



A Discussion of Nose Color in the Akita
By
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The description of the correct nose for an Akita seems pretty straightforward in the AKC standard. It is: "Broad and black. Liver permitted on white Akitas, but black always preferred." A "butterfly nose or total lack of pigmentation on nose" disqualify. Faced with the reality of an actual dog, however, people from novices to experienced dog-show judges have trouble reconciling what they see in front of them with the words of the standard.

The questions posed by them are actually complex :

1. What does the nose of a white Akita look like when it is not black?
2. Is "liver" an accurate description?
3. What is a butterfly nose
4. What is an unpigmented nose?
5. What is a white Akita?

Because the nose section of the standard causes so many problems, the same dog can be awarded a major one day and be disqualified the next. Worse, the correct decision on the part of a judge could have been made in either instance. This confusion can drive off all but the most stalwart fanciers. People who want to show honest dogs that conform to the standard often give up and those who want to win, continue but give in

This article is an attempt to clarify misunderstandings by putting pictures with the standard's words. Before beginning, however, I have a few disclaimers and notes.

First, I'd like to thank the people who have allowed me to use their pictures. Then, I'd like to point out that these are my opinions based on discussions with other

breeders and my own experiences and knowledge. As you read this, you should also keep in mind that inconsistencies in terminology among the breeds bedevil any discussion of canine coat color. Sometimes the same color or marking has different names from one breed to another; while other times, the same term is used but has a different meaning. I discuss this more thoroughly in the Spotting Discussion on this website.

TYPICAL WHITE AKITAS

Curiously, understanding the typical nose of a white Akita poses a far greater problem for people who are more rather than less knowledgeable. Owners and breeders concentrated only on Akitas don't have a problem taking the standard's "liver" at face value since they are often unfamiliar with other breeds and the terminology associated with them. People with a broad range of experience in dogs, however, get into trouble when they take what they know about liver coat color in other breeds and transfer it to Akitas.

The crux of the problem is that the "liver" nose of a white Akita isn't really a liver nose at all, or, at least, it shouldn't be. Maybe the people who wrote the standard weren't familiar with genetic livers or maybe they thought liver was a close enough description, or maybe they'd just finished cooking up some bait for shows. What is clear is that the term isn't in the standard to allow genetic livers as a breed color. The standard states unequivocally that the nose should be black regardless of coat color.

The diluted color on the nose of whites is an exception to this, although it is permitted but not preferred, and is the recognition of the genetic realities associated with white coat color. The dilution that most often causes white coats isn't always confined just to the hair. A failure to note this in the standard would have excluded many fine Akitas from breeding and showing. Akitas could ill afford losing quality dogs from the gene pool, since the original breeding base, even in the native country, was extremely small after World War II.

So it's doubly unfortunate that wording intended to protect whites sometimes proves damaging to them when judges misunderstand or misinterpret. Showing a white can be so difficult that breeders and exhibitors avoid even worthy white dogs.

Typical Whites

On the following page is a gallery showing the noses of white Akitas. Although they are different colors, they are all less than black. They are all correct by the standard, although black is always preferred. So, if you were faced with that may-we-all-be-so-lucky, mythical choice between two dogs of absolutely equal quality, pigment might make the difference in your decision. Otherwise, you have to accept that the color is natural and goes hand-in-hand with the color.

This is in part because the enzymes responsible for melanin production can be and often are very sensitive to minute changes in temperature, and we all know that dogs have cold noses. I suspect that when this sensitivity is coupled with the genes that fade coat color to white, the melanin of the nose is affected more so than when fading alleles are not present.





Sunlight can affect the depth of the nose color on whites. Whether this is because of heat or exposure to some radiation wavelengths, I don't know. Many breeds living in cold climates develop a "snow nose" in winter, and the same causes may further affect the already reduced nose pigment of white Akitas.