



The ROUGH COLLIE BREED COUNCIL

established 1966
www.roughcolliebreedcouncil.org.uk

UNDERSTANDING THE RELEVANCE OF WHITE-FACTOR IN THE COLLIE

To understand the relevance of a Rough Collie's colour and markings one must understand its origin and original purpose. In common with its close cousins the Smooth, Bearded, and Border Collies plus Shetland Sheepdog together with a number of North American and Australian herding types, the Rough Collie can trace its ancestry back to the General British Stock Dog which had been carefully bred by stockmen, flock-masters, and drovers for more than four hundred years prior to the advent of dog shows in the mid 18th Century.

As practical country men living hard and demanding lives on very limited incomes their need was for a practical, hardy, lithe, athletic and intelligent dog capable of assisting them in their adduces task. To this end they required an animal that would contrast with the sheep and cattle which have traditionally grazed the upland areas of the British Isles, yet still be visible in poor lighting conditions, thus explaining why all British herding breeds sport coloured bodies with white areas, particularly on neck, head, chest and tail. Therefore, without knowing anything about genetics, early breeders selected for, what we now term, White-Factor animals and the predominantly white animal would usually be culled at birth although occasionally one would be raised for work around the farm-yard, or with young lambs.

When the Collie first entered the show ring in 1860, they were, like all breeds, judged by general stockmen who invariably placed a flashily marked specimen above their plainer cousins, and as exhibitors will always veer to the type which attracts a judge's attention so the show Collie has traditionally possessed flashy white markings. The fact that the first Breed Standard, published 1881, stated **Colour Immaterial** never did have much credence as is pointed out by **Rawdon Lee** in his book *'A History and Description of the Collie or Sheep Dog'* first published 1890, in which he states:

"... I may say that the line as to colour being immaterial is at any rate misleading. Colour has a considerable amount of weight with all judges..."

These anomalies regarding colour were addressed to some degree in the unified Breed Standard published in 1910, which states the following under the relevant sub-heading:

"COLOUR & MARKINGS: are immaterial, but other points being equal, a nice showily marked dog is preferred."

When the Kennel Club took control of all Breed Standards after the 2nd World War, they reiterated the Colour clause while dropping reference to the previously listed objection to All White and Setter Red, much to the annoyance of Rough Collie elders, with **Miss Clare Molony**,

writing a detailed description of each acceptable colour in the 'Collie Association Handbook of 1952', adding the following reference to white markings:

"A full white collar, white forelegs, white hind legs below the hocks, and a white tipped tail are desirable though not essential, and a white blaze on face is optional."

The first edition of **Margaret Osborne's** 'The Popular Collie' (later re-named 'The Collie') reprinted Miss Molony's interpretation of the Standard from the Collie Association Handbook, but on this occasion she had added to her earlier comments regarding Colour and Markings, saying:

"the 1910 standard said that white and red setter colours are most objectionable, and it is a great pity this clause was dropped. A list of acceptable colours might also be included"

From that moment the breed elders lobbied for such a clause, and after long and protracted discussions with the Kennel Club they were finally successful with the new Breed Standard, published in 1969, stating:

"COLOUR: — The three recognised colours are sable and white, tricolour and blue merle.

Sable: Any shade of light gold to rich mahogany or shaded sable. Light straw or cream coloured highly undesirable.

Tricolour: predominantly black with rich tan markings about legs and head. A rusty tinge in top coat highly undesirable.

Blue Merle: predominantly clear, silvery blue, splashed and marbled with black. Rich tan markings preferred, but their absence should not be counted as a fault. Large black markings, slate colour, or rusty tinge either of top or undercoat are highly undesirable.

White Markings: All the above may carry the typical white Collie markings to a greater or lesser degree. The following markings are favourable – White collar, full or part, white shirt, legs and feet, white tail tip. A blaze may be carried on muzzle or skull, or both."

The current Breed Standard, as regards colour and markings, varies little from that given above.

After around six hundred years of breeding for flashily marked Collies even those without a scientific background must appreciate that the vast majority of Collies of all types, whether or not they exhibit classic signs, are in fact White-Factored and it is now useless to try eliminating a genetic trait which enabled these animals to perform their original function of gathering, herding and driving livestock with greater ease.

Mis-marked or heavily patched with white animals have always appeared in litters, as does the occasional colour-headed white acceptable under American and Canadian Kennel Club rules. Mis-mark specimens of this type **must never** be confused with the double-dilute white produced when mating two merle animals together, for they are just as healthy as any other Collie making ideal pets, often being preferred by those who seek something a little different or unusual.

The British canine world is regulated by The Kennel Club and neither they nor anyone else has ever attempted to prescribe the breeding programme adopted by any kennel. British breeders may use which ever animals they like, with the single proviso that in order to register the stock both sire and dam **must** be registered in the same breed register. The use of mis-marked individuals along with other animals unlikely to win laurels in the show ring have always formed part of the serious breeder's armoury, and many kennels, even today, owe their continued existence to their willingness to retain and breed from white patched examples that were otherwise of high standard.

Not only does the Clarges Street based Kennel Club refrain from advising breeders on the breeding programmes they adopt, they have **never** prevented anyone showing a registered animal, however far it may deviate from the Breed Standard, consequently there have always been those who will risk their reputation by exhibiting animals which fail to display ideal markings.

