

Breed Standard: HOW MUCH WHITE IS TOO MUCH ?

Last RR, we printed François-R Bernier's explanation on the presence of white in the genetic makeup of the Vizsla. In this article he tackles the issue of how much white - and disqualifications.

The *Vizsla Breedlines* column published in the October 1997 issue of *Dogs in Canada* states that in Canada "white hairs on any part of the body other than a small amount on the chest is a disqualification (two inches or under on the chest is acceptable)." Is this an accurate account of the Canadian standard? Our standard provides that "White markings over two inches (5.08 cm) on the chest or white markings anywhere else other than the chest" is a disqualification. At first blush, there would appear to be a difference between "white hairs" and "white markings" on any part of the body and I believe that a closer examination of the words of the standard confirms the difference.

It may be useful to briefly review the situation in this and other countries. In Canada, the 1963 standard did not include any disqualification; it provided that while "small white spots on chest or feet are not considered defects", they should be "eliminated in future breedings." The 1982 FCI/Hungarian standard states that "smaller white spots on the chest and on the feet are not faulted" but that "bigger white spots" and "white feet" are a disqualification. The current British standard states that "small white marks on chest and feet, though acceptable, undesirable". The 1960 American standard also provided that "small white spots on chest and feet are not faulted" while the 1982 revision introduced a disqualification for "massive areas of white on chest; white anywhere else on the body; solid white extending above the toes". This short overview discloses two things. The first is that Canada is the only country in the world (including the country of origin) to disqualify a Vizsla that has a small amount of white on its feet. The second is that the words "mark", "marking" and "spot" are all used to refer to the amount of white that is faulty or that involves a disqualification. It is not within the scope of this short article to deal with the first point although I note that I have yet to hear a convincing explanation as to why our standard should be stricter than all other standards on this point.

As mentioned, many of the standards appear to use the words "mark", "marking" or "spot" interchangeably. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "marking" as "a mark or a pattern of marks". A "mark" is "a visible trace or impression diversifying a surface, as a line, dot, stain, discoloration, scar or the like". Finally, a "spot" is defined as "a small, usually roundish, mark of a different colour from the main surface". These definitions allow us to suggest a working definition of "marking" as being "an area that distinguishes itself from the surrounding area by its colour".

But not every marking or spot involves a disqualification. Only *white* markings and then only if they appear elsewhere than on the chest or, if on the chest, the marking measures more than two inches (5.08 cm). The important point is that disqualification is only called for if there can be found an area (elsewhere than on the chest) that is of a different

colour, in this case white, than the golden rust background colour.

On this basis, it is very difficult to accept that a few isolated white hairs would be sufficient to trigger the disqualification of a Vizsla; a few isolated white hairs can hardly be said to form a "marking" or "spot" or "mark". If, for example, four or five dispersed white hairs are found on the flank of a Vizsla, there is no area that can properly be said to be defined as being of a colour other than the background colour. Unless, of course, the whole flank is then said to be a "white marking". This would be so patently absurd as to require no further attention. In this case, the *white hairs* do not form a *marking*.

But white hairs can also be present in sufficient numbers to form a roan marking and the question becomes whether the roaning that is often found on Vizslas is sufficient to trigger the application of the disqualification? The word "roan" in relation to an animal refers to one having a coat "in which the prevailing colour is thickly interspersed with some other" (*Shorter Oxford*). It should also be kept in mind that "roan" is often used as the name of a colour, either on its own or with the prevailing colour being expressed. For example, a horse whose prevailing colour is chestnut with interspersed white or grey hair may be said to be roan or chestnut roan. Reference can also be made to the English Cocker Spaniel standard in which "roan" is used as a colour. In *The Inheritance of Coat Color in Dogs* (1979), geneticist C.C. Little also refers to "roan" as a separate colour. For our purposes, the issue is simply expressed: is an area of roan on a Vizsla the same thing as an area of white? To ask the question is really to answer it. While an area of roaning may well have sufficient definition that it can be said to form a "marking", "mark" or "spot", that marking cannot properly be described as a *white* marking. A roan marking includes not only white hair but also hair of the predominant coat colour. The result is not "white". A roan horse is not a white horse and, similarly, a roan marking is not the same as a white marking.

