

The Dilute Doberman

The DPCA accepts 4 colors as standard: black, blue, red and fawn. Black and red coats are traditionally the "image" of the Doberman. The dilutes, fawns and blues, had been shunned for many years as inferior and lesser dogs due to misconceptions that they were less healthy. Thankfully, science has proven they are no less a Doberman in terms of structure and health than their black and red counterparts

Dilutes are important to the breed's genetic diversity and image. The dilute colors are produced much less often than reds or blacks. A dilute is not necessarily a rare color, more it is about the genetics involved. Fawns make up about 6% of the Doberman population and blues about 12-15¹% of the total Doberman population, according to the DPCA. The Doberman Diversity Project states dilutes make up only 6-8%² of the entire population.

A Worthy Champion

Today's show world is slowly coming around to accepting dilutes. Many, many dilutes have won titles. They are a strong presence in the breed, though comprising only <20% of the whole population.

"The rarity of seeing these colors in the ring is due in part to the difficulties in keeping them in good coat. Barbara Russell, who sort of specialized in dilutes, specifically blues, had blue Dobermans that generally had good coats she states that was that even with good blue coats she had problems and keeping blues in show condition as far as coats went was a full time job.

There are definitely some judges who aren't fond of the dilutes and a few that wouldn't put one up under any circumstances. In the '60s it was harder for reds to win than blacks...I think that is about where the dilute situation in the ring is now...it's harder to win with a dilute but not impossible if the dog is a good specimen of a Doberman."

Coat Dilution Alopecia "Blue Doberman Syndrome"

The largest issue that dilutes can have is a form of permanent hair loss called Coat Dilution Alopecia (aka CDA, and sometimes called The Blue Doberman Syndrome). The Doberman Diversity Project is currently studying the cause of CDA, besides it's D locus connection (<https://www.dobermandiversityproject.org/report-cda-status.html>). CDA is a hereditary condition found in many breeds, but seems to plague the blue Doberman more so. Studies are limited, but a few studies have

¹<https://dPCA.org/breeder/color-dilution-alopacia/#:~:text=Weimeraners%20as%20a%20breed%20are,the%20dilute%20dogs%20have%20CDA.>

² <https://www.dobermandiversityproject.org/report-cda-status.html>

been done on the subject: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-3164.1990.tb00089.x>,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24422037_Color_dilution_alopecia_in_a_blue_Doberman_pinscher_crossbreed, <https://dpca.org/breeding/color-dilution-alopecia/>.

CDA is a concern, as nearly 90% of blues and 75% of fawns go on to develop it³. Only blues and fawns develop can CDA. Reds and blacks can develop alopecia as well, but due to other mechanisms at play. Not every dilute will develop CDA. CDA often comes on gradually over the dog's lifetime. The hair may thin over the whole body or be limited to certain areas, like the back and sides. Interestingly, only the fawn or blue hairs will thin/fall out and the tan pointing will remain intact. This is thought to be due to the shape of the hair follicle which in most dilutes eventually damages the shaft, eventually leading to hair no longer able to grow⁴.

Though unsightly, CDA is benign, causing no further risk to health. The condition can easily be managed with vests or jackets when the weather is cold and with dog-specific sunscreen. The dogs adjust well and seem un-bothered by their hair loss. Some dogs are more prone to develop staph infections so good grooming is essential. (Though, the breed in general is prone to staph infections.) Some may have more flaky and dry skin. Supplementing with biotin, fish oil, omegas and zinc can help maintain a healthy coat and moist skin. Lotion may be beneficial as well.

Educational Links:

<https://pethelpful.com/dogs/Health-Problems-in-Blue-Dobermans>

<https://www.animalgenetics.us/canine/canine-color/DLocus.asp>

<https://www.animaldermatology.com/newsletter/429/Derm-Digest-august-2010>

<https://bmegenet.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2156-6-34>

<https://bmegenet.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2156-6-34/figures/4>

https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-09352017000601503

³<https://dpca.org/breeding/color-dilution-alopecia/#:~:text=Weimeraners%20as%20a%20breed%20are,the%20dilute%20dogs%20have%20CDA.>

⁴ <https://dpca.org/breeding/color-dilution-alopecia/>