

JUNIORS RULE

I stated in a previous article, the odds of junior age rabbits winning major shows (i.e. Convention) in the fall is pretty great. Over the last ten years, junior age rabbits have won more conventions than their 6-8 or senior counterparts. This past ARBA Convention is no exception. Why are junior age rabbits or should junior age rabbits be this competitive? The junior age rabbits shown today have the look and maturity of our senior age rabbits.

In my opinion, rarely should juniors' have the kind of balance that they possess today. This age group of rabbit is just too young and is not nor should not have fully developed bodies. Show me a perfectly balanced junior and I'll show you a rabbit that will rarely make senior weight and if it does, it will more than likely lack total balance as a senior. I do not believe the pioneers of our breed intended for our junior age New Zealand's to look like senior age rabbits.

Junior age rabbits are under developed or should be under developed versions of our senior group. Yet, many juniors exhibited to date already possess senior body conformation with fully developed shoulder, midsection and hindquarter at a young age (5-6 months). If a junior looks that mature as a baby, it will surely have shoulders wider than it's hindquarters as a mature 6-8 and senior. Where is the balance?

We forget about the natural development of a rabbit. There is not an animal on earth that develops its' body parts at the same time or rate. In fact, the shoulder region of an animal is the last area of the body to develop. So why is it that we mistake the underdeveloped region (shoulders) in juniors for weak shoulders? We should recognize that our juniors should not look like a block but more like a wedge as juniors, with our goal of a slightly tapered rabbit from front to rear as a senior.

Our goal as stated in our standard is for balance. Greater emphasis for shoulder development should be in our 6-8's and seniors where maturity is expected. If we truly believe and breed rabbits to meet our standard, rarely should a true junior win Best or Best Opposite of Breed.

I believe we need to encourage our judges to re-evaluate their expectations of junior age New Zealand's and remember that our standard describes the mature version of our breed. If this is not the case, then why show juniors, 6-8's and seniors separately? As breeders we also have a responsibility to emphasize this difference in maturity and not expect young rabbits to look the part of seniors. I have always watched one of the top breeders, Mr. Robert Crawford. Mr. Crawford rarely showed strong juniors, but these same rabbits grew into super 6-8 and senior age rabbits that possessed the balance described in our standard and that won under many judges.

In my opinion, juniors should not rule.

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