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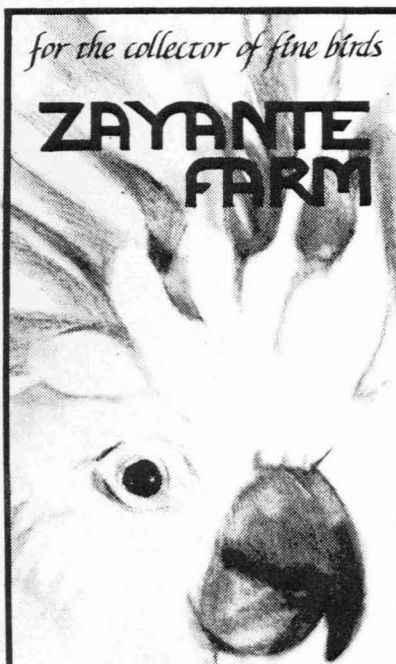
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What is an American Singer Canary?

by John V. Bassett, Jr.
Official American Singer Judge
Westminster, MD

In accordance with the Constitution and By-laws of the American Singers Club, Inc., the American Singer Canary is a standardized breed. It states, "Many have called their birds American Singers but only birds bred by our plan are Genuine American Singers." Simply because a canary is wearing an AS band does NOT make it an American Singer Canary. The definition of an American Singer Canary as given in the Constitution and By-laws states, "The American Singer Canary is a Song Type Canary bred in the U.S. by a systematic plan, known as the blending of Roller to Border Fancy over a period of years to provide a Canary bird that has, (1) an outstanding free harmonious song pleasing to the ear, neither too loud or too harsh, with plenty of variety, (2) a beautiful shape or type, not over 5 3/4 inches long with tight feathers that will please the average home lover of Canaries." Under the breeding standard it also goes on to state that a Siskin-Roller cross beyond the hybrid state can be bred to the Border if a strain of R.F. American Singers is desired. But it also states the prescribed systematic plan must be followed from that point on in order to produce Genuine American Singers.

Now, before going any further, let's see exactly what this means. No matter how you read it, a Genuine American Singer Canary will contain the genes of only two canary backgrounds — Border Fancy Canary and Roller Canary. If it is a Red Factor American Singer, it will also contain Siskin related genes. This means that if the genetic background contains Yorkshire, Norwich, Lizard, Hartz, Waterslager, Gloster or any other breed of Canary, the bird is NOT a Genuine American Singer Canary, regardless of the band it is wearing on its leg. Too many people assume that if a bird is banded with an AS band, that the bird is a Genuine American Singer. In 6B it plainly states that birds are only Genuine American Singers *provided* our plan is followed. If our American Singer Judges (including myself) were following Article XI, Sec. 4, to the letter, a good many of the birds entered in the AS Sections would be automatically disqualified. It states, "Birds having a standard of their

own or no standard will NOT be judged but will be marked NOT AS." I don't know of any judge who is actually following this to the letter, possibly because it is very ambiguous and partly because they don't want to drastically reduce the AS entries. But I do feel in any case where a bird definitely shows either visually that it has a background other than that called for in our plan, or if audibly, the foundation song is definitely not a blend of the Border and Roller songs, the bird should either be marked NOT AS, as called for in Article XI, Sec. 4, or they could apply S.15 in Chapter 11 which states that the song value is NIL (0). If it is not American singer song and the bird should also receive a very low score under Conformation, as S.8, Chapter 11 states "anything contrary to the MODEL means faults can be deducted, not just those faults called out on the score sheet. The faults called out on the score sheet are only for those birds which were bred according to the plan and, therefore, *will* at least resemble the Model. Some birds I have seen entered as AS in the last few years only resemble the Model in that they have one head, two wings, a tail, two feet and feathers. In my personal opinion, if a bird does not even remotely resemble the Model, it should be given a Conformation score of Zero and not a score of approximately 15, as this rule has lead some people to believe is the minimum Conformation score they should receive, no matter what the bird look like.

