



WHAT'S IN A COLOR?

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. While this is one of the Bard’s most frequently quoted lines, it would no longer be true today. Shakespeare lived in the day before man-made hybrids. Roses now come in every color in the rainbow, including multi-color, striped, spotted, and swirled, yet many varieties have lost the very qualities that have characterized and endeared them to our hearts for centuries, including fragrance, cold-hardiness, disease resistance, and vigor. The same thing seems to be happening to the Tibetan Mastiff (TM), as breeders strive to chase the latest fad or create a signature color to grab attention. The breed has historically included many colors, but that does not mean that any and all colors are desirable or acceptable. Every time our [Breed Standard](#) comes up for a revision, color becomes a point of debate. I won’t attempt to justify or deny any particular color, but would like to simply highlight and interpret what our Standard actually says, color by color.

Black is black, and pretty self-explanatory, but because a solid black TM is rare, let me take this opportunity to discuss markings. “White markings on chest and feet are acceptable.” White anywhere else is a disqualification, including white stockings, muzzle, tail, underbelly, behind the head, or a white stripe down the nose. White markings should be minimal, not a prominent feature. A large white chest, as seen in the Bernese Mountain Dog, is incorrect for a TM: “Large white markings to be faulted”. It is important to distinguish between white markings and light tan markings, which can include light silver that can appear almost white.

Black and tan describes a black dog with tan markings which can be found above and around the eyes, on each side of the muzzle, on throat, on feet and the lower part of both front and back legs extending upwards on the inside of the legs, on britches, and the underside of the tail. The color of tan markings ranges “from light silver to rich mahogany”. Please note that while mahogany can describe markings, it cannot describe the dog, and this will be discussed further below. Black and tan is a common color pattern found in many breeds, from Dachshunds to Rottweilers, and is easily recognizable.

Blue/grey is one color, and is a dilute black. As such, it carries with it dilute eye rim and nose leather. The depth of color of the leather should correspond with the depth of color of the dog. I will also add that even though dilute, the color should be consistent, not mottled in appearance. Blue/grey can have tan and/or white markings.

Brown, or chocolate, is like a dilute, in that it also carries dilute eye rim and nose leather. A brown Tibetan Mastiff would be similar in color to a chocolate Labrador Retriever, although a chocolate TM may also have tan and/or white markings. A TM that appears brown but has black leather is not a true chocolate, and this would be a disqualification.

Gold is the most varied and the most debated color in the Tibetan Mastiff. Gold is described as “shades ranging from a pure golden to a rich red gold”. Gold can vary vastly depending on lighting, especially light golds. What may look gold in natural light may wash out to the point of appearing cream under artificial light, especially the fluorescents found in most show venues. Care needs to be taken when assessing color, especially with a light gold puppy, whose fluffy puppy coat may appear cream. True color can be determined by checking the ear flaps

and muzzle. Sabbling may be found on gold dogs, and some may be heavily sabled. Wolf sabbling and sabbling in a saddle pattern are unacceptable. If a TM is patterned similar to a German Shepherd, it is a disqualification.



Since the Chinese Market type dogs appeared on the scene in the early 2000's, red gold has become a hotly contested color. Personal opinions vary dramatically, but it is critical that the description in our Standard is upheld, both by breeders and judges. Our standard does not say dark red; it does not say deep red; it does not say mahogany; it does not say chestnut; it does say "rich red gold", which is very different from any of the previously mentioned colors and is a departure from the FCI standard.

While dark red is acceptable under the FCI Standard, it is not acceptable under the AKC Standard, and this seems to be a point that many judges who have judged in Europe or Asia under FCI have missed. Dark red, or mahogany, such as seen in Irish Setters, is a disqualification.

[Qassaba Ausables Rakpa Of Chokola](#)

Example of Rich red gold

"All other coat colors (e.g., white, cream, wolf sable, brindle and particolored) and markings other than those specifically described" are a disqualification.

Why the concern for color? Because a deviation in color begs the question as to whether another breed has been introduced to give that color, and thus calls the integrity of the breed into question. Indeed, sabbling in the gold TMs first appeared only in the 1980's as a result of the introduction of a Central Asian Ovcharka as well as another dog of questionable ancestry from Ladakh. Because of its prevalence, sabbling has now been accepted, but it should be noted that it was a DQ under a previous FCI standard. Some colors can be extremely beautiful and eye-catching, but we are striving for true, not flashy. Everyone has their favorite color, and whether you agree with it or not, anything other than these specified colors is a disqualification for the Tibetan Mastiff according to the AKC Breed Standard. Both breeders and judges have a responsibility to protect the puppy buying public, maintain the integrity of the breed, and preserve the work of generations of responsible preservationist breeders who have adhered to the Breed Standard to produce dogs that are authentic in type and color, rather than sacrificing a breed we love in order to create the latest fad. Judges have a duty to put aside personal preferences and uphold the AKC Standard, securing the future of the breed by preserving the legacy of the past.

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