

What is the Miniature Silky Fainting Goat?

These little beauties have an interesting past both in the stories as well as in the medical text books. The myotonic goat, otherwise known as the fainting goat, is a domestic goat that temporarily seizes when it feels panic.

The Lore. The story begins in the 1880's in Marshall County, Tennessee. It all started with a man who dressed strangely and had 4 black and white goats, (one buck and three does) and a cow. The man was named John Tinsley and he was a farmer who was thought to have come from Nova Scotia. These goats had a strange ability to stiffen up and fall over when excited. Tinsley and his goats ended up on the farm of Dr. Mayberry and after a year Tinsley moved on, leaving his goats and cow behind. Dr Mayberry bred these goats and noticed that the babies were born with this falling down behavior as well. He felt that this was an altogether different breed of goat and gave them the name, *Tennessee Fainting Goat*. These goats began to be sold to the sheep herders to be used to keep predators away from their flocks. When a predator would threaten the sheep the fainting goat would faint and become the predator's dinner, saving the sheep. Poor Goat!

History. In the 1980 only a few of these goats remained and were put on an endangered list. Currently, about 3800 are registered and the breed is making a come back. Some were being bred for meat and larger fainting goats began to come on the scene. These goats looked more like a meat goat, larger in size with floppy ears and roman noses. The original breed standard is: small in size with ears that stand out from the head and dished faces with wide set "buggish" eyes. The MSFG has long hair which may have come from breeding long hair Nigerian goats to the fainting goats, but this is not always the case. This MSFG is a relatively new breed of goat and is starting to become extremely popular. They are easy keepers, they are small, do not test fences and won't jump as high as goats without the fainting gene. They are good breeding stock and is not uncommon to get 3 to 4 kids at a time. Their personality is calm, quiet and very friendly, but what draws a lot of people to them is how they look. Bred to look like terriers, these goats are gorgeous with their long silky hair, and many of them have bangs and beards.

The Fainting. Fainting goats don't really faint or lose consciousness. What does happen is their muscles contract when they feel panic causing them to fall over stiff as a board and remain there for anywhere from 5 to 20 seconds. This muscle condition is called, *Myotonia congenita* and is caused by an inherited genetic disorder. The myotonic gene can occur in humans, pigeons and other animals as well. The parents can pass on the gene to their offspring without ever fainting themselves as not all goats that carry the gene faint. The fainting was first described in scientific literature in 1904, and described as a "congenital myotonia" in 1939. The mutation in the goat gene that causes this muscle stiffness was not actually discovered until 1996, several years after the same gene had been discovered in humans and mice. Scientific experiments in 1939 with the myotonic goat made a major contribution to the understanding of the physiological basis of this condition and influenced many other theories of myotonia and its causes. Some goats with this gene will never experience fainting while others are extreme fainters. Fainting is not a health risk and even the most extreme fainters live normal lives despite their tendencies for falling over. Scaring a goat to try to make it faint however, is never recommended and should not be tolerated. This *fainting* is a rather severe reaction to stimuli and should be never be brought on intentionally.

Cedar Creeks Apollo (below left) and Bells Goats BethSheeba (Below right)



Jumping Jack Flash



Ruby Tuesday



Apollo and Sheba are Jack and Ruby's parents. All registered MSFGs and award winning goats. Ruby won 2nd place in the Jr Doe division in her first show this year at Del Mar and Jack won 1st and Best In Show in the Wether division. See more about the parents at www.minimythic.com