

The Question of Color

By Claudia Batson for the AKC Gazette

One Beauceron but two colors. Today's classic Beauceron (Berger de Beauce) is black with red-squirrel-colored markings. The other color, which is gaining favor, is the harlequin. Its coat is gray, black and rust.

If we were to investigate the history of the Berger de Beauce, we would find in the 19th century that its colorations could have been solid black, brown, mouse gray, or charcoal gray with black patches with or sometimes without rust markings. By 1965, it was a rare occurrence to see any color but the black/rust dog.

In 1969, the Club des Amis du Beauceron, the French parent club, recognized the harlequin coloration as an alternative acceptable within the standard. However, it was very clearly defined. It is prohibited to breed harlequin to harlequin because of the severe abnormalities which could occur in the puppies. The coat color is determined by a blue-merle gene. White on any part of the dog is not allowed, but an inch blotch on the chest is tolerated. The Harlequin coat may darken with age, reverting to the black/rust coloration.

As defined in both the French and American standard (which follows that of the French almost verbatim), the harlequin coat must have equal parts of gray and black, arranged in patches of more black than gray, with the rust color markings in the same places as on the black/rust Beauceron. If there is too much gray, one side black and the other gray, an all gray head or gray markings appearing within the rust, the dog will be disqualified in the conformation ring. Light eyes in the Harlequin are not acceptable, however walleyes are allowed, with dark brown eyes occurring most frequently.

Contrast that to the black/rust dog which requires the black

be a deep black, the rust must be a red squirrel color; there must be rust dots above the eyes; on the muzzle, the markings gradually blend into the black never reaching under the ear. Two patches of rust show on the breast, rust markings must appear under the throat and the tail. On the legs the markings extend from the feet to the wrists, blending a little higher on the inside, but not more than one-third of the way up. The eyes must be very dark brown.

The topcoat is coarse, dense, short and close to the body. The undercoat is grayish, occasionally buff, downy and very short. Together they protect this herding dog from any weather it might encounter in the field.

The Berger de Beauce original colors have changed and its function has gone from a dog bred strictly for the quality of its herding/guarding abilities to one that is as capable of herding sheep, cattle, geese or ducks as it is performing in the show or agility ring or saving lives as a Search and Rescue dog. However, its character has remained constant—extremely intelligent, strong, proud, reliable, tough, protective yet gentle, and always devoted to his master.