

## The White Doberman

The issue with the “white” Doberman is mostly an ethical one, where breeders started breeding for color to produce more whites. The "white" Doberman scientifically is an albino. <sup>1</sup>They originated from a kennel in TN but were not registered. A pet-line breeder Virginia was the first to register and breed for albinos, per the official record. In 1974 Padula’s Queen Sheba, incorrectly labeled a white bitch, was the first albino Doberman to be registered. She was the only known albino at the time and thus far no other lines have produced albinos. She was bred to her son Tarzan, a black dog, to produce the whites (albinos) after he was bred to his sister and they produced a litter with two whites. The first investigation into the white Doberman by the Doberman Pinscher Club (aka DPCA) was in favor of the breeder and his white dogs, noting they were of good conformation, some observed sensitivity to light, and possibly depth perception issues. They felt the whites were not an issue worth acting on. After years of research and much prodding from a few concerned members the DPCA finally moved against supporting/ignoring the white/albino. The DPCA then went to the AKC to request limitations be placed on the breeding of white Doberman. The AKC, although unwilling to stop the ability to register any white or dog related to Sheba, agreed with the DPCA that the Sheba line was too risky to the breed's reputation and overall disposition. They put in place a way to track Sheba’s lineage and started highly discouraging them from being bred; thus any dog related to Sheba was labeled with a Z (WZ).

The history around the albino is of breeding strictly for color with no regard for the effect inbreeding would have on the dogs. Sheba was bred by Mrs. Ray Pottermother, who sold Sheba to Mrs. Julia Schulz. Julia then sold Sheba to Mr. Joe Padula after Sheba started fighting with another Doberman in the house. Sheba’s mother, Dynamo Humm, was reportedly the first dog to produce "whites". It is not certain to whom she was bred to produce "whites", as the litters were not registered; the breeder claimed at one time Dynamo was bred to an unrelated male for her third litter but “forgot” the dog’s name

and owner's contact information. She would later go on to say Dynamo was bred twice to a local male named Rasputin VI and each litter produced two "whites", the second of which Sheba came from, and a third time to an unrelated male that also produced a single "white" pup. It is thought that the 'unrelated' stud was actually related to Rasputin VI but Mrs. Potter tried to hide the amount of inbreeding that she was doing. It is obvious how inbred these dogs were from the very beginning. All albino Doberman come from Sheba's lines, a heavily inbred pedigree. More often than not z dogs are line-bred to produce albinos, not in an attempt to perfect the breed or those lines. Line-breeding should be done so with a holistic aim in mind; wanting to better the whole dog not just to produce a color.

Albinism is a spectrum, with "white" Doberman falling onto that spectrum. The "white" Doberman is scientifically a tyrosinase positive albino, aka OCA2 (oculocutaneous albinism type 2). "White" Doberman have all the traits of albinism, pink skin, white/colorless hair, blue eyes, and characteristic health issues. In 1996 hairs from Sheba were sent to a DVM geneticist for evaluation. He sent a letter explaining his take on the sample;

*"Dear Mrs. Doniere:*

*In regard to the question of "White" Dobermans, although I have had limited samples to work with (one white Doberman), I have compared this individual to samples obtained from some of the breeds which we tend to accept as "normal" white (i.e.- Samoyeds, Great Pyreneese, Kuvasok, Bichon Frises, and American Eskimo Dogs). Although it is true that all dogs in all of these breeds are not necessarily "all" white, the coats of the ones sampled were all white.*

*The coats of the “white” Dobermans differ from the above breeds in one or more of the following parameters: size of pigment granules, shape of pigment granules, number of pigment granules, and hair diameter and uniformity. In other words, these dogs are not a “normal” white as we have tended to accept it.*

*I would agree with Dr. Patterson’s suggestions (1982) that this is probably a mutation in the C series. I believe it is an albino, although not the classical pink-eyed, tyrosine negative animal which we associate with this term. They are phototypic and I believe there is little disagreement with this statement.*