Mrs George (*Beulah*), arguably the most high-profile breeder/exhibitor in her day, often kept and incorporated white-factor Collies into her breeding programme in addition to encouraging others to follow her example. Her **Beulah's Goldenshade**, as can be seen in *fig 1*, was a very heavily white patched Collie but this did prevent Mr F. W. Ball (*Backwoods*) from



fig 1:
Mrs George with her heavily white patched sable & white dog **Beulah's Goldenshade** (on the left) and his clearly white-factor son **Ch Beulah's Golden Future**

awarding him a 1st in Limit Dog at Blackpool & District Canine Society's Championship Show in 1937, although it did perhaps curtail his show ring success. **Ch Beulah's Golden Future**, by *Beulah's Goldenshade*, (seen on the right in *fig 1* above) and **Ch Beulah's Blanco-y-Negro** (*fig 2* below left) were both obvious white-factor Collies, as can be seen in these images, but this did not prevent either from becoming UK Champions in addition to being widely used and successful stud dogs. Golden Future in particular finding fame as the last pre 2nd World War champion dog,

sire of the 1st post 2nd World War champion Collie and grand-sire of Chs *Beulah's Golden Fuson Kin* and *Golden Flora*, the latter dam of the immortal *Ch/Ir Ch Lochinvar of Ladypark*.



fig 2:
White-factor Tricolour **Ch Beulah's Blanco-y-Negro** earned qualifying CC from all-rounder Mr J Garrow London Collie Club's 1st Championship Show 1955



fig 3:
Blue merle White-factor Male Champion
who gained his title in 1992

More recently this white patched blue merle dog (fig 3) was both campaigned to his title at a time when Rough Collie Championship Show entries would average in excess of 200 Rough Collie exhibits present at each Championship Show throughout the year, and again he was so widely used at stud that his breeding infiltrates almost all British Blue Merle lines of today. Finally only this year a white patched bitch (fig 4 below) after a

successful puppy career with several Reserve Challenge Certificates to her name, gained the Challenge Certificate with Best of Breed at one of our breed club Championship Shows, and will undoubtedly be bred from in due course. You will note that this bitch, like the dog above, does not exhibit the white line up the inside curve of her stifle but both are nevertheless white-factored collies and both exhibit clearly visible white patches on their back.

fig 4:
Blue merle White-factor Bitch Challenge Certificate
winner this year



Disqualifying faults have **never** been permitted under Kennel Club rules, although a judge has always been able to dismiss any animal that they believe to be vicious or suffering from a contagious disease, and it is now more than forty years since this same body insisted upon the removal of all fault clauses, replacing these with the same cover-all phrase appended to every Breed Standards which read:

“FAULTS: Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault is regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.”

The reason given for this departure from previous practice was a wish to promote positive rather than negative judging, which a list of faults is considered to encourage.

European Countries, like much of the world, come under the jurisdiction of the *Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)* who always adopt the Breed Standard from the ‘Country of Origin’, unless another country has an overwhelming claim to be considered the ‘Country of Development’, therefore the whole of Europe has adopted the British Standard for all Collie Breeds. This means that as the British Rough Collie Breed Standard does not include any disqualifying faults, no Rough Collie can be disqualified for failing to conform to the Breed Standard. This ruling confirmed after a British judge disqualified a colour headed white Collie,

bred in America and conforming to their Breed Standard, from competing in a major European show. the judge in question was subsequently advised that this procedure was incorrect and that the animal should have been judged but could have been given the lowest grade as it did not comply with the Breed Standard for the country of residence.

So far I have dealt solely with the white-factor influence over past and current Rough Collies showing and breeding practice. Its genetic inheritance remains mis-understood by the majority, despite current knowledge being fully covered in '*Breeding for Colour in Rough and Smooth Collies*' in addition to several more scientific volumes.

While admitting this and accepting that current theory suggests that the Extreme White Spotting gene, considered to be responsible for white-factor in collies, is inherited as an incomplete dominant, it must be admitted that further research is likely to draw quite different conclusions, particularly as inheritance never appears to follow classic Mendel inheritance patterns. Certainly colour headed, otherwise white specimens have appeared in litters where neither parent showed any indication of being white factored, just as two white-factor collies when mated together can and have produced whole litters of very plainly marked collies that are unlikely to attract the attention of any judge.

For this reason, if no other, there can be little profit in trying to limit the range of mates for any Collie, whether white-factor or not, providing it is a good specimen, and reasonable free from inheritable conditions. When a dog's health status is proved, by genetic profiling, to be free of widely distributed genetic conditions the breeding from such animals should be encouraged rather than otherwise, particularly in today's climate of diseases free animals, genetic diversity and a litigious public.

Dareen A Bridge
'Emmsmoor'

Official **Rough Collie Breed Archivist** for the whole of the UK and supported by the 'Rough Collie Breed Council'

www.roughcolliebreedcouncil.org.uk/rc-archive.html

Webmaster to the ROUGH COLLIE BREED COUNCIL

www.roughcolliebreedcouncil.org.uk

Owner and creator of www.collietree.info a Collie Resource site which traces the Collie's development from humble farm worker to glamorous Show Dog capable of winning at top level

Researcher and co-compiler with Iris Combe (*Tilehouse*) and Pat Hutchinson (*Karibuni*) of the Rough Collie classic '**Rough Collies of Distinction**'