

Those Unusual Mismarks

By: Diane Welle (Blue Knight Labradors)

Important: This article *only* refers to purebred Labrador Retrievers (bred to the Standard, not designer colors that do not exist in the standard). So-Called Silver Labradors have many skin conditions and coloration problems. If you bought a dog advertised as a "Rare" color, you get what you paid for -- rare problems and off colors that are not the same as the mismarks that have always been known to exist in the breed (which are addressed in this article). *Any other color or a combination of colors other than black, yellow or chocolate is a disqualifying fault in the Labrador Retriever. Mismarks may not be shown.*

Here is the Standard for colors as written:

The Labrador Retriever coat colors are black, yellow and chocolate. Any other color or a combination of colors is a disqualification. A small white spot on the chest is permissible, but not desirable. White hairs from aging or scarring are not to be misinterpreted as brindling. Black-Blacks are all black. A black with brindle markings or a black with tan markings is a disqualification. Yellow-Yellows may range in color from fox-red to light cream, with variations in shading on the ears, back, and underparts of the dog. Chocolate-Chocolates can vary in shade from light to dark chocolate. Chocolate with brindle or tan markings is a disqualification.

I've had telephone calls. "I saw a litter where the puppies looked like mixed breeds, they were black, with flecks or patches of brown on them or yellow with black spots. Mismarks have been well documented in the breed since the beginning.

Don't be so quick to determine that there was any other breed in the wood pile, although, the buyer MUST be aware that Lab puppies with odd marks absolutely might be mixed-bred puppies (this is where you must use your common sense, and gut feelings regarding the knowledge base of the breeder in question). The whole litter will not be mismarked in a Labrador litter. One or two in the odd litter maybe, but not an entire litter.

Mismarks occur naturally in Labradors. They're not mixed breeds at all. They're 100% Labrador. They're not "rare" they're not "bad", they're just mismarked puppies. They can't be shown, but they make as wonderful a pet as their non-mismarked littermates, and are usually sold for less than their littermates. They're everything that a Labrador is. Often, a Sire and a Dam will never produce a mismark again, even though they carry the genes to do so. It's typically a very unusual event, UNLESS, someone has found a specific line that produces it, and is deliberately producing them -- I have only found one case (and they're producing about three to six litters

Per MONTH, and does not permit the buyer to see their facilities, but rather delivers them to a meeting location - can you spell PUPPY MILL?). Don't be fooled. There is nothing wrong with a mismarked puppy, but they are *mismarked*.

My intent is not to get into the genetics of mismarks. This is addressed in an article by Pamela A. Davol better than I could ever do it, and if you are interested in words like "nucleotides, gene locus, homozygous, eterozygous, and allele", that article is for you. If not, and you're just a potential puppy owner, and simply want to know that something is possible without going into the genetics of it all, this page is for you.

IMPORTANT:

Sadly, after reading this article through the years, many owners of questionable litters have written to me, asking me to display their obviously mixed-bred puppies on this page as a demonstration of mismarked puppies. Do not allow the breeder of any questionable litter to send you to this page as "proof" that their puppies are purebred. Although respected breeders might send a buyer here to see that mismarks can, and do happen, they'll not send you here to prove to you that their puppies are not mixed. If you've done your homework, and the breeder in question is respected, responsible, and well-known, that's one thing. If the breeder is a back-yard breeder ("we just bred her once so the kids could see the miracle of birth"), you best assume that you are looking at mixed-bred puppies. If the neighbor dog could get over the fence (and bring a few of his buddies along -- there can be mulitple fathers in one litter), you must be careful. You have every right to ask your breeder to DNA the puppy before you purchase a black and tan or brindled puppy as a purebred. There may be one or two mismarks in a large litter, but if several of the puppies in a litter are "mismarked", the litter should be considered highly suspect. **BUYER BEWARE!!!**

If a litter is not registered, you would be wise to consider the puppies are not purebred. Again... Buyers of such puppies should be VERY careful that someone is not foisting mix-bred puppies on you, and using this article to prove anything!

The pictures on these links were sent to me by breeders.. At one time I had all of the photos on one page, but it became so image intense, I have linked to the different images, below:

- [Black and Tan](#)
Tan points on the ears, muzzle, and above the eyes (As is found in the Doberman and Rottweiler)
- [Salt and pepper effect](#)
This is a very unusual event, and I am including it in this section, even though it is not a state puppies are born in. Rather, they develop this as puppies, and in every situation I have heard of, they shed these markings out on their first shed as an adult. I have had two salt and pepper puppies of my own. They developed it while recovering from being quite ill (almost died). In every situation of salt and pepper that I have heard of, the puppies were in some way stressed as babies, and all developed normal coats by the time they were over one year of age. The scattered white hairs (on either chocolate or blacks, and likely unseen on yellows) typically start on the head, and quickly grow in from head to tip tail, and including the legs and underparts. Again, in every instance I am aware of, the coat was normal following their adult shed. Of the two I had, one (Jasmine) was pointed towards her Championship as an adult and had a very normal, if not quite nice, coat. There was no evidence of any stray white on her as an adult.
- [Brindling \(AKA "splashing"\)](#)
This is sometimes very hard to see. Often, at about four weeks of age, the breeder will notice that the puppy has some mud on its legs. The breeder washes the puppy, and the "mud" doesn't come off. This is often how the first glimmer of brindling is discovered. The brindling often then extends for a time up the legs and on the face and hind quarters, and typically extends no further. Sometimes, it is difficult to say if the marks are brindling (splashing) or black/chocolate and tan as in the next puppy. Some would call it chocolate and tan, however, the tan markings are not solid, as with the puppies above, and some breeders call it brindling.
- [Mosaic effects - Chimera](#)
Entire limbs or large patches of alternate colors. An accident of cell division. Without DNA from two different areas of the dog, one can not absolutely classify these as a [Chimera \(click for definition\)](#), but it is highly likely.
Meet Domino, the adult in these images. He has unusual markings,

but he thinks it makes him special, and he is one heck of an obedience dog!

- [Black spots on yellows](#)

There is no stated acceptable amounts of black on a yellow puppy in the Standard.

- [White on Yellow:](#)

This is often so subtle, as to not be noticable on a light yellow dog. On anywhere but the chest, this would be a mismatch.

- **White on Black**

- [Too much white?:](#)

According to the Standard, a small white spot on the chest is permissible.

What is small? Well, that's up to the judge. Breeders must decide what they feel is an acceptable amount of white.

Most would agree that these puppies have a lot of white on the chest, a couple may be showable, and may outgrow the white streak, Puppies with white on the feet or face would be considered a mismatch.

- [Acceptable amounts of white](#)

- Many dogs have white in the groin, and most breeders would not give it a second thought.

- "Bolo Marks" are perfectly normal. They are found on the pads behind the front legs just above the pad. [They are credited to English dual CH Banchory Bolo, who produced this mark in his puppies, and in the generations coming from his lines to this date.](#)

- [Non-discript.](#)

The truth is, a few breeders have discussed this particular mismatch, and could not agree if it is a splashed puppy or if this was a mosaic. Since we couldn't agree, and there is no DNA to prove it is a Chimera, we'll just chalk it up to a very lovely Labrador puppy with a mismatch.