



The winners and the judges

Celebrating fabulous

*The **National Cat Awards 2016** recognised extraordinary feline tales of survival, companionship and bravery at London's Savoy Hotel*

On Thursday 4 August the 2016 National Cat Awards took place at The Savoy Hotel in London, a highlight of the Cats Protection calendar. The awards were to honour the amazing cats of the UK; those that had shown incredible courage, unwavering friendship and loving support to their owners.

Alan Dedicoat, the 'Voice of the Balls' himself, was an outstanding Master of Ceremonies entertaining his appreciative audience throughout while giving a very warm welcome to our finalists, other honoured guests and the event's generous sponsors, PURINA®.

We also had live Facebook videos during the day with TV presenter Tim Vincent proving a very adept roving reporter, chatting with the celebrities, guests and Chief Executive Peter Hepburn.

A new fun element to the day was our very successful Tweetybooth. Donning a pair of cat's ears, or cat mask, guests could go into a photobooth, capturing their attendance of the day and then tweet or post on Facebook with the images. Even the Chief Executive – @HepburnPeter – got his Twitter on!

But nothing could distract from the main attraction – the awards themselves. The finalists had travelled from all corners of the UK to find out which cat would win and collect the coveted awards on behalf of their beloved cats. Cats Protection's Chairman, Heather McCann, welcomed everyone to the awards saying: "These awards recognise the unique companionship that cats bring to our homes and we're here to celebrate the stories of some very special feline friends. Running through all these amazing stories is a common thread, a relationship between cats and people that is unique and based on mutual love, respect and trust."

This year's categories were: Most Caring Cat, Hero Cat, Furr-ever Friends, Outstanding Rescue Cat and PURINA® Better Together ending with the overall National Cat of the Year award. There was also a Special Recognition Award for a Cats Protection cat.

The category judges were actress Anita Dobson, singer James McVey from pop rock band The Vamps, Olympian Charlotte Kerwood, writer and broadcaster Andrew Collins, and the Twitter followers of Purina – all of whom admitted they'd had the best and the worst of jobs having to judge. Andrew Collins asked the audience: "On behalf of all the judges, don't judge us. We have to judge, it's a terrible pressure!" It was a sentiment that everyone seemed to empathise with, having watched each of the three category finalist videos it was clear that every cat was a worthy winner!

The category winners...

Hero Cat and National Cat of the Year 2016 *Tink – Shrewsbury, Shropshire*

As Claire and Russell Hopkinson and their sons Jake and Scott were sleeping one night, they had no idea of the disaster that was unfolding around them. An electrical fault in a neighbouring property had sparked a fire which was about to engulf their home. But thanks to quick-thinking puss Tink, who raised the alarm by jumping on top of Claire, the family awoke and were able to escape. After heroically waking the family, Tink herself panicked and hid in an upstairs bedroom until a firefighter was able to retrieve her. Daughter Lesley, who lives nearby, said: "One of the firemen went back in and brought Tink out but, by that point, she was unconscious and limp. The firefighters were incredible and one put an oxygen mask on her and she came round. She was utterly selfless and without her, I could have lost my family in that fire."

Anita Dobson explains why she chose Tink: "Tink's story really stood out because it really tugged on my heartstrings, particularly the part where she passed out and had to be resuscitated by firefighters. She is a true hero!" ▶



Claire Hopkinson accepting the award for National Cat of the Year

Photos: Philippa Gedge Photography

felines

Singer Saffron Sprackling, actor Paul Copley and musician Rick Wakeman represented the final judging panel, gathering on stage to announce the overall winner, but before this Rick Wakeman (owner of three rescue cats) shared a moment he had with his wife. "I said to her, 'out of interest, what will you do when I depart this mortal coil?' She looked lovingly at me and replied 'I'll get another cat.'" It was something that many in the audience seemed to identify with!

