



Cowgirl 341199: What to Expect

Cowgirl is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Cowgirl is a playful and sensitive girl who is ready to find her forever home. Cowgirl would thrive with a patient, experienced owner who understands feline body language and is willing to give her the time and space she needs to adjust at her own pace. Cowgirl may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with someone when given the time she needs to get to know you.

Cowgirl came to OHS from another shelter, so we have limited information about her history. When she first arrived, she was extremely fearful and shy, often responding to people approaching with hissing, swatting, or attempts to bite. To help her decompress in a less stressful environment, she was placed in a foster home.

During her two months in foster care, Cowgirl initially spent most of her time hiding and would run away whenever her foster parent tried to interact with her. With patience, a calm approach, and the use of treats and toys, her foster parent gradually earned her trust. By the end of her stay, Cowgirl had made significant progress. She eagerly engaged in play, sought out toys, and had become comfortable enough to accept gentle cheek and chin scratches from her foster parent.

Unfortunately, just before she was scheduled to return to OHS for adoption, Cowgirl managed to push open a screened window and escaped from the home. After spending seven days outside, her foster parent was able to safely recover her, and she returned to the shelter. The experience of being on her own outside caused a noticeable setback in her progress, and she once again displayed fearful, defensive behaviors. To help rebuild her confidence and continue her progress, Cowgirl was enrolled in our Behavior Modification Program. The environment in the BMOD program is better suited at helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, increased enrichment, and one on one time with the team, we set out to learn more about her.

Cowgirl acclimated to the BMOD program remarkably quickly. She could often be found lounging on her perch, watching staff with soft, relaxed eyes, and would eagerly ask to come out of her kennel to play with the wand toys we offered. Play is one of Cowgirl's favorite activities—she loves stalking, chasing, and pouncing on wand toys with enthusiasm. She also has a favorite toy mouse that she enjoys carrying around and snuggling with.

As Cowgirl became more comfortable with staff, she showed that while she enjoys being around people, she was still hesitant about physical affection. If staff attempted to pet her before she was ready, she would often move away or occasionally swat to communicate that she needed more space. Despite this, Cowgirl frequently chooses to stay close to people, rolling around, flirting, and happily engaging in play as a way of showing she feels comfortable and enjoys our company.

Based on her successful time in foster care, we know Cowgirl is capable of forming strong bonds and accepting gentle petting once trust has been established. Her future family should be prepared to continue building that relationship at her pace, allowing her to gain confidence and discover that affection can be another rewarding part of her interactions with the people she trusts.

Cowgirl has met several of the kitties in our program. While she is able to coexist and play with some of them, she does not typically seek them out or follow them around. She occasionally shows signs of uncertainty and may hiss when feeling conflicted. Based on what we've observed we believe that Cowgirl would prefer to be the only kitty in her new home.

Cowgirl is currently taking an anti-anxiety medication called Fluoxetine. During her time in foster care, she had several episodes of urinating outside the litter box, which our veterinarians believed were related to stress and anxiety. After starting Fluoxetine, those behaviors resolved, and she has consistently used her litter box appropriately both in foster care and throughout her time in the Behavior Modification Program.

To help set Cowgirl up for success, her adopters will be provided with a supply of Fluoxetine to support her transition into her new home. The good news is that Cowgirl takes her medication like a champion—she readily eats it in a pill pocket or smothered in Churu, making it easy to administer.

She will need an experienced owner, someone that is familiar working with shy/fearful cats and that has the time and patience to help her acclimate. She is a social, yet independent girl who is happy to be close by people, playing with toys and taking treats but will need ongoing support in her new home with touch.

Her new family should expect that she will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce her to new things slowly. Cowgirl typically flees, hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared. It's important to provide her with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for her to relax in, such as her own hidey bed. Hiding spots that are confined to a tight spot and out of reach from you will make it difficult to build a bond with her. The room you set her up in will be the catalyst for how quickly she acclimates. Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Cowgirl to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can she get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with her? If it's a laundry room or bathroom will the constant in and out of people and noises associated with these rooms be too much for her? By having a room without a lot of foot traffic and with appropriate hiding spots, it will allow you to work on building a relationship. While in her hiding spot, use calm voices and offer tasty treats to show you are not a threat. Place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Cowgirl while in her hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Cowgirl will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

Here's how to help Cowgirl during your first months together:

This step is crucial in helping Cowgirl acclimate to her new home. Confine Cowgirl to one cat-proof room in your house.

Provide Cowgirl with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure she cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Cowgirl in her room. Don't force her out of her hiding spot. Instead, encourage her to come out on her own using happy talk, offering a toy or treats. Once she is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing her to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing her to come out on her own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Cowgirl is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Cowgirl has started exploring the rest of the house, give her a safe space that she can retreat to. When she is in her safe space, insist that guests leave her alone and try to ignore her yourself. That way, when she comes out, you can reward her bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Cowgirl time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Cowgirl the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Cowgirl seems curious or interested, have the new person toss her treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave her carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of her normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so she can go in and out on her own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten her. You can also clicker train her to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Cowgirl get comfortable with her carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Cowgirl time to bond to you before taking her to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if she already trusts you, your presence may help her feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Cowgirl is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow

her to adapt in her own time. She may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know her and watching her come out of her shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Cowgirl to be successful in her new home. We're available to answer questions via phone and email. Call the Behavior helpline at (503)416-2983 or email the BMOD Cat trainers at bmodcat@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification department.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Cowgirl now and in the future. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns – or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing! Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new cat!