

## American History of the Sable Breed

### *Saanen history as it applies to Sables*

#### *More Sable History : Color in Purebred Saanens*

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Our present day standards describe the Saanen as pure or creamy white in color. As most Saanen breeders have learned, much to their grief, however, some of our best does often drop colored kids-- probably they never read the standards. The older breeders usually curse their luck and reach for the chloroform bottle, but with the new breeders it's a different story. They have rarely heard of such a thing as a colored Saanen since the skeleton of color isn't something often taken out of the back closet and dusted off for a subject of conversation. Because he doesn't know about it our new breeder becomes very excited and rushes around accusing the breeder of his doe of having sold him a grade. Perhaps then, an understanding of the "whys and wherefors" of these color outcroppings may be of some value.

Many hundreds of years ago there were no breeds of goats as we know them. The herds at that time consisted of large numbers of animals of all shapes, sizes, and colors, and they bred indiscriminately. After the Swiss peoples recognized the value and adaptability of these little milkers the methods of breeding gradually changed. In Switzerland most of the goats were, and still are, for that matter, bred in small isolated sections. It was only natural for some of the people to start selecting preferred colors in their animals. The few sections which showed no preference developed the true "Alpine" colors; the sections which liked a combination of brown and white started the Toggenburgs; the few who desired a pure white goat combined with good milking qualities founded the Saanen breed. The fixing of these color characteristics was a long slow job. Registration had not been thought of, so each man bred as he thought best. While most of the breeders in the "Saanen" valleys desired only white animals there were a few individuals who showed a preference for other colors. Whenever these men had a good white kid they sold it to a neighbor who wanted the white, thus keeping a lot of coloring influence in the blood lines. It wasn't until they wished to export their animals as a breed that the Swiss started a formal registration system and even then it was a system of eligibility by inspection rather than by pedigree. We can easily see how the animals that we imported into this country were color bearers, some may have been from colored parents for all we know.

The first volume of the American Milk Goat Record was published in 1914 by J.R. Darst of Dayton, Ohio. According to our present day ideals these first registrations were far from being perfect and were sadly lacking in detail. Many individual strains were recognized which gave rise to such breed names for Saanens as "Stucker, Segwartzenberg-Guggusberger.." We must remember however, that these early pioneers did the best they could with the very meager material that they had available. By the time that the second volume of the Record came out in 1918 many improvements had been made. One of these was the inclusion of the animal's color.

If we take the number of animals entered in this record starting with 1000 (when color data was first started) through 45,000 we find that there are 7,168 pure Saanens registered. Of this number 7,051 are listed as white or cream and 117 are listed as being "off color." This may not be the

true proportion of colored animals as what may be fawn with one breeder will be cream with another. Some animals were registered young, as white, but their coats may have later darkened out. One of the top does in the old Three Oaks herd, Three Oaks Princess Leat 34286 is a good example of this. *Her kid coat was light cream but it darkened out before maturity to a silvery gray.* Then too, many kids, particularly bucks, which showed color were never offered for registration. Nevertheless, the fact that 1.6 percent of the Saanens were registered as being other than desired as to coat color is important. It is interesting for us to note the different colors appearing.

Among our 117, there are 40 that were black and white, 26 brown and white and 15 gray and white. The rest ranged in color anywhere from red, through tri-color combinations to blue. (there are many tri-colored Toggenburgs and the standard chamoisee in French and Rock Alpines is a tri-color). Only 16 failed to have some white. These "off-colored" animals were sired by 76 different bucks. Those sires with three or more kids out of the 117 were:

Joker of West Lawn 37478 (8 kids)  
Alta Switzerland 7672 (5 kids)  
Highland Crackerjack Saanee 10335 (5 kids)  
Keng Nega 3562 (colored himself) 3 kids  
Cerro Hiram 28142 (3 kids)  
Andreas Hofer 177 (3 kids)  
Supreme Switzen (3 kids)  
Three Oaks Blossom's Lad (3 kids)

There are only two does of any great importance who "threw" any number of colored kids. One was Queen Lou 616, and the other was Nega 3561 (twin to King Nega, a colored buck). Queen Lou's color was not given, but since her sire was Andreas Hofer 177, there is a strong possibility that she was something other than white.

In addition to the bucks first listed we find such famous sires as these in our list of color "throwers":

Saanen Chief II 312  
Excelsior 597  
Victor 224  
Saanee 1141  
Bonnie Imperator 2000  
Alta Simenthal 8260  
Lakeview Commander 17294  
Three Oaks Bela King 25601  
Three Oaks Blossom's Lad 27447  
Three Oaks Blossom's Prince 27418  
Louis Franz of Echo Herd 27121  
Omerdale BoFlorhi 40619

And a host of others. Since these bucks are some of the best representatives of all the important strains and families of Saanens in this country it is impossible to dispense with their blood in an

effort to lesson their color influence. If we did that we would have virtually no animals of good milking blood lines left.

In view of the facts it must be concluded that purebred Saanens, at least as they are known in America, are not pure for white, and that we must expect occasional "off colored" kids to appear in our herds. Since this tendency for color is found in all strains of the breed those who wish only white kids must prove homozygous characted bucks, and then use only these bucks. It is possible, but very impractical at this time due to many outside factors.

Perhaps if we pay more attention to proving our bucks for milk production and type it would be of more material benefit to the breed, particularly at the present stage of the game.

Editors note: Friends, don't let this or any other facts dim or dull your ardor and zeal and love for and of Saanens. You would gain nothing in the way of a history free of unaired and unwanted skeletons by changing to another breed. There is plenty in every breed of all animals to breed away from. Have you ever seen a perfect herd either in history or actuality? There should always be a goal in all things just at least a few jumps ahead of us.

[editor was Carol W. Romer, reedited by Carolyn Menzies 2014]