It has been said that the "intent" of those who proposed the inclusion of this disqualification in the breed standard was to include roan or isolated white hair. But that "intent" must still be supported by the words of the standard. No matter when they became involved with the Vizsla breed, owners, exhibitors and breeders are entitled to rely on the breed standard itself as opposed to what someone says the standard is intended to say. The standard is the proper point of reference, not the unverifiable "intent" of persons involved in the breed in earlier days or an "interpretation" by particular individuals. An "interpretation" that is not supported by the actual words of the standard is simply the expression of a personal opinion.

We might want to ask ourselves this question: if it was indeed the "intent" of the standard to disqualify Vizslas that exhibit a few white hair or an area of roan on their coat (other than the allowed white area on the chest), why does the standard not simply say so? The standard could easily provide that *white or roan markings* on the chest over 2"

Breed Standard: HOW MUCH WHITE IS TOO MUCH ?

and white *or roan markings* anywhere other than the chest is a disqualification. It does not! It could equally provide that white markings over 2" on the chest *or white hairs* anywhere other than the chest is a disqualification. Again, it does not! I believe this confirms that the intent of those who prepared and approved this disqualification is exactly that conveyed by its wording: Vizslas with an area of solid white more than two inches on the chest or with any area of solid white elsewhere than on the chest should be disqualified. Vizslas that do not meet this description may be faulty but they are not subject to disqualification. The onus is on those who believe otherwise to show how the *words used in the standard* support a different reading of the standard.

In conclusion, the suggestion that a Vizsla with white hairs on any part of the body except the chest should be disqualified is not supported by the words of the standard. Unless the "white hairs" form a defined "marking" and that marking is uniformly white in colour, a Vizsla is not subject to disqualification. Before a Vizsla is disqualified, it is necessary to establish 1) the existence of a "marking", i.e. a defined area that is distinguishable from its background by reason of its colour and 2) the fact that this distinguishing colour is white. This is how the standard was applied a few years ago when Tino Petalas' Ch. Futaki's Ruckle River Rags, C.D. was disqualified at a show for having roaning on his toes. The disqualification was appealed and the dog reinstated on the ground that that no "white marking" could be seen on its feet. More recently, Bob Gammage's Ch. Ferngold Auburn Quincy, C.D., F.D. Jr was disqualified by judge Sandra Lex because of the presence of a roan marking on his chest. This dog was also reinstated by an appeal committee made up of two judges and a breeder on the ground the chest marking was not a "white marking".

In Canada, breed standards are authored by the Canadian Kennel Club. Although changes to a breed standard are generally first proposed by fanciers of the breed, in the end, it is the CKC that decides whether or not a change will be made. As far as the disqualification for white is concerned, it has now been found on two separate occasions by appeal committees that a *roan* marking is *not* a disqualification in Canada. These appeal committees were appointed by the CKC to whom the standard belongs and their decisions are authoritative interpretations of the standard. It will always

be the case with any such decision that some will disagree with them. But breed fanciers should be careful to distinguish between their personal opinion and the proper application of the breed standard. If it is thought that roan markings should also be a disqualification under our standard, a proposal to that effect can be submitted to the Canadian Kennel Club. Until then, it should be taken for settled that a Vizsla with a roan area larger than 2 inches on its chest or a roan marking on its toes is not subject to disqualification. Such markings should be faulted but they do not disqualify.

On a more general note, we should be mindful of the dangers of genetic selection that overemphasizes cosmetic traits. Historically, the single-minded pursuit of fancy points in the breeding of dogs has often been to the detriment of the health, overall conformation and usefulness of a breed. In the case of the Vizsla, its golden rust coat is an element of breed type and this may justify making the presence of too much white a disqualifying factor. We should keep in mind that while it is applied to the showing of dogs, the blunt instrument of disqualification is ultimately meant to influence their breeding. This is all the more reason for a disqualification to be read and applied with common sense and in a manner consistent with the purpose of eliminating truly undesirable specimens of a breed from future breeding. We should be cautious before endorsing "interpretations" of the standard that would bring about the disenfranchisement of sound examples of the breed on the basis of an exaggerated or unreasonable attention to minor cosmetic faults. This is all the more so when it is realized not only that white has been and will remain an integral part of the genetic make-up of the Vizsla breed but that some of the important Vizslas of the past might well have been removed from our gene pool if, as stated in the October *Breedlines* column, "white hairs on any part of the body" was a disqualification.

March 2, 1998

Francois Bernier

Bajnok Reg'd

bernif@sen.parl.gc.ca

And you thought you had trouble getting your (one or two) vizslas to 'sit stay'!

