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Alaskan Malamutes: **Those Perfect Markings!**

Part One

Having seen many top winners with a variety of colours and markings over the past 30 years, I hardly thought that a dog might be denied a win based on his colour or so-called “less-than-perfect” markings. Dogs with every marking, from large nape spots to split bars on the face to asymmetrical white markings on one leg, have all finished championships, and some have gone on to successful campaigns as specials.

.At a recent show, a judge consulted the AKC standard to see if a particular dog whose markings included a half-collar should be disqualified. Another judge, commenting on a nationally televised dog show, described the lovely grey Malamute being exhibited in the group as “the correct colour”. One can only hope this was an accidental omission of the words “one of”, and not due to the mistaken belief that grey is the only proper colour.

A wide variety of colours and marking are allowed in the Alaskan Malamute. The standard states that the usual colours range from light grey through intermediate shadings to black, sable and shadings of sable to red. Colour combinations are acceptable in undercoats, points and trimmings.

White is the only solid colour allowed. Further, white is always the predominant colour on the underbody, is found on the legs and feet and is part of the facial markings. A white blaze on the forehead or a collar or nape-spot are considered attractive and acceptable. (Mantled colouring, where colour is broken by white or where white splashes over the body, is considered undesirable.)

The basic colours for the guard coat are black, white, red and grey (agouti). A true black and white Malamute will have hair strands that are black from base to tip. The undercoat will be black or a very dark charcoal. Gray or agouti dogs have hair strands containing bands of colour, with the lightest colour being at the base and the darkest colour, usually black, at the tip.

Depending upon the intensity and how these bands are distributed, the appearance of the coat colour can range from very light to very dark. For instance, a silver dog has light-grey colour-bands with a white undercoat. Intermediate grey dogs can vary greatly from light to dark, all with a white or cream undercoat. A seal Malamute has such a heavy concentration and length of black on the tips of the hair shaft that the dog appears black from a distance. Closer observation, revealing some lighter colour near the base and a cream or white undercoat, will distinguish a true black dog from a seal dog.

With white dogs, the hair is white from the base to the tip, although there may be varying shades of cream or biscuit. Red Malamutes can range from light reddish to a dark mahogany. They will have liver pigmentation of the lips and nose, with no black evident. Sable Malamutes may at first glance look like reds, but will have black or grey guard hairs with red or brown trimmings. These trimmings can be minor or very concentrated and dark. The undercoat will have a reddish tint, and the lips and nose will be black. Both the red and black factors are evident in a sable.

In my next column, I'll cover trimmings and facial markings.

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