

# THE BRINDLE

MARCH 2012

(part one)



**From the Chair:** In this issue we are going to showcase the Brindle Bullmastiff and explain the brindle gene. Do take time out to learn more about this very important piece of the Bullmastiff's heritage.



**Bullmastiffs are more than champion dogs. They are the dog champions!**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BRINDLE

All the available literature on the Bullmastiff informs breeders about the importance of using the brindle Bullmastiff in long-term breeding programmes. Some breeders are adamant that there can be no purity and clarity of colour without a brindle somewhere in the line, as it is the brindle that is the key to the cosmetic colouring in the dog.

And indeed the early breeders were quick to realise (working on a practical trial and error basis?) that when they did incorporate a brindle into their long-term breeding programmes, the dirty smudging seen regularly in matings between the clear colours, which apparently do not carry the brindle gene, disappeared from their stock and the mask on the muzzle was clearer.

What they perhaps did not know was the genetics involved in the inheritance of the mask and the brindle coat in the Bullmastiff.

There are actually two kinds of brindle Bullmastiffs. There is what is called a true or pure brindle with the genetic code of  $e^{br}e^{br}$ , and what is called a brindle with a masking gene, which carries the genetic code of  $E^m e^{br}$ .

It is not always possible visibly to tell the difference between the two as the brindle colouring of the dog sometimes obscures the masked portions of the muzzle, but the difference can be seen clearly in the red and fawn coloured dogs that also normally carry this masking gene. Occasionally there are dogs that do not carry this masking gene, or the mask is a poor one. This can be seen especially in the clear colours, but sometimes also in the brindle. As the Breed Standard calls for specifications in respect of the mask, dogs that are deficient in this quality will not be readily displayed in the Breed Show Ring and knowledgeable breeders will probably not breed with such stock unless they have other positive quality, which explains why we see so few of them.

Pictured below are two brindles, one with poor masking (only the area around the nose is masked) and the other with a good mask.





Apart from expensive blood tests, a way to positively determine the one brindle from the other is to mate that particular brindle to a red or fawn dog and the colours of the offspring will provide the answer. If the dog is a true brindle, all the puppies will be brindle regardless of the colour of the other dog.



According to Don and Sue Spooner (Sondu Bullmastiffs) one of their Champion brindle males Ch Sondu Tristan only produced brindle puppies regardless of the colour of the bitch mated to him. This would then make him a true brindle.

Ch Sondu Tristan, pictured here as a young dog.

To understand more fully the concept of the involved genetics, let us look at what Clarence C. Little says in his book, *The Inheritance of Coat Color in Dogs*. This should help the reader understand the possibilities available in relation to the Bullmastiff colour coding.

“Mating two pure brindles having no masking gene ( $e^{br}e^{br}$ ) would produce only pups that are pure brindle ( $e^{br}e^{br}$ ).

Mating a pure brindle ( $e^{br}e^{br}$ ) to a brindle with a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ) would produce all brindles, 50 percent pure brindles and 50 percent with masking genes.

Mating a pure brindle ( $e^{br}e^{br}$ ) to a red or a fawn ( $E^m E^m$ ) would result in all brindle pups, but all would carry a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ).

Mating two brindles both with a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ) would result in 25 percent pure brindle ( $e^{br}e^{br}$ ), 50 percent brindle with a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ), and 25 percent red or fawn ( $E^m E^m$ ).

Mating a brindle with a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ) to a red or a fawn ( $E^m E^m$ ) would result in 50 percent brindle with a masking gene ( $E^m e^{br}$ ) and 50 percent red or fawn ( $E^m E^m$ ), but none of the brindles would be pure brindle.



