



A Discussion of Nose Color in the Akita—Part II
By
Sherry E. Wallis

A LIVER NOSE?

In solving one problem, the typical nose of a white, the standard set up another, because the writers picked the wrong terms to describe the color. As soon as you compare the noses of white Akitas with those of genetic liver dogs in other breeds, you have a problem. The nose of a white Akita isn't liver because Akitas don't or at least shouldn't be genetic livers.

The term isn't such a problem for most Akita owners and/or breeders because many of them aren't familiar enough with liver-colored dogs to notice the difference, or else they understand that the term is descriptive and not literal.. On the other hand, you can bet that anyone in the sport long enough to judge knows what a real liver nose looks like.

Confronted with some of the noses on the previous page, the first thng they think is,

“The standard says liver nose and that nose is not liver.” Well, look at the real livers here and you can see that this is absolutely right!

The discrepancy still wouldn't matter except that the next logical step is:

“This color nose must be a fault, therefore it should be penalized in accordance with its degree.”



Further underpinning this decision is the standard's disqualification of butterfly and totally unpigmented noses. Some whites come very close to this.

A Word About Liver

The most obvious difference between the noses of white Akitas and those of genetic livers is that the former have black pigment somewhere, although it may just be visible at the edges. Liver dogs have no black pigment—anywhere. For the purposes of this discussion, **liver** refers to any shade or color that results from the presence of two recessive alleles of the liver gene.

The color has various names depending on the breed, including liver, chocolate, brown, copper, and red, although these terms may also refer to tan or brown which is different genetically. Regardless of whether the end result is the dark copper seen in Siberians or the light cream of a Labrador and regardless of what it is called in any breed where it is present, dogs that are genetic livers do not have black pigment in either their coat or on the “**leather**” which is the skin of the nose, lips, pads, eye-rims, and anus.

In a liver-colored dog, the leather is liver, even the eye may be affected and show a reddish-brown cast. Those with one or both dominant alleles have normal coat color since the “liver” gene only affects black pigment wherever it occurs on the dog. If the normal coat color has no black in it, as with a yellow or fawn, the dog will be distinguishable as a liver only by the color of the leather.

“Red” Dobermans are a good example of this gene’s effect. As you can see, from the two dogs pictured above, the “tan/brown/rust” pigment of the points is the same color in both dogs, because the liver gene changes the black pigment but does not affect that responsible for brown pigment. This is particularly obvious when you look at the distribution of the coat colors as opposed to the color of the points.

Liver color occurs so seldom in Akitas that most people don’t realize the alleles exist in the breed. Those unfamiliar with the color in other breeds may fail to recognize it in their own dogs, especially if those dogs do not have black in their coat color.

The Akita puppy on the previous page is readily identifiable as a liver at this stage in his life because many puppies are very black. The more obvious the black would be in the absence of the liver gene, the more obvious the liver is when it is present. That’s why a liver Doberman is more easily identified as a liver than a liver Ridgeback.

The dog on the right is much easier to miss, and if he were self-masked he might pass as a cream with light eyes. Any dog, including a white, that doesn’t have black hairs in the coat will be hard to identify as a liver without inspection of the leather.

Indeed, liver alleles may be harbored in self-colored fawns and creams as well as whites because the liver can easily be confused with faded pigment. You can tell which is which by looking at all the leather. Dogs with totally faded nose pigment will still have black in other areas if they are not livers. If all the leather is liver-colored, you are looking at a dog that is genetically a liver.

Dudley Nose

The white Akita’s nose more closely approximates a “**Dudley**” or “**flesh-colored**” nose than a liver. In *Canine Terminology*, Spira defines them as:



When she told me about this dog’s deep emerald eyes as a puppy, I informed the breeder he was a liver. Because he is a cream, the presence of liver isn’t that obvious

“Dudley The name given to a weakly pigmented, flesh-coloured nose. Other names apply to the dudley nose syndrome including ‘cherry nose’, ‘putty nose’ and ‘flesh nose.’

“Flesh or Flesh-coloured nose An evenly-coloured nose, similar in all respects to the so-called ‘dudley’ nose, the difference being that the term ‘dudley’ is used to describe a fault, while ‘flesh-coloured’ is used in breed standards where such pigmentation is acceptable.” (Spira, 100)

The Ibizan has a true Dudley or flesh-colored nose as do several spaniels including the Clumber.



Although the white Akita’s nose often is putty, cherry, or flesh colored, it’s less likely to be evenly colored as you see with the noses of Ibizans or Clumbers. Rather, it resembles a “**snow nose**,” most common in Arctic breeds like this Malamute’s (left). The depigmentation probably arises from similar causes since both will darken on exposure to sunlight.

By Spira’s definitions, the white Akita's nose is more correctly termed “**partly unpigmented**” which he goes on to explain is not necessarily the result “of a permanent nature nor is it always to be regarded as a fault as climatic, environmental and nutritional factors may cause temporary loss of nasal pigment.” (Spira 100)

This type of nose can have areas that become completely depigmented. If this happens to a snow-nose, then it becomes a “**butterfly**” nose, which in Akitas is a disqualification. The loss of pigment may be temporary, but owners should realize that the dog shouldn’t be shown until it repigments.

*NOTE: Spira is speaking generally. Any Akita with a butterfly nose in the show ring should be disqualified even if it is a puppy.