Finally it was time to announce the 2016 National Cat of the Year...Tink! Claire Hopkinson, Tink's owner, who had made a very moving acceptance speech for the Hero Cat award admitted she hadn't prepared a second speech and was clearly overwhelmed at the national accolade her cat had just received. Managing to find a few words Claire said: "I just can't believe it, thank you ever so much. She's just a normal cat and I love her to bits. It's been such a lovely, lovely day!"

The charity's Chief Executive, Peter Hepburn said of the day: "We are all of us aware, as people who have that special relationship with cats, of the many wonderful things they bring into our lives. They are with us in times of happiness and equally they can comfort us in times of despair. These stories have had me in tears and we feel privileged that they have been shared with us today."

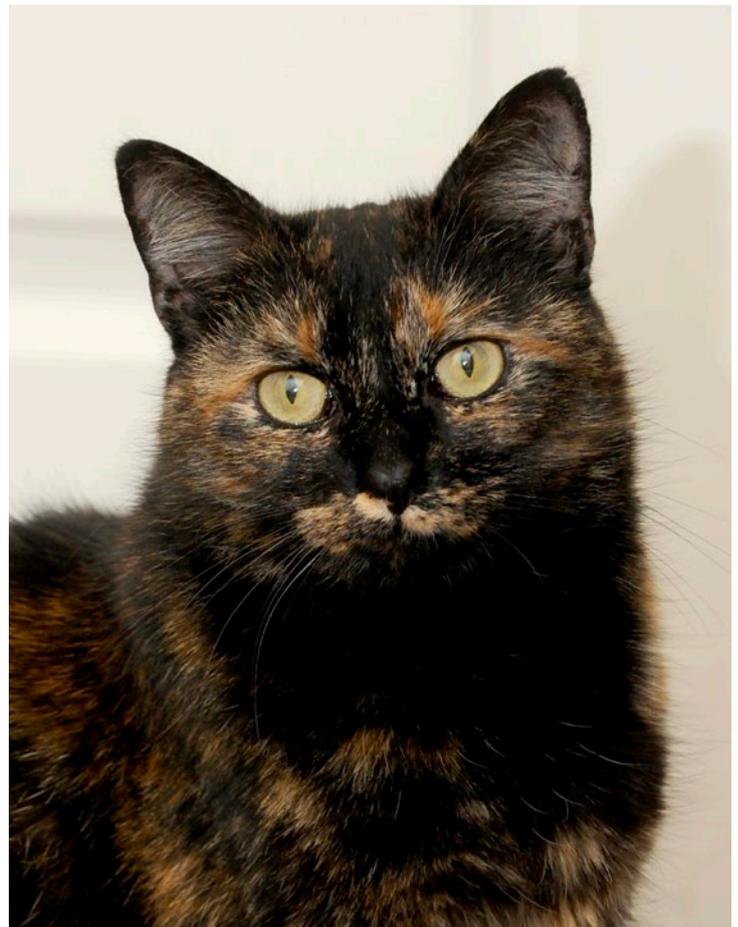


Photo: Koray Erol, Caters News

Most Caring Cat

Spike – Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

When a rare illness left Maria Price paralysed almost overnight, her world fell apart around her. After a month in hospital, the 38 year old faced a long battle to adjust to her condition and find the strength to recover. Support, companionship and inspiration came in the form of her seven-year-old cat Spike. The road ahead is a long one but Maria says Spike is the incentive she needs to get better. Maria said: "Spike gives me so much fight – I am desperate to be able to play with him like I once did so every day he is my therapy. I have started getting some feeling back in my right arm and it is such a joy to be able to stroke him again."

Andrew Collins had the hard task of picking the winner. "There is something about the way Spike provides therapy for Maria after she became paralysed that seemed beyond the call of duty. I liked the image of Maria "smoothing him", and regaining movement in her hands and arms – something so simple, and symbiotic. Some cats have a time limit on how long they want stroking, but it seems as if Spike knew he was doing something vital for Maria. I also loved the emphasis she put on Spike being 'funny'. Cats can be very serious creatures, but more than capable of raising a smile, even when times are tough."



