

A Place for the White Bitch

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The white bitch can and has played an important roll in many breeding programs.

At the moment our standard is so written as to "effectively eliminate" the white Sheltie from competition. I am among the ever-growing group of breeders in this country who would like to see this changed. And not because the white is my favorite color — it is not, it is the color I like least. But it is a *normal* color.

Because so many of our Shelties are white factored, the situation often occurs where the best suited stud dog for a white factored bitch is himself white factored. Should the bitch be bred to a lesser dog to avoid the possibility of white puppies? I think not.

Having made this choice, the white puppy may turn out to be the nicest in the litter, for quality has no connection whatsoever to color. What should be done with it? Shall we hide it in the darkest corner of the kennel? A top quality dog is much too hard to come by to throw it away because it comes in a white package! If I have bred a lovely dog I want to show it off. But, alas, that is not practical under our present standard.

Unfortunately many people, either due to ignorance or in order to deliberately support their prejudices, seem to confuse the color headed white with the homo-

zygous blue or double merle. The double merle is often afflicted with defective hearing and/or eye sight. This defect is caused by doubling the merle gene which works as a dilutant. Along with diluting almost all color to white this merling factor seems to interfere with the adequate development of the eyes and ears. Aside from these abnormalities which we can see there is reason to believe the MM (double merle) genes may cause defects we cannot see. Double merles are usually easy to spot, due to their almost total lack of markings and the absence of black patching. Such a puppy will often have excessive white on the head and rather clear blue areas asymmetrically around the eyes and ears, seldom accompanied by body spots.

On the other hand the white will most likely have a head fully framed with color along with prominent body spots. And we need not worry about hearing or eye sight loss in the normal blue headed white since it carries only the single M gene.

I have been told a white dog should not be used for breeding but if it is, certainly not by a novice. Why not? It is my opinion that a *blue* dog, whether it be a solid colored or a blue headed white, should not be used by the novice as a breeding animal. For it is the blue dog when bred to another blue who can get the breeder into serious trouble by producing the double merle. Certainly

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only an ethical experienced breeder should ever make a blue to blue breeding, and then not without valid reason. The blue can also be trouble when bred to a sable which might result in sable merles. The sable merle while not defective, is a generally unacceptable color, as well as a difficult color for a novice to understand. So why do we not advise novices not to breed blues before warning them off whites? The genetics of the white are far simpler to understand. I see only one disadvantage in breeding the white dog: *all* the progeny of a white dog will be white factored.

As with the blue dog, who usually should be bred to a black, the white should be bred only to the non-white factored dog. When this is done all the puppies will be solid colored and white factored. I see no reason to expect either a greater incidence of body spots or any heavier white stifle markings than when breeding together two solid colored white factored dogs. If you breed a white to a white factored dog,

the incidence of white puppies can be expected to be extremely high. And certainly, any fool who would mix white dogs with a blue to blue breeding deserves the mess that would result!

The normally colored white factored puppy that results from a white to a non-white factored breeding will breed exactly the same as the white factored pup, which results from a solid colored white factored to non-white factored breeding. The puppy's color genes will not be any more polluted by the presence of a white ancestor than by the presence of a fully marked white-factored ancestor.

Apart from the white factor, the color inheritance of a white dog is exactly the same as any solid colored dog. So the use of a white Sheltie as a breeding animal is just as valid and certainly no more difficult or unpredictable than the use of any other color, except the more complicated blue merle. ■■■