Wellmeadow Inkunzi  
3/2/1984 – 19/11/1989  
(Ch Jokukids Greg x Leblon Angie)

Mating two fawns / reds would result in a litter of all fawn / red puppies and no brindles”.<sup>1</sup> **How then do we explain the phenomenon of Wellmeadow Inkunzi of Anubis - a brindle dog out of two fawn coloured parents?** The breeder of Inkunzi, Bobby Bain, is adamant that there was no other male, specifically a brindle Bullmastiff male present on her property during Angie’s oestrus and mating and there is no reason to suspect otherwise. So was this conception and birth a genetic mutation? Or is there more to this than thought?

<sup>1</sup> Little, Clarence. *The Inheritance of Coat Color in Dogs*.

Is this litter then a landmark in the history of the Southern African Brindle Bullmastiff or not? Furthermore there are two other known Kennel Union of Southern Africa registered litters where the parents were of a clear colour and the puppies or some of the puppies have been registered as brindle. However both cases are not quite as clear-cut as the previous one as there was a resident brindle male in both cases. I definitely do not want to cast doubt on or attack the integrity of the breeders but this fact cannot be ignored. Mistakes can and do happen without us knowing.





This brindle-to-brindle mating produced six puppies of which only two were brindle. The male is known to be a brindle carrying a strong masking gene, the bitch the same but with a weak-masking gene.

The Breed Standard does not specify whether the brindle stripes should be in a chevron pattern or not, it only states that the colour should be clear and pure. It also does not say whether the background colour should be more or less than the brindle pigment or even if the pigment must be dark or light. It does, however, state that there should be a dark mask on the muzzle toning to the eyes, and that the ears should be darker than the body, and that the nails should be dark. Other pigmentation such as the flews and eye rims should also be dark, for aesthetic and practical working purposes. This is unfortunately not mentioned in the KUSA Breed Standard.

In fact the only specification mentioned in respect of the brindle coat is that it be pure and clear. There is, however, much more to the colour of the brindle coat than meets the eye, as there are actually many different variations of brindle colouring to be found.

There are primarily the red and the fawn brindles and of these two, the background colour can either be so heavily patterned with pigment (brindle markings) that it gives the appearance of an almost black Bullmastiff, or it can be so lightly pigmented that the background colour is the dominant one.

There can also be a 50/50 balance of the two. Yet another variation is a coat of which the background colour may be mixed, for example areas where the red shows through the brindling and areas where the colour fawn shows through, with neither colour being dominant. It is also unusual to have matching patterns on both sides and sometimes the entire brindle pigment is uneven throughout.

In specialist judging of the Bullmastiff for the Best Brindle Coat, I feel the Judge should take the original purpose of the dog into consideration and that the darker the brindling, the better. After all the dog had to avoid detection in the undergrowth, and just as white is an undesirable feature on the dog, a fawn coloured dog with only a slight amount of light brindling would be easier to detect than an almost black dog. However, as in everything, moderation is the key and perhaps a compromise of 20 percent background colour to 80 percent dark brindling could be a guideline for the interpretation of the words "pure and clear". A brindle squiggle here or there can definitely not be interpreted as pure and clear and is therefore, in my opinion, not desirable.

We must bear in mind that the original Gamekeeper's Night Dog was depicted as brindle. It is therefore assumed that the brindle was the original colour of choice. These dogs could blend well with the vegetation whereas the black muzzle and ears further aided the dog to remain undetected even when its head was lifted up to sense, smell or sight the poacher. In Richard Ansdell's painting of "The Poacher" dated 1865 this can be seen very clearly.<sup>2</sup> The original brindle colouring stems from the incorporation of the brindle Mastiff and the brindle Bulldog in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the breed typing was being done.



<sup>2</sup> *The Poacher*, painted by Richard Ansdell. in Hancock, D. *The Bullmastiff: A Breeder's Guide*, Vol 1, p. iv.

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Nicky Robertson: 2012 for the Cape Bullmastiff Club

**"The Importance of the Brindle" will be continued in the April newsletter.**

***Please feel free to send us photo's of your Brindles, both past and present. We will publish them in the next e-news.***

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