

Scottish Terriers 5-15

A RAINBOW OF SCOTTIES

Even after 40 years breeding and exhibiting Scottish Terriers it still amazes me that there are those who believe our wonderful breed only comes in black. Perhaps the Black and White Scotch ads are to blame. Or was it the wonderful illustrations that grace so many items? Was it a simple fashion fad in the early years that led to this? How many people actually know the wonderful rainbow of colors our breed comes in.

I wonder is it just me, am I more sensitive or is my memory a little wistful but when I go back to my youth I recall seeing many variations in the ring especially at Montgomery County. No single color predominated. Where have they all gone? Is it a belief that it is easier to win with a black? Is a black easier to maintain? Is it a visual issue? Is the outline easier to see than the other colors?

I went back to some of the first written descriptions. Vero Shaw's *Illustrated Book of the Dog* is given credit as the first printed Standard. The passage on color reads: "various shades of grey, or grizzle, and brindle, the most desirable colour being red brindle with black muzzle and ear-tips." That from Dorothy Caspersz's, *The Popular Scottish Terrier*. However John Marvin in *The Complete Scottish Terrier* shows Shaw in October 1883 stating "steel or iron gray, brindle, black, red, wheaten, and even yellow or mustard color. It may be observed that mustard, black, and red are usually so popular as the other colors. White markings are most objectionable." Fayette C. Ewing in *The Book of the Scottish Terrier* makes the comment that "so much ignorance prevails about the original and natural colors of the Scottish Terrier." He goes on to list 54 color variations. The point is these early writings show wide-ranging colors. It makes me wonder why today when chatting ringside or elsewhere we simply say black, brindle or wheaten. Yes those three colors offer the variety previously mentioned but we usually have to add additional description especially to someone new to our breed.

Why this exercise of color comparison and inspection? It was triggered when someone asked me how you deal with brindles in the ring. They felt it was difficult to see outline for type on colors other than black. It gave me pause. I found myself describing so many wonderful colors, including a striking mahogany color as well as a "silver brindle" with black mask. After giving it some additional thought I said what happens if we stand here and you squint your eyes just a little to blur the color? Does that allow you to see the outline? Does that allow you to compare the different colors? Much to their surprise it worked. I was so happy I now educated another person to look for type before color. A very wise dog man once said to me you should be able to pick any purebred from simply their silhouette. By blurring the color we were able to see it.

For those exhibiting I am often told a black is easier to groom. This has perplexed me since I found brindle coats to be much more wiry and easier to roll. I loved feeling multiple layers of harsh tight coat. I listened trying to understand why this was an issue. During a grooming seminar many years ago I was asked about blending. The person said it was so much easier to

work their blacks and now they had their first brindle it was horrible. I examined the dog. I found that in more recent years people have gotten comfortable with thinning shears and clippers. On a black coat this is not much of an issue most times because their under coat is black. However when you use this "shortcut" on a brindle or grizzle you will end up with undercoat that is either striped or gray! This also presents problems for wheaten's. Many wheaten's' good dark color is on the end of their hair. As you cut or clip you can completely lose the color. It can create a negative optical illusion when trying to see overall balance. I was fortunate I learned from people who restricted the use of thinners to feet, a little on the butt and areas of face and beard. I could now see how this was an issue.

Ultimately my point of this little retrospection is that we need to educate on all features of our breed to ensure we maintain type. This means we need to embrace all the colors. Maybe we have oversimplified it. Maybe it is time we are a little more verbose on this point. We should stop ourselves when we say it's easier to win with a black and instead consider the challenge of learning to present one of the other colors correctly. Sadly over the years I have even seen attempts to take wonderful brindles and "enhance" them to appear blacker. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing more striking standing in the field on a sunny day than a solid black Scottie beautifully groomed. However it might be time to stop, rejoice and sing praises to the rainbow of colors of our incredible breed.

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