

# Rats combat image problem at fair

■ Rodents take center stage at Rat, Mouse and Hamster Fanciers Show

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PLEASANTON — "All right you dirty rats."

It's famous lines like that — attributed to James Cagney — that have given rats a bum rap, rodent supporters insist.

Rats and mice make perfect pets, said Sylvia Butler of Danville and Sylver Marsh of Alamo, who are members of the Rat, Mouse and Hamster Club.

They and some of their top rodents took part in the Rat, Mouse and Hamster Fancier Show at the Alameda County Fair on Sunday. The exhibit may have been burrowed deep in the Small Animal Pavilion, but it was no Micky Mouse affair.

Rats and mice suffer from terrible stereotypes and negative connotations, said Marsh, who would probably like to find the rat fink who started nibbling away at their fine reputations.

The rodents need very little care and take up very little room, she said, adding that they're ideal pets if you live in an apartment.

Plus, they're very affectionate and attentive pets, Marsh said. Unlike hamsters — which are anti-social animals — rats and mice are very social, she said, gnawing away at another misconception.

"Kids really love them," Butler added. Several youths who come by her pet shop in Danville have loads of fun with the rats, Marsh said. One girl loves to dress up her rat in Barbie doll clothes.

Of course, the rodents on dis-



ANNA MARIE REMEDIOS — Staff

Sylver Marsh of Alamo holds Jerry, her Agoutie hooded rat, at the Alameda County Fair on Sunday.

play weren't the garden variety rodents that can be found, well, er, in the garden. Some of the rats Butler has at her shop are imported from England, she said.

The rats entered in exhibits are the product of precise and intricate breeding, said Butler, who is vice president of the club. Each breed must meet certain criteria regarding color, health, general care and disposition.

As an example, Marsh pointed out a Blue-hooded rat, which must have blue-gray hair on its head with a long streak of the same color ex-

tending down its shoulders, over its back and to its tail. The rest of the rat's hair was white.

The rat Marsh pointed to was almost perfect, except that the blue-gray streak on its back was broken up by some white hairs, she said. It will take two more generations of breeding to get a rat with a complete streak of blue-gray hair.

To an aficionado, that rat may not be perfect, but for 3-year-old Alexis Clore, it was a cute, furry creature. She went from cage to cage oohing and aching at the little, finger-sized mice and palm-sized

rats.

"She loves it," said her mom, Karen Clore of San Leandro. She was somewhat surprised to walk into the Small Animal Pavilion and find rodents.

Because she was a hamster owner when she was a child, Clore would have no qualms letting her daughter have a pet rodent, she said.

The only reason why Clore said she wouldn't get one is because she feared her daughter would lose interest and she would end up taking care of the rat herself.