*Sincerely,*

*George A. Padgett, DVM*

*Professor of Pathology”*

Over the last 25 years many geneticists and veterinarians have helped study the albino Doberman including Dr. John Paul Scott, BGSU, Regents Professor of Psych., Dr. Donald Patterson, DVM, University of Pennsylvania, Dr. D.J. Prueur, Wash. State University, Dept. of Veterinarian Micro Pathology, Dr. Charles Parshall, Ohio State, Department of Ophthalmology, Dr. Mark Ladd, University of Surrey England, Geneticist, Dr. Jeff Hogans, DVM, Dr. May Jacobson, PH.D. In 2014 scientists Paige A. Winkler, Kara R. Gornik, David T. Ramsey, Richard R. Dubielzig, Patrick J. Venta, Simon M. Petersen-Jones, and Joshua T. Bartoe discovered the final proof, the exact gene responsible for the white color; SLC45A2. It requires two defective gene mutations to produce the white (albino) color. Some dogs carry the SLC45A2 mutation and are of standard color. Two carriers can produce albinos. The majority of z factored Doberman

genetically only carry the traditional color genes. Most z dogs are not capable of producing albinos because not every z dog carries the albinism mutation. It is a recessive gene and can be bred out of the breed. Regardless if a carrier or not all dogs related to Sheba are z factored.

The issue of white vs albino is due to an exchange between the AKC and Mr. Padula the first letter stated: stating “albino is not a color”, returned his certificate and requested he provide photos of his dog when resubmitting. He did and in return he received a letter saying the following:

*“Dear Mr. Padula:*

*Breed: Doberman Pinscher*

*Litter number WM 361038,*

*This will acknowledge receipt of your recent correspondence and photographs of the female you acquired from the above litter. The photographs you submitted were examined by the registration review committee, and it was the opinion of this committee, that the color of this female is white.*

*Your application for individual registration has been forwarded to our processing department.*

*Thank you for your cooperation.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Dorothy Ott*

*The American Kennel Club”*

The AKC did not seek the approval of the national breed club, the DPCA, on the color making the decision to add "white" on their own. This matter has just complicated the debate on "white" VS albino. Many white advocates deny the status as an albino and believe the whites are simply a coat color or that they do carry "traces" of pigment and "can't be albino" because they 1) have blue eyes, 2) lack red or pink eyes. The fact is the white color is due to a form of albinism as proven through science.

While uncommon, there have been several Z dogs to title and whom excelled in various competition:

- Kasper Blanco Schnepf CD, WP61614201, Male Doberman Pinscher, white, born 3/13/95
- The Warriors Magic Crystal CD, WP32599306, Male Doberman Pinscher, white, born 12/11/90
- Mousethatroared Von Ernest CD, WP49530405, Female Doberman Pinscher, white, born 6/14/93
- Kathy Bates' Ice Phantom CD NAJ, WP69373608, Male Doberman Pinscher, white, born 4/7/96
- My Fair Lady Lexus CDX, ILP99023, Female Doberman Pinscher, white, born ?
- Lornich's Lunar Ice CD, WZ00200005, Female Doberman Pinscher, white, born 4/9/2001
- Wisteria's Vanilla Frosting NJP, WZ00133704, Male Doberman Pinscher, white, born 2/5/2000

Anyone who tells you albinos and Zs can't be titled is misinformed. There have been many dogs to compete and earn titles in obedience, tracking, canine good citizenship, sport, agility, and more. Z dogs can compete in all areas except conformation. The

white is an immediate disqualification in the show ring because it is a breed fault, an unaccepted color.

