extremely entertaining.
- Flexibility: A well-adjusted rat should be able to adjust to the demands of the situation.
- Reliability: An excellent pet rat (when treated respectfully) should remain pleasant and reliable, showing no negative temperament traits.

Negative temperament traits

- Indifference/lack of focus: The rat doesn't care whether a human is there or not. A very active or apathetic rat might become completely distracted. The rat isn't in any way focused on relating to the judge.
- Caution or fear: Some rats will cling to humans because they lack confidence or are afraid. If the rat is 'cuddly' it should also be confident, not cautious or fearful.
- Reluctance: The rat is difficult to engage or shows signs of mistrusting the judge.
- Unresponsive: The rat doesn't respond positively to any advances made by the judge.
- Grumpiness or unreliability: The rat should not demonstrate any defensive or aggressive behaviour.

Notes

Willingness to 'cuddle' should not be used as the sole measure of interaction. Some very interactive rats do not stay still for very long. Some rats that appear quiet and cuddly may be bored, scared or looking for reassurance because they are uncomfortable with the situation.

If a rat is distressed to the point of aggression towards the judge, it should be removed from the show bench and returned to its owner via the show secretary.

Special awards

There are seven special awards for the Pet section; four to reward positive temperament traits (Most engaging, Most relaxed, Most confident, Most affectionate) and three for physical characteristics (Best coat condition, Best overall fitness, Best presented).

