

Ferret Showtime In Japan

Enthusiastic ferret owners in Japan show off their pets at two championship shows.

By Scarlett Gray-Saling

Konichiwa (or “Hello”)! Most of you know of the ferret shows in the United States, but did you know Japan also has ferret shows? Japan is not a large country and space is at a premium. Ferrets, with their engaging personalities, quiet nature and small space requirements, make a perfect pet in Japan. Ferrets are so popular that the Japanese Ferret Association (JFA) puts on two ferret shows a year. The 2006 Fall JFA show in Kobe was the 15th show in eight years.

Setting The Scene

The ferret show day is on a Sunday as most Japanese work on Saturdays. Early morning finds excited ferret owners outside the large convention center show hall with their ferrets in carriers or small cages. They wait in line for the vet techs in neat lab coats to examine each ferret and verify vaccination records. Yes, they have epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE) and Aleutian disease virus (ADV) in Japan, so vet techs and judges take the precaution of cleaning with a parvocide between ferrets.

Once inside the ferret show hall, everyone finds a place to set up at tables in the center. Their cages are similar to those in the U.S., mostly one-level styles. I suspect many are their cages from home, too. American-style playpens are just starting to show up. As in the United States, hammocks are the popular mode of bedding. In most litter boxes you see a white beaded cat litter or just absorbent pads. Some litter boxes are two-piece sieves with newspaper or an absorbent pad in the bottom section. Wood pellet litter is unheard of in Japan.

The ratio of owners to ferrets shown is higher than at most U.S. shows because most ferret owners in Japan only have one to two ferrets. Most of the approximately 190 ferrets entered in the championship classes are also entered into a specialty ring. The show hall is not crowded but all tables are occupied and there is walk-in traffic throughout the day.

On With The Ferret Judging

With few actual ferret breeders in Japan, there are less breeder and late-alter ferrets shown. So, due to the larger number of early alter/companion entries, JFA's championship rings are set up differently. The Breeder Class consists of about 30 to 35 whole ferrets, with adults and kits grouped together. Late-alters number about the same. Companion ferret classes are broken down to Companion Adult Hobs, Companion Adult Jills, Companion Adolescents and Companion Seniors, with 15 to 35 ferrets in each class.

The excitement builds throughout the day as the ferrets are judged. As each ring's top 10 is called, proud owners literally run up with their ferret and eagerly wait. When their number is called, owners walk up and politely bow to the judge as they take the ribbon and, hopefully, a trophy, too. The pride and joy along with occasional tears of happiness show on each face, no matter where their ferret places.

Specialty Rings consist mostly of the same ferret coat colors we have — sable, champagne, etc. They call their mutt class “fancy color.” Their point (Siamese) is split into American Point (less defined) and Southern (New Zealand) Point (more defined).

One unique specialty is the Angora ferret because they are more common in Japan than the United States. Angora ferrets' coat colors are similar but are distinguished by their longer, silkier hair. Angoras are judged on coat quality, not by their color. Physically Challenged and Super Senior specialties are judged on conformation (structure) because they can be any color or pattern. There is no Shelter specialty because Japan has few, if any, ferret-specific shelters.

The Japanese take their Costume Contest very much to heart. Owners line up and hold their “dressed” ferrets as judges make their decision. Some owners do group themes, such as Peter Pan with Tinkerbell, Wendy and Captain Hook (complete with the crocodile). It ranges from brides and grooms, to “school” kits complete with school bags and uniforms, to frilly dresses and hats of all colors. Bo Peep is complete with sheep, bunnies and so much more. Such variety! The ferrets are so adorable. My favorites were the geisha ferrets and the mermaid. I don't know how they can choose a winner.

Let There Be Shopping!

Shopping at a ferret show is a favorite for any ferret lover, but shopping at the Japanese shows is an experience. Vendors line the outside walls and everyone is polite and helpful. Some English is spoken, and if communication falters, they



quickly find someone to help you.

With so many unique items from little stuffed ferrets, handcrafted clay ferrets, dangles and attire for you and them, the hard part is choosing. Anime is big in Japan and one vendor has purses, bags, "ferret in car" signs, stickers and T-shirts all in cute, round-eye anime-style. Little animals and cartoon characters that dangle from cell phones or purses are very popular. So, of course, there are ferret ones in a variety of colors. Need a new outfit for the Costume Contest? There are plenty of those too!

Everyone Attends!

Universally, ferret owners have no age, gender or social boundaries. Attire is casual to punk and you even see men in business suits and women in dresses and heels. Though I have to admit, seeing a grown man in a business suit gently holding an obviously loved little ferret dressed in a cute frilly dress is priceless.

Smile For The Camera

Photo-taking is an event. Pictures are taken of the 1st through 3rd place ferrets and owners with ribbons and trophies. 1st place and Best in Show photos include the judges. After the official photos, friends and family all crowd in to take pictures also.

A Common Bond

As with ferret shows in the United States, the show goes on the whole day. There is plenty to keep you busy. You can buy raffle tickets for a chance to win ferret-related items donated by vendors and individuals, cast your vote in the photo contest from the board full of cute photos submitted by owners or just sit and watch the people, ferrets and judging.

The Fall 2006 show in Kobe was my 8th JFA show. Each time, I delight in how friendly and helpful everyone is. I enjoy seeing familiar faces, talking to old friends and making new ones. Just walking around the show hall, you see ferrets being carried on people's shoulders, hanging out of carry sacks, held like sleeping babies and dressed in costumes.

Everywhere, you see ferret lovers talking to other ferret lovers, laughing, showing off their ferrets just like any other ferret event. Language barrier? There is none when you share a common bond — ferret love. All ferrets are icheban, No. 1, in any language!