



TRACKING THE GREAT WHITES

You do not need a bigger boat; we refer to great white dogs, not sharks! White - the only solid color allowed in Alaskan Malamutes, and rare to see. Did you know there have only been five white AKC Champion malamutes? Breeder/trainer/handler Jim Kuehl recounts his experiences with three of these exceptional and unusual dogs.

You Can't Always Get What You Want

On the morning of October 5, 1995, Robin and I were in our hotel room somewhere on Lawn Guy-land, New York. I was putting on a tie because I was going to show Tommy and Frosty, our two white dogs, at the National Specialty show that morning - Tommy in 12-18 month old dogs, and Frosty in Bred-By-Exhibitor, and both as a brace AND in a team. I forget how many times we showed dogs that week, but I remember that the entry fees were over five hundred dollars. I told Robin that if we



Tommy, Ch Poker Flat's Murphy's Law, WTD WWPD shows off his weight pulling technique. Named after the white Power Ranger, Tommy was the very first white male malamute to earn an AKC Championship.



About the Author

Jim Kuehl became a malamute person when he met Robin Haggard in 1966. Since then they have put over twenty five obedience titles on their dogs, as well as many working titles, and are the listed breeders of over seventy AKC champions and several Canadian champions. Jim takes personal credit for only the white champions. Jim has been an AMCA member for thirty years, is a past member of the AMCA Board, and is a member of the Alaskan Malamute Research Foundation (AMRF) Board. He is the Illinois/Wisconsin Area Reporter for the AMCA Newsletter. He and Robin are founding members of the Dog Training Club of Champaign-Urbana in 1977 and have been Nicolet Mushers since 1989. They are particularly proud of being awarded twice the AMCA Humanitarian Award for their work with the AMRF.

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paid that much for entry fees, we at least better win a painted wolf plate. I remember we also brought Tommy's father, Teslin, who was also Frosty's half brother, (both out of Ron Pohl's "Bonstres"), and two girls - Leslie, Tommy's litter sister, and Sharon, Frosty's litter sister. The girls both decided to come into heat as we drove east through Pennsylvania.

I was showing in conformation because Robin, like you, is not a big fan of white dogs. We had been showing and breeding for twenty years at that time (Robin for much longer) and had not had a white puppy until Frosty popped out. Some folks, though, think of us as a "white kennel," even though ninety-five percent of our puppies have been generic gray. Robin still doesn't like the white color.

Robin let me keep Frosty because, as she said, I had never complained about the dogs she chose to keep, so I should get my choice for once. Also I had kicked and screamed on the floor and held my breath until she let me keep him. You have to know how to handle women.

"The Samoyeds are over there..."

I can't handle dogs, though. Had I world enough and time, and more word allotment from my incredibly stingy editor, I could catalogue my ineptitude in this area. My poor handling did not help in my quest to finish Frosty, with his major handicap. One argument that Robin made against showing Frosty was that no white male had ever finished an AKC championship. I took this as a challenge and not a rebuke. "Then Frosty Shall Be The First," I declared.

Initially, Robin was more than happy to let me show Frosty, as long as at the show site I pretended I didn't know her. As I entered the show ring, some judges told me: "This is the Malamute ring. Samoyeds are over there." Most said: "I've never seen a white malamute," or its variant: "Its been years since I saw a white malamute." These statements never bode well for the white dogs.

Tommy actually finished his championship fairly quickly. He got his majors at malamute specialty shows with Robin handling him. Frosty got all but one of his points out of Bred-By-Exhibitor class because Robin reasoned that judges at least would know she was a breeder and would not question his color. On the other hand, when I showed Tommy, several judges stopped judging and tried to get the attention of a judge in the next ring to check on whether white was an allowed color. I told one such judge that I was on the AMCA Breed Standard Committee. It wasn't quite true, but it was not a lie, either. I was on the AMCA Board and we were reviewing the re-write of the Breed Standard submitted to us by that Committee. To me, that counted. I told her that white was the only allowed solid color, and that Tommy was therefore an ASCOB (Any Solid Color Other than Black).



The Great White Way

Ch Poker Flat's Frosty the Snowman CD WWPD WTD WLD is the only white malamute to date to earn both an AKC Championship and Companion Dog obedience title. Frosty also earned three Working Dog titles.

But what about Tommy? I don't like to train for obedience and weight pulling at the same time, since one involves pulling and the other discourages it. I didn't start Tommy on obedience until he retired from weight pulling at nine years of age. By then he knew my weaknesses. When I said "heel" he just rolled on his back like a puppy and waved his paws. He was so cute I couldn't make him do it, and he never got his CD. I am not a very good trainer.



Tommy's talent was weight-pulling. At the Cleveland Cluster one December he pulled I think 4000 pounds and came in second to a St. Bernard. It just shows that you can pull more weight going downhill than uphill. At the same show I was standing outside the ring when a random member of the Public looked at Tommy and told me that Tommy was the most beautiful dog he had ever seen in his life. I was forced to agree.

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Frosty Makes History

Tommy finished before Frosty did, even though Frosty was older and had a head start. Frosty got that head start at the 1995 National. As we were dressing that morning, Robin surprised me and said, with an air and tone that admitted of no gainsay or appeal, "I'm showing Frosty today." That was that. I didn't say a thing; first, because it would have been pointless; and second, I was glad not to have to embarrass myself twice in one day.

