

MISMARKS AND MISFITS IN SAINT BERNARDS

BY: MARLENE ANDERSON / via THE SAINT BERNARD

To the Saint Bernard owner, or would-be owner, and some fanciers as well, the term "Mis-Mark" does not always ring a bell. We still have some breeders who have bred Saints for many years, and claim they never bred or housed such a dog. We see very few such dogs at shows, or matches, and rarely do we have these dogs brought in for stud service.

We are supposed to be living in a modern era where it is no longer a sin to have a retarded child, or even an incurable disease. But to own such a dog, or breed a litter with "half-masks" or "brown noses" among them.. is still whispered about.. in SOME circles.

To explain...we have a standard of perfection for which the breeder tries (or certainly should try) to uphold. In our standard, the paragraph concerning color read: "Necessary markings are: White chest, nose-band, feet and tip of tail, 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."

Does this mean that a dog with a brown mask is wrong and incorrect? Yes. Does this mean that a dog without a complete mask over both eyes is wrong? It would seem so...wouldn't it? But our standard does leave room for doubt in this area.

Let us define the commonly used term "Half-Mask": It usually means a dog that has only one eye covered with the traditional, and favorite, black markings or mask. If the dog has NO mask over either eye, it would be probably termed a "white-head" by most breeders. Although the correct terms would be no-mask...if the dog still had the correct dark ears. I have never seen a complete "white Headed" Saint and never bred one without ANY color or on the head itself.

One of the finest dogs I have ever owned was referred to as a "white-head" she whelped 13 puppies in her first litter and all were perfectly marked, one went on to become a champion and specialty winner. She whelped 13 in her second litter and again all were perfectly marked. This dog had a black patch around one eye, covering it entirely. I recently learned of a well known champion who had the same markings over one. She also had two complete brown and black ears. Her body structure, rear and front movement, hips, bite, eyes and lips were flawless. A beautiful sound typey bitch, with incorrect head markings. She has never been shown, but her progeny have yet to produce a

mis-marked puppy. I do not conclude that these dogs would never produce mis-marks, but I find the ratio high for well marked puppies, considering their background. In my experience with breeding mis-marked animals, I have no evidence to state that a perfectly marked offspring than a mis-marked Saint Bernard will ... provided the mis-marked one if bred with a perfectly marked one, of course.

I recall when we used to breed many dark mantled dogs, and never came up with a half-mask or white-head, but we did have many puppies that lacked the necessary wide blaze and wide nose-band, and the white collar or at least the white spot on the nape. We termed these puppies with little or no white on their faces mis-marks.

On a recent trip to the hospice, or beginning of our breed, in Switzerland I noticed an oil painting of a hospice bred bitch that hangs in the dining room of the hotel there. It is note worthy that this bitch was maskless and showed a tinge of color on one ear, her overall body being with little or no markings, as I remember. We are told that the hospice dogs were often "white-heads" used to eliminate freckles, or dark spots on the face. This may or may not be true. My theory is that the dogs were bred for rescue work ONLY. Without thought to physical beauty, and the breeders were right in doing this. This was not a beauty contest (and the dogs did not attend shows), but a matter of human lives were at stake. Only the dogs that showed heroic and intelligent tendencies were used for lifesaving in the deep snow. If you were lost and freezing to death, the color or markings of the dogs that find you are of no matter.

My point is this, which is worse, a mis-marked Saint with good sound working body and a beautiful head, or crippled, incorrect, well-marked ones? We see such poor dogs in the shows and they sometimes win. Isn't this worse than a mis-marked dog that has movement and body of the true working Saint. The shame of it all is these "freaks of someone's careless breeding or nature are shown and sometimes win, but worse yet they are bred or used at stud, while few mismarks or half-masks are. Thank goodness the judges today are broadminded enough to put imperfectly marked dogs up, be it lack of enough mask, or too much mask and not enough white blaze on the face. If it is the best overall dog in the ring, the markings shouldn't mean that much to any judge that knows our breed.

BROWN NOSES OR LIVERS

When a puppy is born with a lack of black pigment, the Saint Bernard will have the coloring of a red Doberman, for example or a Brittany Spaniel with the liver colored nose, instead of the correct black. These dogs mature into nice looking animals with carrot red and white coloring and liver colored noses and lips. They have pale blue eyes as puppies, which turn amber at maturity. They are just as big, sweet or sour, and every bit as healthy as their black nosed brothers and sisters from the same litter. (Unfortunately, sometimes they are more beautiful conformation wise) These Saints are incorrect and are termed

"misfits". Some breeders really don't recognise this fault in a newly born or even several week old puppy, until it happens to be there. I am forever getting calls from people who saw a Saint with liver coloring and think they have seen something that should be in a side show. I don't believe these dogs should be placed in the same category as a white German Shepherd or a white Boxer, because they don't lack anything else in their physical appearance or mental makeup but color, and this isn't true with the other breeds. Some owners of brown nosed dogs have tried unsuccessfully to exhibit them. DON'T, as you will only embarrass yourself and the breeder. These dogs should be sold or placed (this is the breeders business) with the understanding they are NEVER to be shown or bred but kept for pet only. They certainly make excellent pets as anyone who has ever had one knows.

If pedigrees carried notations of such imperfections, it would lessen the chance of producing "brown-noses" as it takes "two to Tango".

OTHER IMPERFECTIONS

A Saint Bernard with a white or partially white ear is another objectionable marking to SOME, but many fine animals have such an imperfection. I don't think there is anything more detracting from an otherwise beautiful dog than a Saint that has a beautiful head covered with black or brown freckles going into the blaze and down the white of the front legs. It must be remembered that a GOOD dog should not be faulted for such freckling, as our standard does not mention them, and it leaves the judge to personal preference. I, personally don't like freckles and have tried to breed them out of my line for years, but this is only my personal dislike.

PAGE 4 / MARKINGS AND COLORS BY: MARLENE ANDERSON

I would certainly breed to a fine male if he was all I wanted in a stud dog, even if he was freckled. I have done it, as a breeders must sacrifice to get what they want, often. Some people want a puppy with freckles and some breeders find nothing wrong with them. Many judges find absolutely nothing wrong with a heavily freckled dog, a white eared Saint, or even a crippled Saint, which leaves all with a choice under some judges.

Recently a litter of Saint puppies was sold by a pet shop in New Jersey. Every puppies seen from that litter had one blue eye. This is a rare happening in our breed. The buying public had no way of knowing this was incorrect, and every puppy was sold for two hundred and fifty dollars or more.

Another rarity is a grey Saint, or often termed "blues". Some are being seen in different parts of the country. They have a definite blue cast to the coat, and it is not traditional brown or orange colorings, but more like a grey Newfoundland or grey-blue Dane. These dogs, usually, have amber eyes and a lot of pink pigment on the lips and eye rims. This too, would be wrong, according to our standard, but many breeders have sold these dogs to the unknowing public as "typical" for our breed.