

VIZSLA

VIZSLA MYTHS

In December's column, I explained that the 'Futaki horns' – a feature thought by some to be unique to the Vizsla – are in fact found in other breeds, and that an explanation of this singularity must be sought elsewhere than in the history of the Vizsla.

Along with the 'horns,' the 'Esterhazy saddle' is sometimes discussed as if it were a hallmark of the Smooth Vizsla. In *Your Vizsla*, the authors wrote that, "Some of the finest specimens of the breed carry the 'Esterhazy saddle' or stripe, as it is known in Hungary today.... The saddle is a darker shading of the coat colour over the back. The darker shading slopes downwards over the shoulder and from there it narrows and goes back to the tail where it becomes the tail colour or is a darker stripe on the top surface of the tail." Far from accepting it as typical of the breed, the 1981 version of the Hungarian standard grudgingly concedes the marking is not a 'significant' fault (but a fault nevertheless), and adds it is usually due to nourishment conditions!

Interestingly, the same feature occurs in Weimaraners, where the marking is called the 'eel stripe' and identical markings, down to the lighter shoulder tabs, can also be observed on Pharaoh Hounds. Evidently, the 'Esterhazy saddle' is not unique to the Vizsla. As early as 1957, in *The Inheritance of Coat Color in Dogs*, Clarence Little commented on the fact that restriction of black (liver) pigment has a regional aspect "as is shown by differences between dorsal and ventral or central and peripheral areas of the body." Perhaps we need go no further for an explanation of the 'Esterhazy saddle.' A related possibility is that the saddle is caused by the pattern of migration of pigment cells from the neural crest at the embryonic stage, with areas closer to the neural crest retaining more pigment. One thing is certain, however, and it is that the suggestion put forward by the authors of the 1981 Hungarian standard – that the feature is due to nourishment conditions – is to be seriously doubted, insofar as the 'Esterhazy saddle' is found on Vizslas raised in different environments and on widely varying diets throughout the world.

The conclusion of the last two columns has to be that if 'horns' and 'saddles' are by no means unique to the Vizsla, a 'hornless' and 'saddleless' Vizsla is quite as lovable and engaging as any other. – *François-R. Bernier, 42 de la Gravité, Hull, Que. J9A 2Z2; e-mail: vizslas@bajnok.com*