

## WHAT COLOR WILL I BE?

*By Vicky McCaffrey*

When we started in Shires, we dreamed of a 6 of grays. When our first Shire foal was born, I was SO excited!! We had imported the gray Shire mare Alneland Countess from England having had her bred to a gray stallion before she left the country. Lo & behold we had a fuzzy smoke gray, long-legged beauty which I quickly named Ox Kill Silver King. I excitedly called our mentor, Sue Wilson, in Idaho to tell her the exciting news. "Sue, Sue, we got a gray!" Her first question seemed very strange. She asked me what color he was. I excitedly exclaimed, "Gray, of course." Her reply floored me. "Then he will be black." Many gray foals later; we have learned to recognize the eventual coat color of the foal when born.

Black foals are born smoke gray, just as Ox Kill King was. (I dropped the "Silver" when he was registered as he was indeed black). Gray foals, on the other hand, can be bay or black when born, but a careful examination around the eyes will reveal a scattering of white hairs. The lighter the foal will be on maturing, the whiter the spectacles he or she will have. Bays are easy. They will be born bay.

I should add to this discussion of color the fact that because the gray color is dominant, no foal can be gray unless they have a gray parent. Even with 2 gray parents, the foal can be bay or black and not gray. Also, black is dominant, so 2 black parents should produce a black unless both parents carry the recessive red (chestnut/ sorrel) gene, and then you can get the rare sorrel foal.

This is complicated in Shires because many horses may look & are registered as black, but are actually dark brown (where they carry the Agouti gene that tells the black how to be displayed - "A"= limited to points or "a"= black all over the body), so their foals can be bay. And just like the black parents, you can get a sorrel foal from bay parents if they are recessive red carriers as well. Isn't genetics fun!

An unrelated tip that I was taught by Sharon McLin many years ago may help those with foals to register. Sketch the markings on your foals as soon after birth as possible (while they are still wet). Within a week, it is harder to make out this marking & by the time we usually register them, the foal coat very often obscures the white marking on the legs.

*Editor's Note: The DNA lab that ASHA uses, University of California-Davis, has a great site on coat color genetics. We also have a contract through them to help you genetically determine the color of your horse. <http://www.vgl.ucdavis.edu/services/coatcolorhorse.php>*



Gray "spectacles" around eyes of a gray foal.