

## **Breeding for Color**

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Let me first say that I don't dislike Border Collies that are not traditionally marked or colored. I dislike the breeding of Border Collies being for color or physical traits that are not beneficial to the long term of a working breed.

This all started last week when I was contemplating getting off a Facebook page that sold Border Collies for various venues. Some are listed for work dogs, others for agility, or obedience. Nearly every time a post came up from that particular page that week, it had to do with puppies being sold because of their color.

This led me to start a conversation with an individual who had posted to that Facebook page that they were looking for a rare color to become their next dog. They said the color was important, but also they wanted a good temperament. My conversation didn't last long, as is usually the case in these matters, as the person didn't want to hear what I was saying or didn't want to believe what is true.

Border Collies have been very lucky as a breed in that the standard for most of our breeding has come down to talented work dogs. Those with the most talent, were bred the most often. Until recently, those without much talent, or not physically able to handle work, were unlikely to enter the gene pool. With that history, we are fortunate to have dogs with talent to work and relatively few physical problems.

So, back to my conversation on the Facebook page. I tried to explain that by limiting her choices to such a rare color in our breed, she was unlikely to get the best dog possible. And although she wanted a dog with a great temperament as well as color, she thought there were no negatives associated with color.

Breeding dogs with recessive genes together to express the recessive trait, is not a good choice. This has been proven in many species of animals, including horses, cows, cats, etc. Anytime you breed uncommon recessive genes together, you are pulling from such a small gene pool that you are likely to expose other harmful genes that are exposed through that colored gene. A dilute or merle gene is even more dangerous.

Most people have not given thought to why our breed looks the way it does. It wasn't because breeders or shepherds thought it would be really cool to have a dog that is mostly dark with some white points, it is because those dogs with the traditional markings moved the sheep and cattle with the proper authority. Too dark, and they might startle the sheep at a trial, too light or white, they might not have enough presence to move stock that is not accustomed to them.

But in our gene pool there are dogs that have different recessive colors. When two dogs have the recessive gene, some of the pups may be colored with the recessive gene. I have no problem with that, but only when the two dogs are mated to produce the best dog in mind. I have a huge problem with breeders thinking that color does not change how stock is affected by our breed, or that color is desirable for marketing purposes.

Through my webpage, I get a few requests looking for puppies. Sometimes, they are looking for a particular color. I try to explain why this is a poor idea, and that I know of no serious Border Collie breeder that is breeding for color. Some individuals understand, others like on the Facebook page, don't want to understand. They want their idea of what a Border Collie can look like.

Whether you are looking for the best sheepdog, cowdog, or sport's dog, you should look for qualities that will enhance their work and performance. Color enhances nothing but appearance. Pick the best dog....not the color.