Photo: Matt Horwood, Caters News

Purina® Better Together

Smokie – Woking, Surrey

Six-year-old Smokie was in a bad way when she turned up as a bedraggled stray on Jane Leggott's doorstep. Suffering with a congenital eye problem, Smokie's vision was impaired and she was desperately in need of someone to take care of her. Deciding to keep her, Jane had no idea how much Smokie would come to mean to her family, especially son Stefan, then aged 18, who was struggling to cope with the death of his stepfather. Jane said: "Out of nowhere this little cat arrived on our doorstep, thin and looking rather sorry for herself. Straight away, she formed a very close bond with Stefan. She would follow him around, cuddle in close to him and never left his side. We thought this little stray who kept bumping into things needed us – in fact, we needed her just as much."

This award was chosen by followers of the @PurinaUK Twitter account.

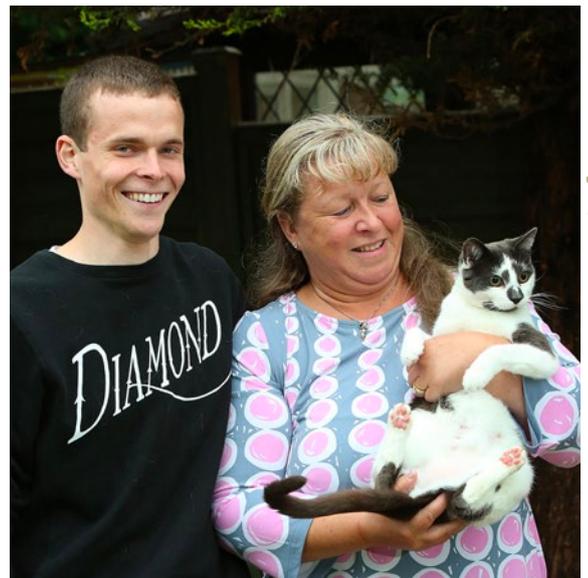


Photo: Stewart Turkington, Caters News

Furr-ever Friends

Houdini – Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

For the family of schoolboy Harri Cossburn, Houdini is not only a much-loved pet, he is also an in-house therapy cat. Harri, 10, is on the autistic spectrum and suffers from anxiety attacks, finding it difficult to be alone. But since two-year-old Houdini came into his life, Harri has found a constant source of comfort, support and friendship. Mum Kleio said: "Houdini seems to know when Harri's had a bad day at school, or when everything is getting too much for him, and will sit with him. The sound of his purr and the smell of his fur have a huge calming effect on Harri. We call Houdini a therapy cat as he has helped Harri so much."

Houdini was picked by James McVey. "It was a tough choice but Mr Houdini is my winner for the way he helps Harri to stay calm and positive in the face of challenges like loneliness and bullying. Watching his video brought a tear to my eye."



Photo: Koray Erol, Caters News

Outstanding Rescue Cat

Jessie – from Peterborough, Cambridgeshire

Life for Tracey Jessop-Thompson and her husband Stephen changed forever when their 18-year-old daughter Lucy died suddenly from a cardiac arrest as a result of an undiagnosed heart condition. As the devastated couple went about slowly rebuilding their lives, they found comfort, support and joy in the most unexpected of places – a tiny rescue kitten called Jessie. Now aged one, fun-loving Jessie has given the couple the strength to embark on charity work to raise awareness of heart conditions in young people. Tracey said: "Jessie really has been such an incredible help to us, she has soothed me when the pain has felt too much to bear, made us smile during the darkest of days and been a constant presence in our lives. She's a truly remarkable cat and I don't know where we would be without her."

Charlotte Kerwood explained why she picked Jessie. "Tracey and Jessie's story really touched me. I can't imagine what it must be like to lose a child but the joy and love the family have got from Jessie is just amazing."

