

COAT (EXCERPT FROM "THIS IS THE SAINT BERNARD")

BY: MARLENE ANDERSON

1. On when they reach maturity.

"Experienced breeders are inclined to say that the majority of Saints have fully developed and are mature at about the age of five. The head especially is not fully developed until approximately this age. Often the dog has not reached its full height, weight and breadth until five years of age. This should be the peak year for the Saint Bernard, when he is at his best in the show ring as well."

2. Freckles

"There is nothing more detracting from an otherwise beautiful Saint than a dog that has a gorgeous head covered with black or brown freckles. Some dogs even have freckles going into the blaze and down the white of the chest and front legs. It must be remembered that a good dog should not be faulted for freckling, as our Standard does not mention them. The judge is left to his personal preference. Certainly you would breed to a fine male if he had all you wanted in a stud dog, even if he were freckled."

Foreign judges have stated that our Standard left out the word freckles, or brown/black spots, since they are not supposed to exist on our Saints. Our pictures of the Standard illustrates that freckled dogs are wrong and objectionable. Anyone who prefers a heavily freckled dog to a "clean" one is a poor judge of Saint Bernards. Still, we do have buyers who want a freckled Saint Bernard, no matter what! Many breeders and judges find nothing offensive about them, and, needless to say, numerous champions and point winners are freckled."

3. Smooth-vs-rough coats

"When asked what a new breeder should start with in coat type, I always reply: SMOOTH! This is my humble and honest opinion, based on experience, over a ten-year period of breeding both coats. I find that smooths produce better type, more soundness of body, and fewer problems connected with the breeding of giant dogs. I might also mention that less care and coat conditioning are required for smooths."

I seldom breed rough to rough, and when I do, the percentage of sound, typey offspring is low. I usually advise clients who have rough bitches in heat to use smooth studs--just to be safe and produce better dogs. This advice is based on a follow-up study over a two-year period of all the puppies that I produced and sold. All our smooth studs and rough studs are from a predominately smooth background.

All this tells you is that I prefer smooths over roughs for my personal breeding program. However, I have no coat preference regarding individual Saints, for I am drawn to the most beautiful dog, and coat does not enter into it. I have seen dozens of near perfect smooths. I have, however, traveled in this country and Europe and I have yet to see the near perfect rough. I have never bred a dog with which I am completely satisfied, and I haven't come close to breeding a rough that has contented me.

Too many winning roughs are feminine, small, and lack bone and substance. Too many "pretty" roughs are slab-sided, shallow in front, and hide all their flaws beneath a luxurious thick coat of lovely red mantled long hair.

Many judges are impressed with this lovely outward appearance, and do not look beneath the coat for the many faults that exist. It's like viewing the ten most beautiful girls in the pageant dressed in fur coats. How does one know what kind of framework lies beneath?

Please remember the smooth Saint was the original. It remains the chief factor necessary in a correct breeding program. To those who refuse to face this fact, I can only say, you are breeding dogs, but that's all. The breeder who wants to breed Standard-type Saints uses both coats in his breeding program.

I often hear the argument that the novice breeder cannot sell a smooth puppy. If this same novice knew the great selling points a smooth has over a rough, and could correctly answer all and any questions on the two different coats, this problem would not exist. More important, they should, if at all possible, let the prospective buyer see both coats at maturity and then the smooth Saint will sell itself.

Try these selling points if the question comes up:

1. For the lady who hates hair all over the house...buy a smooth.
2. For easy flea and tick detection...buy a smooth rather than a rough.
3. For less grooming...buy a smooth.
4. For breeding purposes...buy a smooth.
5. For less growth and bone problems...buy a smooth.

Now it might be said, and somewhat truly, that roughs finish their championships more easily than smooths, and that the largest number of big winners are of the rough coat. This can only reflect on the judges. Our experience, which represents over ten years of breeding both coats, and using a greater number of smooths in our breeding program, indicates that the incidence of Hip Dysplasia is higher in roughs than in smooths."