



PHOTO BY RACHEL MAYFIELD

A champion is more than a face and a coat—a champion has heart.

Some pig

Two days. Forty-seven competitors. One winner. The Open Cavy Competition at the California State Fair was a tense affair. Ears were examined, fur was brushed, noses inspected—but only one entry racked up enough points to take home the Golden Bear and claim the title of “Best in Show.”

The guinea pig in question—the terms “cavy” and “guinea pig” are interchangeable—is a lithe, cream-colored American boar with a cool, laid-back vibe. He **doesn't** have a name, but that only makes him more mysterious.

Originally hailing from Texas, the winning cavy was purchased by Sacramento County resident Steven Belcher from his previous handler. Belcher, who in 2016 entered a guinea pig that took the same award, has been participating in cavy competitions for 10 years. He caught the guinea pig bug from his girlfriend, a cavy veteran he would accompany to different shows. One day, Belcher found himself in a Petco face-to-face with a guinea pig he couldn't resist. The rest is history.

According to Belcher, judges follow the American Rabbit Breeders Association's Standard of Perfection, which gives detailed descriptions for what each of 13 recognized breeds should look like, and the number of points assigned for each feature. Among many factors, the newly-crowned cavy likely won for his smooth, high-sheen coat and exquisite brow.

Next up for the state's hottest cavy? Reno, where cavyes across the country will compete at a national ARBA convention in October. While Belcher isn't fully confident they'll take home first place, he believes that, at the very least, the cavy champ will be a contender.

SN&R caught the bold, bright-eyed competitor for a brief Q&A following the awards ceremony. The following interview actually transpired, and the responses are interpreted by SN&R as earnestly as possible.

How does it feel to be named the best guinea pig in the state of California?

The elegant, stately victor scrambles across the length of the table, nose twitching. The excitement

appears to affect him, but it's hard to know for sure when he hasn't even answered the question yet.

Just tell us what's going through your head right now.

He continues to scurry along, seemingly aware that all eyes are on him. He may enjoy carrots, but it's the limelight that feeds him. At least, that's what he would probably say if he spoke.

What's your secret to winning over a judge?

A flash of the rear indicates his potentially waning interest. There are people on the other side of the countertop who offer to pet him—and they don't ask too many questions.

What does it take to be a fierce competitor?

The ivory-hued champ turns around, his shapely ears moving, only slightly.

Has there ever been a moment where a rival guinea pig got under your skin?

He seems to scoff at the question. “How could anyone get under a pelt this lustrous?” ... is what he might say if he could scoff or speak.

How do you mentally prepare for a competition?

No response.

Any rituals? Superstitions?

The slender boar stops in his tracks. He lifts his head and sniffs the air cautiously.

Do you have a playlist you like to listen to beforehand, to pump you up?

His whiskers quiver—but to be fair, his whiskers quiver a lot, making it difficult to ascertain whether he understands the question.

How do you envision the future of cavy competitions?

His crimson eyes brighten under the warm light. Such curious orbs—they seem to harbor not only a passion for pageantry, but an infinite wisdom and mystical omniscience beyond human comprehension.

Congratulations on securing a win. Anything else you'd like to add?

Another twitch of the nose indicates that this interview is pretty much over.

Thanks for your time. Good luck! □



BY TONY GEMIGNANI

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