

Remembering Robert Gunning's Contribution to the Black Velvet Chinchilla

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In 2024 Lisa Paternoster, daughter of Robert Gunning, provided the following account of her father's contribution to the Gunning Black Velvet chinchilla:

During the 1950's, Robert (Bob) Gunning lost his entire herd of chinchillas to a fire. He considered retiring from the chinchilla industry, but instead [and fortunately for the fate of what would later become the Gunning Black Velvet] he decided to seek out a new herd. At a show, believed to have been located in Utah, Bob saw an unusually marked female chinchilla owned by Herb Chase. Bob offered to buy the female, but Herb wanted to sell the entire herd. So as fate would have it, Bob Gunning bought the entire herd of 50 chinchillas. The unusually marked female within the herd was the first known 'Black [or F0 mutant]'. Bob endeavored to study genetics with some help from Washington State University. He knew he would need a male offspring if he was to have success developing the new mutation. After three attempts, the unusually marked female gave birth to a male. From that point on, it took Bob 11 years to develop the mutation. Being a 'product of nature,' Bob was not able to patent the new mutation, so he guarded his animals carefully, and also enlisted the help of his friend Bert Colby of Quincy, Washington. Bert took several Black chinchillas into his own herd, to help speed up the process of propagating the Blacks, and also to safeguard the new mutation against fire or mishap. At the 11 year mark, Bob Gunning took 11 of his 'Black Velvets' to 11 shows across the United States. He won almost every trophy during the show tour, save just a few, and by the end of the tour every chinchilla breeder wanted a Black Velvet! Following, in the late 1960's, Bob went on another tour, this time to various major cities where he sold the Black Velvets by lottery. Bob Gunning continued in the chinchilla industry until approximately 1984, at which time he sold his herd and went back to farming dry land wheat full time. He loved the chinchilla industry and made many lifelong friends. Robert Gunning passed away in December of 2020 at the age of 89.

Read the [full article](#) about the Gunning Black Velvet chinchilla.

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