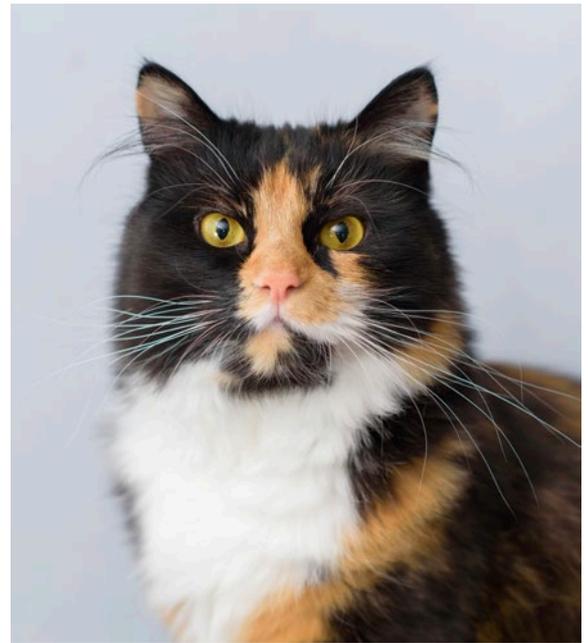


Photo: Georgi Mabey, Caters News

Cats Protection Special Recognition Award

Peggy – Dundee, Angus

Kirsty Oliphant, 23, was at rock bottom when she adopted Peggy – then aged 16 – from Cats Protection's Dundee & District Branch in 2014.

With a long history of mental health issues, she had frequently been admitted to a psychiatric hospital following a series of suicide attempts. But after adopting Peggy, life changed almost overnight for Kirsty and she is now well enough to undertake a university course to study mental health nursing later this year.

Kirsty said: "As soon as I met her, she jumped on top of my lap and I knew she had chosen me. Immediately we had a bond and that has just become stronger and stronger. She brought humour, fun and comfort into my life overnight.

"My life changed very quickly after Peggy came home with me. The despair lifted and having her by my side gave me a new sense of purpose and responsibility.

"Before Peggy, I was in and out of hospital with mental health issues. It was a draining and difficult life. Yet since she arrived I've not been back to hospital once. My life really has turned around. I thought my life was over but, thanks to Peggy, it is just beginning."

Cats Protection's Chief Executive, Peter Hepburn said: "This year we wanted to recognise the special bond between an owner and a cat that came from Cats Protection. Kirsty's story stood out to us as a moving example of such a bond and of what makes older cats so special. We all know how difficult it can be to find new homes for our feline senior citizens. So we felt that we could not pass the day without giving special recognition to such a wonderful story of companionship and care. ●

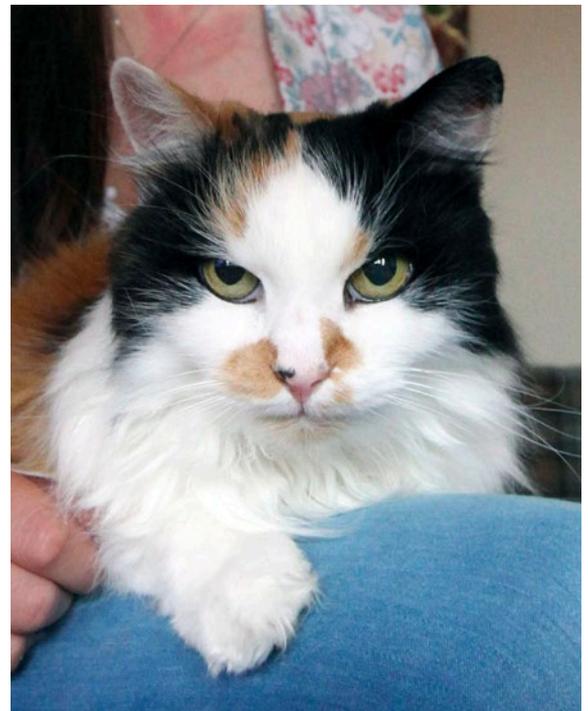


Photo: Ron Cathro, Caters News



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