The largest concern with the white Doberman is their health. Nearly all the issues they can have legitimately stem from the gene mutation causing albinism. The tight inbreeding to produce whites further complicates their delicate health. The health problems associated with Zs come directly from the nature of being albino (white/cream dogs); 3photophobia, melanocystic tumors, skin sensitivity, prone to sunburn, cognitive delay or limitations (slow), deafness/blindness (rare, but is caused by what we call extreme white), optical/retinal mutations (again, rare but happens), skin cancer, organ malfunction or under functioning (typically thyroid, liver and kidneys; due to a predisposition to autoimmune issues), overall predisposition to allergies and sensitivities. The lack of melanin predispositions albinos to these problems even more so than traditional colored dogs. The standard colored dogs are less likely to be deaf, blind or have sunburn since they carry pigment. There is some credibility to Z dogs having more temperament issues, mostly due to tight inbreeding or poor rearing conditions. The sensitivities that come with the albino's color can also lend to more temperament and mood instability as the dogs are often uncomfortable, in pain and can not see as well. While Doberman as a breed are prone to similar issues (skin sensitivity, food allergies, food intolerance, and even temperament trouble) it is not as prevalent as it is in the whites.

As a breeder and breed advocate I can not condone the breeding of albino Doberman nor the breeding of the SLC45A2 gene mutation. The science is clear on the matter; "white" Doberman are albino and are prone to more health issues. The Doberman breed deserves total dedication to longevity and optimal health. I don't believe there is a good reason to break away from the traditional breed color standard. Albino dogs are

not the best representation of the breed nor do they help promote better dogs for the future. A z factored Doberman should be avoided. A reputable breeder will not breed a Z dog nor would breed for albino. Keep in mind purebred isn't always well-bred. Take time to get to know the dog, the pedigree, what ethics the breeder holds, and breeder themselves before you buy a puppy. Supporting ethical breeders, who truly care about the breed and its future, is more important than a popular pedigree or flashy colors.

- 1) <https://dpca.org/BreedEd/albino-doberman-history/>
- 2) [http://dpca.org/breed/breed\\_health.php](http://dpca.org/breed/breed_health.php)
- 3) <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0092127>
- 4) <https://www.uniprot.org/uniprot/F1P698>

## Melanistic Doberman

Melanism in Doberman is due to a genetic mutation on the E m locus. It is called a melanistic mask. Normally, a Doberman has two normal genes, represented as N/N (N for normal). When there is a mutation it is represented as em/N or em/em. A dog with em/N will be a standard color but be able to pass on the em gene to 50% of its offspring. A dog with em/em will be "affected" for the melanistic mask and will pass at least one em gene on to all of its offspring.

Melanism is a genetic mutation and not a variation of coat color. Research in mice and cats has proven it to be genetic.

Studies on wild melanistic animals have shown that they are healthier and longer lived. The reasoning behind this is they are more difficult to spot thus having a greater chance at survival. A melanistic prey animal is more difficult for a predator to find. A melanistic predator is more difficult to spot making it more successful at hunting. The exact reason for their better health is not well understood but may be linked to lower stress levels and better immune health. Melanism is correlated with increased vitamin D synthesis and lower rates autoimmune diseases.

The aim of a breeder is to preserve and to improve the breed. The standard is a guideline, a blueprint for the integrity of the breed. I am of the persuasion to maintain the standard and to focus on the health of the breed. Most studies on melanistic animals are on nocturnal animals (such as cats and mice). Studies into domestic animals such as dogs is limited. To say definitively that melanistic Doberman are healthier than their standard counterparts is misleading. There is limited research into melanistic animals none of which proves melanistic domestic dogs are healthier or longer lived. Seeing how the melanistic Doberman is not part of the established standard and the national breed club (the DPCA) doesn't accept the melanistic as a valid coloration, I do not support the breeding of or for melanistic Doberman. The Em mutation is fairly rare,

occurring in a limited gene pool of dogs. Breeding for this mutation is to breed within a small number of lines which is not benefiting the breed. Breeding like that produces dogs with higher COI (inbreeding ratios) and is not aiming to improve the breed, rather it is breeding strictly for color. Until the DPCA accepts melanistic dogs as part of the breed standard they should not be bred. Ethical breeders who sincerely care for the breed and its future will breed to the standard and for the betterment of the breed.

- 1) <https://mashable.com/2015/03/05/black-animals-melanism/>
- 2) <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0226136>
- 3) <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0006435>
- 4) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19182816>
- 5) <https://www.pawprintgenetics.com/products/tests/details/163/?breed=114>
- 6) <https://www.nature.com/articles/ncprheum0989>