

CHAPTER 6

Type, Colour and Markings

For all varieties of fancy mice the ideal 'type' — that is, bodily form as distinct from colour or markings — is the same. The required type is specified in the introduction to the official *Standards for Fancy Mice* of the National Mouse Club as follows:

'The mouse must be long in body, with long clean head, not too fine or pointed at the nose, the eyes should be large, bold and prominent, the ears large and tulip shaped, free from creases, carried erect with plenty of width between them. The body should be long and slim, a trifle arched over the loin, and racy in appearance; the tail, which must be free from kinks, should come well out of the back and be thick at the root or set-on, gradually tapering like a whiplash to a fine end; the length being about equal to that of the mouse's body . . .'

This description was drawn up many years ago and is today somewhat behind the times — that is to say, it no longer does full justice to the current ideal, although its interpretation in modern terms is understood clearly enough by judges and exhibitors. For example, good show specimens today are not only 'long and slim' and 'racy in appearance' but also strong in bone, and good loin development could no longer be adequately described as a 'trifle' arched. A 'long clean head, not too fine or pointed at the nose' is still the ideal, but the best specimens today are notable for breadth as well as length of skull, with width between the eyes as well as between the ears, and good distance from ears to eyes. Lengthwise, the skull should have a curved, roman nose formation, terminating in a broad muzzle. The set-on of the tail is also of even greater importance today than when the Standards were first framed: not only must the tail be 'thick at the root' but its junction with the backbone must form the apex of a well-defined triangle based on the flanks. Although the Standard states that the length of the tail should be 'about

equal' to that of the body, it usually exceeds that length in winning exhibits today. By 'tulip shaped' ears the fancier understands that they should stand straight out from the skull without any folds or wrinkles, and without tendency to flatten back, as is the habit of wild mice. 'Large, bold and prominent' eyes are as important as ever, and can be of great advantage to an exhibit that is sound in other respects.

The introduction to the Standards goes on to specify that 'the coat should be short, perfectly smooth, glossy and sleek to the hand'. These qualities derive partly from physical condition — of which more will be said in chapter 10 — but they also depend to some extent on the absence of coarse projecting hairs, which are an inherited defect. The coat should also cover the body densely, including the underparts, without sparse patches in the groins, or the 'armpits' of the forelegs, or around the roots of the ears. The whiskers at the muzzle should be well-developed — long and straight, except in the *Astrex* variety (see p.42) in which they must be curly.

Size is of prime importance today, although it is not mentioned in the Standard description. In fact, an undersized exhibit stands little chance in open competition however good it may be in other respects; and subject to other considerations of type the general rule is 'the bigger the better'.

Females usually measure up to the Standard requirements of type and size more readily than males, and with the possible exception of the Marked varieties a large number of the mice exhibited are does. Bucks often excel in strength of skull, but they usually lack width at the loins and are less 'arched' than does: they also tend to be less fine in coat, which is a competitive disadvantage (especially in the *Self* varieties). Adult does are usually at their best as regards type and size after their first litters, and between subsequent litters — provided, of course, that they are not overworked in this respect.

The forty-odd different varieties recognized by the National Mouse Club are divided into four groups: *Sels* — that is, varieties with one uniform colour of coat throughout; *Tans* — with one colour on the upper part of the body con-