

COLOR MISCONCEPTIONS

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So many misconceptions exist surrounding Saint Bernard color and markings that I think the subject deserves some clarification. Marked as he is, the Saint Bernard may be one of the most individualistic breeds we have, and it is not always easy for those new to the breed to differentiate between what is correct and what incorrect.

Since our dogs are bred to conform to a standard, let's have a look at what that standard has to say about color and markings.

There is only one reference to the subject in the entire standard and it reads as follows: "COLOR: White with red or red and white, the red in its various shades; brindle patches with white markings. The colors red and brown-yellow are of entirely equal value. Necessary markings are: white chest, feet and tip of tail, nose band, collar or spot on the nape; the latter and blaze are very desirable. Never of one color or without white. Faulty are all other colors except the favorite dark shadings on the head (mask) and ears. One distinguishes between mantle dogs and splash coated dogs."

As explicit as the standard is on the color of the body-markings, many seem to disregard it almost entirely. Personal preference excluded, it is wrong to fault a dog because of brown-yellow coloring-that is, if one is using the standard as a guide.

Too, it seems that only a very few recognize the difference between brindle color and a black overlay. Brindling is black hairs mixed with the colored hairs in the coat, and is quite correct for a Saint Bernard. A black overlay is black ends on the colored hairs so that the hair strand is two different colors. This coloring is correct on Belgian Malinois or Belgian Tervuren. Black overlay is found on some Saint Bernards, but it is not correct. A variation of the black overlay, and also incorrect, is the black outline or ring around the colored areas on the body.

So long as the dog has the necessary white (chest, feet, tail tip and collar or spot on the nape), almost any body markings imaginable are acceptable. A dog's body may be all red except for the minimum white required and be perfectly correct -OR- his body may be all white, and still be correct.

Facial markings and coloring seem to cause more confusion than those of the body. What is correct? What is incorrect? What is desirable? What is not? Much of what one hears on this subject is purely personal opinion being passed off as fact.

The face we all like to see has a perfectly symmetrical black mask over both eyes. Unfortunately, perfection is the mid-point between two extremes, and facial markings do swing from one extreme to the other. We see dogs without a white blaze (which, although mandatory according to the standard, does add considerably to the friendly expression of the dog, in my personal opinion). We see dogs lacking a white nose-band.

Sometimes we'll see a dog with a completely colored face!

On the other side of the scale we have half-masks (sometimes called one-sided), white faces, and white ears. Like their counterparts with the too-dark faces, these dogs are seldom if ever shown, and only occasionally bred.

Before going further, it should be mentioned that there are a couple of things that are absolutely "verboden" if you are thinking in terms of breeding. They are: livers (brown noses) and blue eyes. Why these things are not listed as disqualifications in our standard, I'll never know. Maybe the men who wrote the standard expected us to know without being told. Apparently they expected too much!

So the question is - what is standard? It is plain to see that a face with no white at all is incorrect, as is a dog lacking a white nose-band since this is specifically asked for in the standard. As for the dog who is lacking a blaze only, it seems that he would have to be "standard," although a dog with a blaze would be much more desirable. I'd also like to make the point here that the standard does not ask for a wide blaze, or a medium blaze, or for a narrow blaze. ANY blaze will do to satisfy the standard's statement that a blaze is very desirable.