Now, let's go to the Foundation Song. I was surprised to find that many American Singer breeders are not aware of the *basic* difference between a Border Fancy's song and a Roller's song. I think all knew that a Border Fancy sang chopper song consisting mainly of chop notes and, hopefully, some warbling notes. That much is true, BUT that's only half the story. The Border Fancy also sings his song "open noted." That is with his beak open wide. The Roller, on the other hand, sings tours or groups of notes in a muted song which is sung "closed noted." That means his song is sung almost entirely with his beak nearly shut.

Now let's think about what happens when we genetically blend these songs. The Border song is almost entirely due to

genetics, while the Roller song is 75 % to 80% due to genetics, with the balance being a learned song from Tutor birds, which is why Roller breeders do not want any males around their young birds which sing notes, which are faults in Roller song. This means that a Genuine American Singer will sing a foundation song which contains a percentage of chopper song (open notes), that is inherited from the Border Fancy and a percentage of Roller song (closed notes) inherited from the Roller, plus what it has learned from Tutor birds, which may be wild bird notes. I know many of you have heard Canaries which have crow or catbird notes and I think you will agree that these do not add value to the song, while Cardinal notes and some of the other wild bird notes will improve the song in many, but not all, cases. When a judge is evaluating the American Singer song, he or she will not only listen to the song, but also watch the beak to see how it is sung because, as I stated earlier, a Genuine American Singer will sing both open notes and closed notes. G.32 states the song will be faulted if there is too much of either type song.

The next item I found many breeders did not fully understand is what "variety" means in the American Singer song. "Variety" is determined basically in two ways—first, the number of different notes or tours he sings and, secondly, but equally important, the order in which he sings them. To more fully explain this, a canary may sing a long song which contains a number of different notes, or tours—so you might say he has a good variety of notes in his song. But, if he sings exactly the same song over and over in the same order, he nullifies the variety because although, as in individual song, it would score high, it becomes a repetitious song, which scores lower. Therefore, a bird which might have a lesser variety of notes and tours but sings them in a different order each time, could score just as high in variety. In other words, "variety" is scored on the overall song rather than on any single song. If the judge only hears and sees the bird sing a couple of times, it cannot, in all fairness, be given a high song score because the judge does not know if the bird sings a repetitive song or not.

Another point that seems to be confusing to many people is whether or not songs sung on the floor of the cage or behind the cups or on the lower perch should be counted for full value, or even at all. Let's see what our standard says: In the first paragraph of Chapter 4 it states, "Type birds must be trained to stage in position in their show cages. Rollers must

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Blue border, one of the more rare color variations of this popular canary.

be trained to sing. American Singers must be trained not only to stage but to sing also." I don't see how this can be taken to mean anything other than that the American Singer must do its singing while it is properly staging or, in other words, standing in close to the position shown in the model and on the upper perches. This is also brought out in G. 30 Rendition when it states that rendition includes the "presentation of the song." How would you rate a human singer who sang in the orchestra pit rather than up on the stage. In other words, the score under rendition covers the entire presentation or performance of the bird while singing. This also means that although the Roller Loop is the only position actually spelled out as a fault, any variation of it, such as singing in a head-down position or looking as though it's laying on the perch, is equally undesirable.

Another thing I have noted lately is that many entries were birds that could almost be called tiny. Rule 7B states, "Never use small birds at any time for breeding." If this rule is followed, we will not see these tiny birds on the show bench. If you have a tiny bird that has a good song, use it as a tutor, not as a breeder in your American Singer program.

