**COLORS AND THE CAVALIER KING CHARLES SPANIEL**

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The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is an elegant, graceful, well-balanced toy spaniel blessed with a happy, loving temperament and an equally beautiful and silky coat. The Cavalier comes in four coat colors:

* There is the *Blenheim*, named for Blenheim Palace, with rich chestnut markings well broken up on a clear, pearly white background. The ears must be chestnut, and the color evenly spaced on the head and surrounding both eyes. In the center of the forehead, there may be a chestnut spot, or “Blenheim spot,” which is unique to the Blenheim color.
* There is the *Black and Tan,* which is jet black with rich, bright tan markings over eyes, on cheeks, inside ears, on chest, legs, and on underside of the tail.
* We have the *Ruby*, which is a whole-colored, rich red.
* Finally, there is the *Tricolor,* with jet-black markings well broken up on a clear, pearly white background. The ears must be black, and the color evenly spaced on the head and surrounding both eyes, with a white blaze between the eyes, and rich tan markings over the eyes on the cheeks, inside the ears, and on the underside of the tail.

These are the four accepted colors of the CKCS and the only four accepted colors based on the history of our breed, beginning with its country of origin, England, and the 1600s.

Like so many breeds today, the CKCS is subject to attacks from “breeders”  
offering what I might call “designer dogs” or “other-colored Cavaliers.” These may range from chocolate, black, black and white, white, ore even merle. While these breeders may suggest laudable points such as hybrid vigor, these colors bring with them the possibility of genetic defects.

Other colors in the CKCS are nothing new, and an attempt was mad by the AKC parent club to exclude these other colors from AKC registration when the breed was accepted in 1995. That exclusion was and still is denied, opening the door to problems.

To understand the issue of colors requires some knowledge of Cavalier history. After the death of Charles II in 1685, the King Charles Spaniel began to change from a longer-muzzled dog to what we now call the English Toy Spaniel. In and effort to regain the lower muzzle and features of the original dogs featured in the paintings of Van Dyck and others of that period, various were introduced.

These “Other-Color Cavaliers” may reflect the history if introduction of these breeds including Papillons, Cocker Spaniels, English Springer Spaniels, and even the now-extinct Pyrame, Norfolk Spaniel, and Toy Trawler breeds. The last three breeds are known only to very educated Cavalier lovers and historians. These Other-Colors may also be achieved by present-day out-crossing. There is concern that accepting Other-Colors brings with it the genetic defects associated with “dilutes”.Deep in the history of CKCS are diseases like curly coat and dry eye, which have been essentially eliminated. Will these and other health issues re-emerge with the Other-Colors? The merle color has never been part of the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, in history or in any country, and can only occur as an outcross.

The American Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club has taken the bold stop to revise its breed standard to make clear to judges of the breed that there are only four acceptable colors in our breed and that all non-allowed colors should be disqualified.

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