

I Want One!

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Wow, she's gorgeous! Is she an albino? What kind of dog is she? I didn't know shelties came in white! Where did you get her? How can I get one? I want one! These are questions and comments I hear every day when I am out and about with my double merle shelties. People are fascinated by them.

Yes, my dogs are gorgeous, but they are also very impaired due to people's poor decisions. My dogs are mostly white and are stunning to look at. They are always kept well groomed and their coats are fluffy and clean. I'm glad to have people interested in them because it gives me a chance to educate them that shelties are definitely NOT supposed to be all white!

People are always drawn to the unusual. My job is to help them go away with the knowledge that double merles are not a new fad that is up and coming, like the multitude of "doodle" mixes out there now. Nor are they rare and extra valuable. They are victims of a very sad epidemic - one in which people are creating dogs with severe impairments for their own gain. Double merles do not just happen by falling out of the sky. They only happen when two dogs carrying the merle gene are bred together. Thus, double merles are totally preventable.

Once people realize that my dogs are blind and deaf, they are shocked and saddened that someone could be so irresponsible to cause this. Sometimes they make cruel comments that my dogs would be better off dead. While I know my dogs are happy and healthy, some people assume that I am the cruel one to have kept them alive in the first place. Some try to convince me to put my dogs out of their misery. What misery?

My dogs were born this way. They don't miss what they never had. It is us, as humans that feel badly for the dogs, not the dogs that feel bad for themselves. We tend to project our own feelings onto the dogs. We imagine how we would feel if we suddenly lost our sight and our hearing. Yet, we were not born both blind and deaf, so we cannot personally know what they are experiencing.

That is my opportunity to educate even more, by telling them how my dogs get around and play and what they enjoy doing. My dogs run and play and wrestle with each other. They play with toys. They enjoy dog beds and going for car rides. They like to meet new friends, both dog and human – sometimes even something new like llamas or cows! They enjoy rally obedience, playing new games, and learning tricks. They excel at K9 nosework. They wag their tails. They lick my face. They live their lives to the fullest every day.

When people see my dogs in action, they are usually amazed at how happy and well-adjusted they are. My dogs are not this way because they are double merles; they are this way DESPITE the fact that they are double merles.

So, do you really want a double merle? Double merles require all of the same things as other dogs. They need good quality food, veterinary care, walks and exercise, play time and mental stimulation, grooming, management and supervision, and training. They will need to be



housetrained and taught not to chew. Yes, they do bark and shed just like other dogs do, too. They dig and they destroy things sometimes too. They need someone who will commit to them for a lifetime, not just for a few months while the relationship is new and exciting.

So many dogs are abandoned when the excitement wears off or when things get frustrating for the owner. Double merles are no exception. Many are let loose by the side of the road or relinquished to shelters and rescues. Many more are killed. Dogs, whether double merle or not, depend on us for their every need. Are you sure you can provide for those needs for the next 14-17 years? Maybe even longer?

Often double merles need even more than the average dog. They may need more veterinary care depending upon the impairments caused by poor breeding practices. They need more supervision at times. You will need to be much more aware of keeping your dog safe, because a dog that cannot see or hear trouble coming will be at a disadvantage. Playtime and exercise may need to be done differently depending on the dog's abilities, and you will most likely need to learn a new way of training and communicating with your dog. A double merle may require new or different equipment and adaptations made to its environment to ensure its safety and quality of life.

With a double merle, you will immediately be thrust into the field of education. Everyone will have questions and comments. You will need to keep your cool and remain professional while you educate others about the issue of merle to merle breeding. There will be days when you are

angry with people for wanting a dog just like yours because it's rare and different. There will be days when you are overjoyed because you helped someone who sincerely wanted to rescue a double merle and give it a wonderful life. It is quite an adventure.

There are many double merle dogs in need of forever homes. Please do adopt if you are so inspired, but do it for the right reasons; not because you want that cool looking white dog to draw attention to yourself. Get to know the dog as an individual. Be sure that you can commit to its needs before adopting. Educate yourself so you are able to answer the public's questions. It is only by educating others in a kind way that we will change their thinking.

***Debbie Bauer** is a certified Healing Touch for Animals® practitioner, a certified Tellington TTouch® practitioner, a published author, and a professional dog trainer. She has over 28 years of training and consulting experience working with dogs and their people. She specializes in working with dogs that display fearful, reactive and aggressive behaviors, in a positive manner. Debbie has trained dogs in a variety of fields including therapy and assistance dogs, print ad and media work, obedience, agility, and scent work. One of her passions is working with and educating about deaf, blind, and blind/deaf dogs.*