I may never know why Robin took Frosty from me that morning. I suspect that she had no other dogs to show that day, and she likes to show dogs. For example, after Frosty's win, I suggested that we get another handler for Teslin, who had a shot at taking Best of Breed. I thought that the judge was now not likely to give her the breed, especially after giving her the points in such an historic manner. Robin scoffed: "I did not come all this way not to show my dog." Whatever her reason, after that Specialty show Robin handled the white dogs mostly, which I was happy to let her do.

Frosty was the first white dog of any sex to win the points at the National. But Tommy finished his

championship before Frosty did because Tommy was a better conformation dog. I'll bet you thought I would complain about white dogs having to be twice as good as the competition in order to win half as much. Ya-but that was not true of Tommy. He won and lost fair and square. Frosty should have finished sooner, but he was the pioneer. He is still the only white malamute to have a Championship and an obedience title. He finished both titles on the same day.

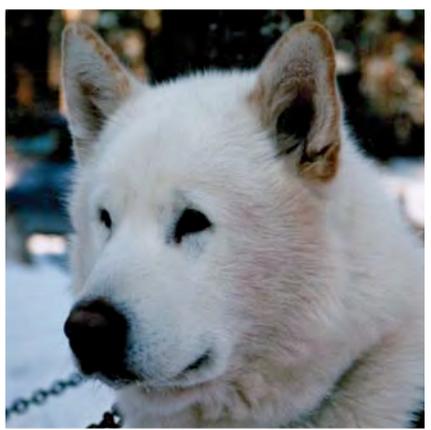
Frosty and Tommy did not start the white dog explosion that I thought they would. In the past decade and a half, people have shown a few white dogs here and there. No one has until recently campaigned a white dog. I believe that white dog owners get discouraged because they lose more than they should, which is frustrating and costs money.

Go Team!

The final class at the '95 National was the team competition. I had the only team there. First prize was a painted wolf plate, otherwise I would have skipped it because the two aforementioned girls in heat were half the



Two examples of white malamutes.



SAY WHITE?

Nichole Royer Explains the Genetics of White in Malamutes

The color white in malamutes is caused by a single simple recessive gene. This gene is known formally as the Melanocortin Receptor 1 gene (MC1R), and is responsible for extending yellow pigment to cover the entire body of the dog. When a copy of this gene is inherited from each parent it overrides whatever color the dog is programmed to be. This eliminates all black in the coat, and the resulting puppy will exhibit only yellow pigment throughout the entire length of its fur.

This is the same gene which causes Golden Retrievers to be gold and Yellow Labs to be yellow. Though the exact mechanism has not been studied, in malamutes and a handful of other breeds including Samoyeds and Siberian Huskies, yellow pigment almost always appears as white. Thus this gene is responsible for removing most of the color from a malamute and producing a white dog. Most white malamutes are not completely white. In many cases you can still find traces of yellow or buff pigment on the ears and along the topline. While many white malamutes will have black noses as puppies, it is very common for their nose to fade to a flesh color edged in black as the dog matures. This does not affect the lips or eye rims, and it is not an indication of poor pigment. It is instead just a normal product of this particular coat color gene.

Because this gene is a simple recessive, there is no way to tell if a dog is carrying it just by the appearance of the dog. There is, however, a genetic test offered by several laboratories which can identify carriers of the gene. This test is referred to as the test for "Black/Red" or the "E Locus". Laboratories offering this DNA test include:

Veterinary Genetics Laboratory - <http://www.vgl.ucdavis.edu/services/coatcolordog.php>

Veterinary Genetic Services - <http://www.vetgen.com/canine-coat-color.html>

DDC Veterinary - <http://www.vetdnacenter.com/canine-dna-coat-color.html>

For more information on coat color, please visit the Malamute Coat Color Genetics website at <http://www.kwestmals.com/malcolorgenetics.html>.

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team, with Tommy and Frosty rounding out the crew. As we went around the ring, Frosty growled at Tommy, Sharon growled at Leslie. They changed positions in the line-up twice as I tried to keep the disputants apart while running. I was terrified that they would fight and I would be further disgraced as a dog handler.

We made it around the ring and up and back; but as the crowd called out for more, I grabbed the ribbon and the plate from the judge and ran out of the ring, where Robin took Tommy and Leslie from me. Not a drop of blood was spilled, and I had my painted wolf plate.



Above: The painted-wolf-plate-winning team at the 1995 National. Below: Out on the trail, Frosty is in lead and Tommy is in wheel.



National Treasures

Above: Frosty after his historic win at the 1995 AMCA Nationals; the first time a white malamute won the points at a National.

Right: I was very proud of Mauya, the white bitch that won Best of Winners at the 2010 National. Of course there were many worthy bitches there that day, and Mauya was one of them. Owners Sarah and Paul Thuot and handler Amanda Volkomener earned their win. And by the way, Robin and I bred Mauya. That means that of the five white AKC Malamute Champions, Robin and I have bred three. (I blush).



Ch PokerFlat Pure Mauya Of Qumukti is the most recent white malamute to become an AKC Champion.

Editor's Note: We hope you enjoyed the first article in the History In the Making series. Do you have a story to share about a significant accomplishment in the breed, whether in conformation, performance, working or another area? We would love to hear from you and to consider your story for this series! Email "incredibly stingy editor" Karina Burger with your idea at info@winterstarfarm.com. Thanks!