

A Discussion of Nose Color in the Akita-Part III
By
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BUTTERFLY NOSE

Of course, many dogs with butterfly noses have them all their lives. Despite the examples I have here, they are most common on colored dogs with white face markings; whereas dilution of the pigment is most common with whites.

Exactly what constitutes a butterfly nose is also subject to review. The AKC Complete Dog Book defines a butterfly nose as a “parti-colored nose; i.e. dark, spotted with flesh color. (AKC, 742). Spira, on the other hand, says:

“Butterfly nose syn. Spotted nose. A partially unpigmented nose of irregular flecked appearance. Typical of harlequin-patterned or merle-colored dogs, e.g. Great Dane, Cardigan Welsh Corgi, but listed as undesirable in numerous breed standards. The time of completion of full nasal pigmentation tends to vary from breed to breed and even strains within a given breed. When judging it is important, therefore, not to penalize too severely for incomplete pigmentation at too early an age.”* (Spira, 100)

He also discusses unpigmented spots or “flesh marks,” which are “poorly coloured or unpigmented areas on an otherwise correctly coloured nose...Flesh marks joining into one another make up into a butterfly nose.” (Spira, 60)

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



Flesh mark or butterfly? How do you view the unpigmented spot on the dilute color of this Akita's nose?

If you go by the AKC definition, two colors on the nose make it parti-colored and so one flesh mark would make a butterfly nose. If you go by Spira, a butterfly nose is comprised of flesh marks, but one flesh mark doesn't make a butterfly. The question is then: What distinguishes one large flesh mark from several joined together? How large is a flesh mark before it's considered two together?

Whether the dog on the left has a butterfly nose is subject to debate, but there can be none over the dog on the right. This is clearly a butterfly nose.

One problem in recognizing unpigmented skin is that it doesn't always look the same. Sometimes it is bubble-gum pink, like the tongue, because the circulatory system gives it color it wouldn't have otherwise or it is fish-belly white. This

same color, or lack of it, can also be found inside the ear on many dogs.

Puppies often lack leather pigment at birth. Tiny black dots appear and gradually spread until they are all united. White face markings result from the actions of the S or spotting series genes which prevent production of melanin. We associate them with coat hair, but these genes also affect skin.



there. He also had a tiny bit left on the inside of on nostril, but the leather was black.

The unpigmented nose of the puppy on the left is a good illustration of this. His nose is fish-belly white rather than pink. It was completely filled in by the time he was a year old, but he had a patch of unpigmented skin on his muzzle that showed through the white markings

While this wouldn't concern me at all as a judge, as a breeder, my choice of partners for him would have been solid-colored heads. Breeders who ignore the suggestions of pigment problems do so at some peril. If the nose hasn't filled in naturally by the time the dog is 18 months old, it probably will never do so without artificial help, which unfortunately does occur.

In contrast to the faded nose of whites, where color is most often missing on the top, unpigmented areas of the butterfly nose are usually at the base around the front of the nostrils. Judges may fail to even notice a butterfly nose unless they make a point of lifting the



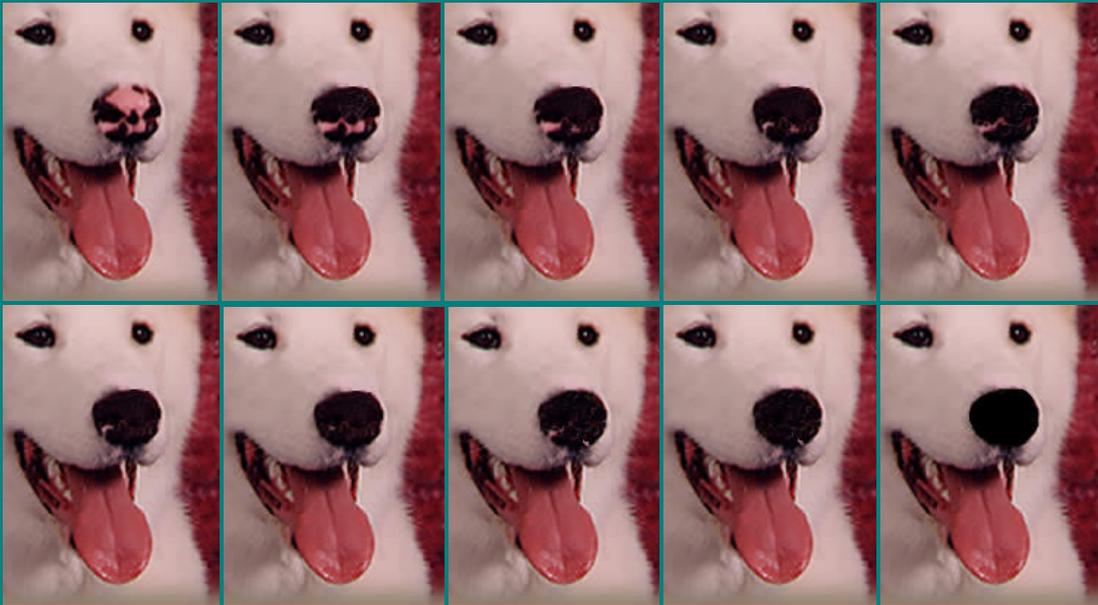
Butterfly nose on a puppy. The black spots will spread across the nose, and should eventually cover it, but that doesn't always happen.



Compare these litter mates and their noses

dog's head up during the examination so that they can see the base clearly. Pigment may also be restricted in other areas of the dog's face, including the eye rims and/or lips. Extending a line from the white markings of the coat can often make the reasons for this obvious.

POP QUIZ: Decide for yourself if these are butterfly noses? Number 1 is the benchmark—you get no credit for a yes on this one!



Decided? 1 is a yes and 10 is a fake. Missing pigment on the eyes and mouth should make you very suspicious of a coal black nose, especially where white is on the face. You have to decide for yourself how much depigmentation you consider disqualifying.

TOTAL LACK OF PIGMENTATION

The photos above are good illustrations of noses where pigment is missing. A nose that is completely lacking pigment is a disqualification, and one which, incidentally, I've never seen on an adult.

I have, however, seen whites that were so close many judges would consider disqualification warranted. The trick here is the word "total," because even whites with bright pink noses have a rim of pigmented skin around the margin of the nose leather.

The two dogs here provide good cases in point. The nose here is about the same color as the tongue. Like the dog on the next page, black pigment is present at the borders of the nose. Both have very black lips, so much so that the bottom of the nose and the hair between the nose and lips in the front is black. It's not the best nose possible on a white, but it is certainly permitted.



Pigment loss can be due to other factors as well. One of my black Akitas whose nose was much darker than his coat had a ball with a large handle that he loved it so much, he



even slept with his head resting on it. After a few months of carrying it around all day long, at the age of 6, he developed true butterfly nose! The pigment on the front of his nose, the skin at the front of his muzzle and on his lips was pinkish-white. I found a new toy and disposed of the ball, but it took about a year for all the pigment to return. (This is of some cause for alarm because this kind of depigmentation can also be the result of an autoimmune disorder). Of course, a judge faced with such a dog in the ring must follow the standard, but breeders should realize that not all pigment problems are due to serious genetic problems.