

Pigment

Third in a series exploring breed type.

Copyright 2003 by Kathy Lorentzen

Pigment-or I might better say, the current lack of it that seems prevalent in our breed right now, is a subject of great interest to me. During my tenure in the breed (32 years), I have watched as skin pigment in our liver dogs has faded, in far too many cases, from dark liver to pink. And while not as drastic, it has certainly lightened in the black dogs as well. This change has dramatically altered expression in the breed. The standard says that "*the color of the iris harmonizes with the color of the coat*" and it also says that eye rims "*match the coat in color*". I interpret that to mean that a dog with proper pigment shows no variation in color on eye rims at the transition point between hair and bare skin.

Yet it is commonplace now for our dogs to show a very "goggle-eyed" appearance which is due to eye rims that are a considerable number of shades lighter than the surrounding hair. Combined with iris color which is frequently too light as well, and eyes that are not "*set fairly deep in their sockets*", the entire look changes-from soft, kindly and trusting to harsh, staring and vapid.

I have a pretty strong theory as to why this change has happened. I have been doing a fair amount of research on foreign Springers and it has struck me that pigment on European bred dogs is much more correct and attractive than what we are getting in this country. Time and again I am drawn to the warm, intelligent expressions that are displayed by those dogs, and it is created in great part by the outstanding iris and eye rim color that the dogs possess. And those dogs all have something else as well-ticking! And just what is ticking? It is pigment in the skin. The quest in America to "fancy up" markings and remove all traces of ticking has resulted in a tremendous loss of pigment in our breed. We have bred the good pigment right out of them, and in doing so we have jeopardized a feature of our breed that the standard says is the essence of the Springer's appeal.

I'm including two headshots of Scandinavian dogs that show extraordinary pigment and expression. (They are also just plain gorgeous heads, so correct to the standard). Take a look and you will see the tremendous appeal in the faces of these dogs. I personally think that the ticking on their faces adds to their character-and it certainly goes hand in hand with the spectacular color of their eyes and eye rims (and noses, for that matter, obviously nose color is affected by all this as well).

I would suggest here that the opportunity to restore proper pigment to our breed is not lost. Are you willing to tolerate some ticking to get it back? Food for thought. As always, correspondence is invited. vincefan@centurytel.net

