

SOME FACTS ABOUT WHITES

By Libby Babin

There have been many questions arising concerning the inheritance of white in the Sheltie. Now that there is a movement afoot to eliminate those discriminatory few words that were, unfortunately, included in our standard, perhaps some clarification would help the general understanding of the genetic factors involved in producing white.

Perhaps the most persistent question involves "mis-marks". . . For some mysterious reason some seem to think that, just because breeder X might fancy whites in his hobby he (breeder Y not interested in whites) will suddenly be bedeviled by odd markings. The truth of the matter is that this breeder Y will have the same number of "mis-marks," after the lid on the white is off, as he is getting NOW. Let's face it "perfect" markings are rare . . . PLUS if this breeder Y continues along the same genetic path of mating colored to colored he will continue to get the SAME sort of markings as in the past with the same amount of selection he has been doing on this particular one quality. The only breeder who will have a few problems is the fancier X who would like to develop a strain of attractive and well marked white Shelties. He will have a lot of selecting to do in order to sort out the gene pairs that give attractive and consistent color and markings establishing and perpetuating these while eliminating the less desirable genes. A challenging job.

Whitney feels there are at least four completely different gene pairs that may give us the various types of primarily white dog — along with additional suppressing action gene pairs — that would need to be either eliminated or encouraged depending on their roll in arriving at the most desired over all patterns. Apparently we have — in some of the Sheltie families that occasionally produce white puppies — representatives of each and in some instances all of these gene pairs. . . . The likely conclusion to draw is that the more of these gene pairs that are matched up the greater the restriction of color leaving larger clearer white areas. The Collie breeders have proven that selection can and will put the white primarily where you want it. The percent of white found in the Sheltie, being as variable as it is gives credence to Whitney's belief, as polygenic (many gene pairs) qualities usually have quantitative expression depending on the number and message of these matched pairs.

The question of definition of white also arises . . . I do think we all know what white is even without going to Webster's lengthy definition. If a dog is PRIMARILY white, sable, black, merled that is his base color and how much he has in markings of white, tan or other color is basically immaterial . . . IF he is marked or mottled in such a way that destroys the overall effect of beauty he will be penalized by all whether expert or rank amateur . . . This rings true of ALL combinations . . . In other words their very unattractiveness will solve the problem. There will always be borderline cases that remain up to individual taste as, there are fanciers that can see ONLY sables — others wouldn't have a sable on the place and feel they must be tricolored or blue to attract — there is one fancier that is SO keen about blues that that is the ONLY color she will keep, she finds the other colors too ugly to live with. Those of you who can see only one or two colors would be the ones to understand and be in sympathy with the admirers of whites.

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If we try to tie down the white fancier with endless legal description white Shelties we will be unfair unless we also become as specific in describing all other colors. The blue would have to have black only in specific amounts in specific places . . . His blue patches would have to be a certain shade (TRY to get agreement on that). The sable would have to be a certain color, only X amount of shading and white markings allowable, etc., etc. . . . white will be able to come into its own only with NO MORE definition than placed on any of the colors. Objectionably marked dogs would eliminate themselves simply because they are not attractive, in just the same manner any color or combination has been eliminated because of lack of fans . . . Let's give the white fans a chance to work out the breeding and selection to THEIR taste.

The white Shelties that have appeared in the ring this year were VERY attractive. . . . These dogs were received very enthusiastically . . . Perhaps they are more worthy of the title than some of our colored Champions. These fine specimens will, assuredly, be in their owners' breeding programs and carry on the origin of the beautiful white families. ●

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