

Cosmetic Faults

By Steve Wolfson

Every breed standard has a description of faults it wants to highlight and avoid. This process helps to insure uniformity of type and construction while preventing breed type from deviating. The Rottweiler standard, a highly descriptive and exacting one, is no exception. When selecting the compatibility of breeding partners, or how much emphasis a judge should place on a fault that a dog possesses, is a topic of discussion eliciting great debate. The Rottweiler standard contains 25 faults; all are listed as serious, with the exception of two (# 13 and # 25). They are listed as faulty. Below is the list:

- 1. Lack of proportion**
- 2. Undersized**
- 3. Oversized**
- 4. Reversal of sex characteristics (bitchy dogs, doggy bitches)**
- 5. Yellow (bird of prey) eyes**
- 6. Eyes of different color**
- 7. Eyes of different size**
- 8. Hairless eye rim**
- 9. Improper ear carriage**
- 10. Total lack of mouth pigment (pink mouth)**
- 11. Level bite**
- 12. Any missing tooth**
- 13. Wavy coat**
- 14. Open coat**
- 15. Excessively short coat**
- 16. Curly coat**
- 17. Total lack of undercoat**
- 18. Any trimming that alters the length of the natural coat (caused by grooming not a fault due to genetics)**
- 19. Straw-colored markings**
- 20. Excessive, markings**
- 21. Insufficient markings**
- 22. Sooty markings**
- 23. Rust markings other than described**
- 24. White markings any place on dog (a few rust or white hairs do not constitute a marking).**
- 25. Any structural fault that detracts from the above-described working dog must be penalized to the extent of the deviation.**

Despite the standard referring to these serious faults and simple faults, many breeders, and exhibitors often speak about “cosmetics faults”. Factually, there is no point in the standard listing or referring to faults as cosmetic.

I believe this “cosmetic” terminology has little value. It is a dismissive term and implies that a fault can be easily removed or overcome. Nonetheless, with great frequency we hear its use. All involved with the Rottweiler for any length of time understand that faults are not easily overcome. A fault does not disappear as in a magic act. They can be re-combined to become recessive, but will re-surface, some place, sometime in the proceeding progeny. This is why the study of a pedigree is so important. Discovering and acknowledging problems within a bloodline helps to prevent a fault from emerging. It is best to avoid them before the breeding takes place.

Where did this term “Cosmetic” originate? It is difficult to determine its origin within the folklore of the dog world, but its implication is to diminish and rationalize deviations from the standard that certain dogs possess.

For example, the correct color for markings is mahogany. However, many presently exhibited Rottweilers possess light color of markings (straw markings #19). It is listed as serious in the standard; yet, many will simply call this a problem of cosmetics. If this were just a matter of cosmetics, then why are so many Rottweilers exhibiting this fault? Would it not be easily eliminated? All Rottweilers would possess rich mahogany markings.

Another example of a fault deemed as cosmetic is pink gum pigmentation. Not only is this listed in the standard as serious fault (#10), more importantly, it is a type fault as well. That is why dark gum pigmentation is highly desirable, difficult to obtain, difficult to maintain once achieved in a breeding program. Nonetheless, a problem often observed on many exhibits is, “bubble gum” pink inner mouth pigmentation. Below are some faults categorized as cosmetic that seem to prevail.

- Light markings- Tan –Yellow
- Light eye color (3a - 5a)
- Dark markings
- Sooty markings on pasterns
- Poor ear carriage (high set, low set, fly away)
- Large ears
- Small ears
- Ears that have a fold in them
- Coarse coat
- Wavy coat
- Fine, silky coat
- Pink gums
- Pink spotted gums
- Rose colored gums
- Tuck up in groin area like that of the Dobermann

There are probably more out in the field than these listed. Why have these prevailed? Most likely, they are used as an excuse for problems, faults encountered on an otherwise good specimen. It is easier to rationalize a fault than it is to improve it. One should always be objective and critical when faults are the topic of discussion. Avoid making a fault more palatable by labeling it cosmetic.