A number of years ago many Border Fancy breeders were crossing in Norwich to increase the size of their smaller "Wee Gem" Borders. This continued for several years until finally the members of both the ABFCC and IBFCC who were maintaining pure Border Fancy stock got together and insisted that the judges put down any Borders which showed any sign

of Norwich blood in them. Now if you look at the top birds in the Border Fancy Section, you will find they bear a very close resemblance to their Model. If the American Singer Canary is to continue as a "standardized breed," our members, through their local chapters, are going to have to insist that our judges score the bird's song and conformation much closer to what is called for by our standard and much less to what may be considered just good song, but is not the blend of Border Fancy and Roller Canary song called for by the standard. I think

we all will admit that we have heard some Hartz, some Glosters, some waterslagers and some mongrel birds that have outstanding songs, but that is no excuse for breeding them into our American Singers. Use the outstanding singers of these breeds as tutors, not as AS breeding stock. If we allow this inbreeding of everything and anything just because it happens to sing a song that someone likes, it won't be long until we no longer can say we have a "standardized breed" because all we will have, at best, is a bunch of free singing mongrel birds with no standard. Then the judging, if you could call it that, will be purely a matter of what the individual judge prefers in the way of song and conformation.

It's up to the breeders of Genuine American Singers to see that the National Club, the local chapters and all the local clubs that have American Singer Sections at their shows, insist that all our judges adhere much more closely to the standards instead of asking that they not penalize birds that definitely are not "Genuine American Singers" or that ask that birds not be penalized when they sing on the lower perch or on the floor. It's time we started worrying more about the quality of the breed rather than the number of entries at the shows. Sure, the number of entries will drop for a couple of years, but they will come back up in a few years, just as the Border Fancy Canaries have and they will sing American Singer song and look like the American Singer Canary Model. ●

Yellow border not quite finished with its molt.

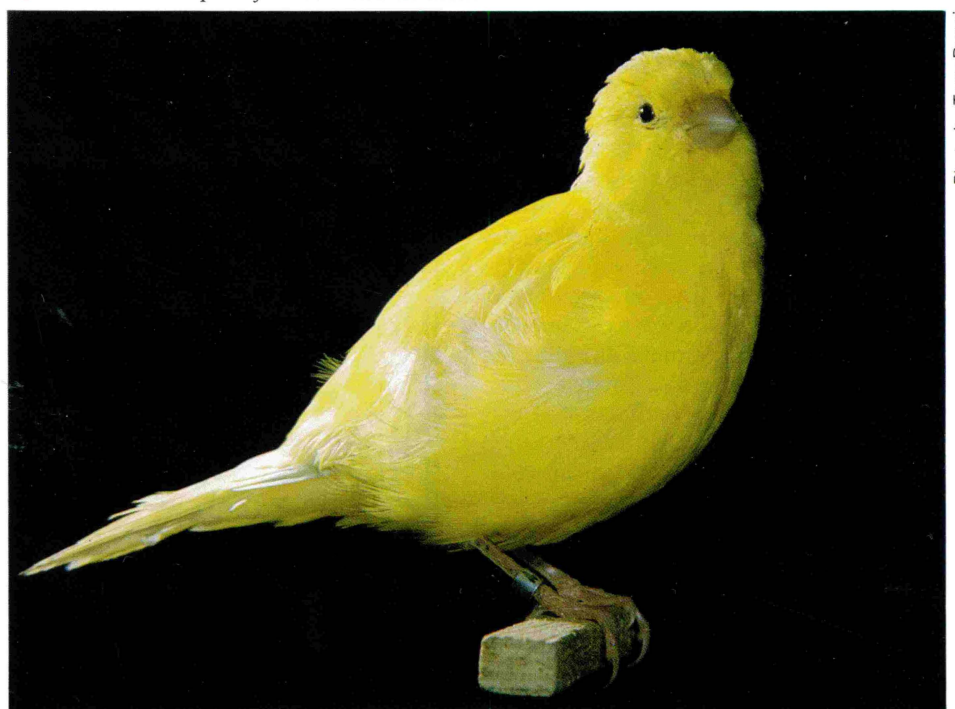


Photo by Tony Buccci