

# A MILL FERRET, A BYB FERRET, AND A BREEDER FERRET WALK INTO A BAR...

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By Holly "Ais" Ravenhill

I actually don't have a punchline for that. However, having owned each of them, I would like to talk about my experience with them. First, I'd like to introduce you to them and how they came into my life.

As most of us did, I started with mill ferrets. I volunteered at my local ferret shelter (Washington Ferret Rescue & Shelter) to gain experience and knowledge before adopting these funny little animals. Finally when the time was right, I brought home the pair that had captured my heart: Liam and Jasper. Since then, I've only had two other mill ferrets - Five, who recently passed, and Clover who is new to the crew and still settling in.

My two BYB (backyard breeder) ferrets were my attempt to step up my game. I thought I was pretty knowledgeable, and had moved to a bigger house that would allow quarantine and a separate room for when those hobs got in a rut. The breeder I contacted seemed legit and passed all my red flag censors, but unfortunately I wasn't aware of all the things to watch out for. So, I picked up my two 3-month-old neutered boys from the airport and dove even deeper into the world of ferret knowledge to make sure I wasn't fooled again. Welcome home, Remus and Rom!

Since then I've learned a lot, and have spoken with lots of reputable breeders and interacted with a few on Facebook. I honestly began sweating about what I would have done if I got two INTACT boys from that BYB. From what I hear, they can be an experience! I have close friends who are breeders or own breeder ferrets and this helped prepare me for their behavior. Last year I made the trip to adopt one of these noodles from Lilac Grove Ferretry. Cricket is now part of the crew and she is thriving!

I had heard that some breeders are hesitant to adopt to people with mill ferrets, since their ferrets may be rougher than mill ferrets are used to. Cricket's breeder socialized them all very well and made sure she got along with many different ferrets, so we were confident she'd be okay with my crew. Thinking about this, I stepped back and looked at them all - a mill ferret named Five, the BYB boys Remus & Rom, and the breeder baby Cricket. It felt pretty neat to have such diversity and see everyone getting along. That gave me the idea to write this and compare them.

I know each ferret has a very unique personality, so I'll try not to compare their personalities. However, you'll often hear people say that Marshall Farms breeds their ferrets to be docile, while breeder ferrets are more intelligent and may have more enrichment needs. Through the four I've owned and many others I've met, mill ferrets definitely tend to be more on the aloof side. You can often see the little cogs spinning in their heads, or hear the dial up tone screaming from their brain as they stop and stare into the void in between war dances. Though body types vary, I've noticed that most of them have liquid spines. Even with ample room and space (my lucky noodles are only put away at night or when I am gone, which isn't often since I work from home) their muscles are soft and squishy. Their facial features tend to be more elongated, and who knows what's going on with those waardy faces!

My BYB boys are interesting. Remus is very round, and Rom is small. Both are much lighter than people expect. Whenever someone meets them (especially someone experienced with ferrets), they will lift my boys and say "Oh!! He's so light!" So they've clearly got a bone density issue. With BYB's, you never know what kind of health history they'll have, or what diet they were raised on that may have impacted their early nutrition. (My boys came with a mix that had red and orange kibbles - artificial colors are not a good sign..) I've taken both to the vet many times, and all the vets agree that Remus's chunk is just muscle. He's got abs of steel, my friends. That boy will meerkat all day, every day. Meanwhile, Rom is a spindly thing, with a nose like a ski slope (it curves upwards!) He's able to whip around in the play tunnels, but has also struggled with some GI issues we haven't been able to pinpoint. As far as their intelligence, there's definitely a bit more there. Though they do struggle with sharing brain cells sometimes, Remus has tricked me away from my chair multiple times so he can hop on my desk and wreak havoc. He's an excellent climber (again, those abs) and looks like he might maybe catch on with the training I'm attempting. BYB ferrets can be such a mixed bag due to no control or standards of breeding, so I'm glad my boys seem to be a happy medium.

Cricket, and the other breeder ferrets I've met - WOAHA. Did you know ferrets have MUSCLES IN THEIR HEAD?! I can feel them on her!! Her snout is shorter and head is wider compared to the others. When she runs in the house, it sounds like a small dog galloping around. She could probably beat me in a race. Her thighs are well defined, meaty arms, and she's difficult to "fold" like mill ferrets (and Rom). Where Remus has abs of steel, Cricket's whole body is made of steel. I also found it interesting that the vet commented on how thick her skin was when she got vaccines and her implant. When she came home, she was extremely respectful of the boys - if they got overwhelmed with her intro wrestling, she would immediately disengage and respect those boundaries. (Now that she is queen of the house, she's protective of her

territory and giving Clover a run for her money). She has such a loud personality, and is very intelligent. She's learned how to get up on things, into things, she will watch me do something and remember where I put something. She will test bite me then run away giggling - she absolutely knows she's being a booger.

I'm so grateful they all get along (minus Clover - but we're making progress), and it's a joy having such diversity in my home. Though I will not make the mistake of adopting from a BYB again, Remus and Rom are such sweet and happy boys. Five, the mill ferret Cricket came home to, passed recently, but he was best buds with all of them, and Cricket was never overwhelming to his soupy noodle body. Cricket has expanded my knowledge and experience as an owner, and her energy and demand for snuggles are a highlight in my day. A mill ferret, a BYB ferret, and a breeder ferret walk into a bar, and they share a soupie together and know they are loved.



Left to right: Rom, Remus, Five, Cricket



Top to bottom: Remus, Rom, Five, Cricket

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