



COAT COLOURS DESCRIPTION

There are several thousands of coat colours among the cats.

This nomenclature is a compromise between logic, which allows some systematic, and tradition, which allows to be understood by the majority.

Logic has been introduced at several levels:

- The terminology for a colour is the same for any breed. In French, "exotic" names such as ebony or foreign blue, for Orientals, for instance, have been suppressed because they have become obsolete. However, there still are some rare cases where specific names are often used ("lièvre" (ruddy) for brown ticked tabby and "sorrel" for cinnamon in the Abyssinian and the Somali breeds, bronze in the Egyptian Mau breed, "zibeline" (sable) in the English or American Burmese breeds). It is then recommend to write the normal colour followed by the usual term.
- The order of the different terms describing a coat is always the same. The order is as follows:
 - the "basic" colour (see "colour" section below) including the tortie varieties;
 - the optional "amber" mention;
 - the optional "silver" or "smoke" mention;
 - the optional tabby pattern;
 - the optional pattern for the sepia, mink and point categories;
 - the optional presence of white.

For instance, one could read "blue tortie [amber] [silver] [blotched tabby] [sepia] [and white]"

The usual rules have generally been kept. For example, "black" becomes "brown" if the cat is agouti ("tabby") and "seal" if the cat is sepia, mink or point! Tradition that distinguishes between "shaded" and "chinchilla" was also kept, despite the continuum in tipping length.

In some cases, it is useful to include eye colour in coat name so that it is mentioned on the cat's descendants' pedigree. It is systematically done for white cats (example: blue eyed white, odd eyed white, gold eyed white), but also for gold eyed silver tipped cats.

Next to the current name, the genetic formula is given. Even if cat coats are extremely varied, they are actually the result of a combination between a small number of independent genetic factors, like dilution, tabby patterns, etc. Some of those factors are identified at the molecular level and we have DNA tests at our disposal to know for sure the cat's genotype. Some others are not available yet. When the genetic model is established or strongly presumed, it will be indicated in the following explanation.



The following tables are meant to present a synthetic view of all those colours by grouping them together in order to describe them more easily without listing them all. Coats are commonly classified by "categories", "divisions" and "colours", the three groups combining with each other: each coat belongs to a category, to a division and to a colour.

The category

Category distinguishes cats with full colour expression from those with thermosensible pattern, i.e. those whose pigments fully express only in the colder areas of the body (muzzle, ears, legs, tail...): there are then 4 categories, each of which corresponds to alleles combinations on "C" locus (that of tyrosinase enzyme). From the more homogenous to the more contrasted, we get the following categories:

- Full colour (C- genotype), also called « **traditional** »;
- **Sepia** (c^{bc^b} genotype), like in the English or American Burmese;
- **Mink** (c^{bc^s} genotype), intermediate between sepia and point;
- **Point** (c^sc^s genotype), like in the Siamese or Birman.

The division

Division distinguishes cats according to several independent factors: presence of white spotting or not, presence of inhibitor gene giving silver or smoke colours, self-coloured (non agouti) cat or presence of a tabby pattern... As those factors are independent from one another and combine with one another, grouping them together by division includes some arbitrary choices. For instance, silver AND tabby cats are in "silver" division, not in "tabby" division. These grouping choices have often been dictated by tradition and conformity with other feline federations' uses. Inside each category, one will find the 8 following divisions:

- **Solid**: non particolor, without inhibitor allele (ii), non amber (E-) and non agouti (aa) cats. All-white cats (W-) are included in this group.
- **Tabby**: non particolor, without inhibitor allele (ii), non amber (E-) but agouti (A-) cats. In this division, one distinguishes several sub-divisions according to the tabby pattern (for ticked-hair cats) or the length of colored tip (for tipped-hair cats):
 - Ticked tabby
 - Mackerel tabby
 - Spotted tabby
 - Blotched tabby
 - Shell
 - Shaded



- **Silver/smoke:** non particolor, non amber (E-) cats, but with inhibitor allele (I-), whether they are agouti or not.
- **Amber:** cats that are non particolor, homozygous for amber mutation on the extension locus (ee), with or without inhibitor gene, agouti or not. For the moment, this division has only been introduced in the traditional category.

And the four similar divisions but for cats with white:

- **Solid and white:** particolor, without inhibitor allele (ii), non amber (E-) and non agouti (aa) cats.
- **Tabby and white:** particolor, without inhibitor allele (ii), non amber (E-) but agouti (A-) cats. One finds the same distinctions as in tabby division (ticked tabby, mackerel tabby, spotted tabby, blotched tabby, shell, shaded).
- **Silver/smoke and white:** particolor, non amber (E-) cats, but with inhibitor allele (I-), whether they are agouti or not.
- **Amber and white:** particolor cats, homozygous for amber mutation on extension locus (ee), with or without inhibitor gene, agouti or not. For the moment, this division has only been introduced in the traditional category.

The tables I to III show those different groupings for each of the categories.

Note: cats with a locket are not considered as particolor cats; their coat colour is written without "& white" and they are judged in the same class as the cats without a locket.

The colour

Colour distinguishes cats according to the « basic » colour of their hair, which is controlled by several genes among which the main ones are B gene (« brown », that of a protein linked to tyrosinase, TYRP1), D gene (« dilution », that of melanophilin MLPH) and O gene (« orange ») carried by X chromosome.

Thus, we obtain the 6 basic colours resulting from the combinations of B and D genes without O allele:

- **black** (also called brown, seal, ...): B- D- o(o)
- **chocolate:** bb (or bb^l) D- o(o)
- **cinnamon:** b^lb^l D- o(o)
- **blue:** B- dd o(o)
- **lilac:** bb (or bb^l) dd o(o)
- **fawn** : b^lb^l dd o(o)

two colours resulting from the action of O gene carried by the X chromosome:

- **red:** D- O(O)
- **cream:** dd O(O)



and all torties corresponding to red combination (resp. cream) with solid basic colours: black, chocolate, cinnamon (resp. dilutes: blue, lilac, fawn):

- **black tortie:** B- D- Oo
- **chocolate tortie:** bb (or bb^l) D- Oo
- **cinnamon tortie:** b^lb^l D- Oo
- **blue tortie:** B- dd Oo
- **lilac tortie:** bb (ou bb^l) dd Oo
- **fawn tortie:** b^lb^l dd Oo

All those 14 colours are found in each cell of tables I, II and III.

However, amber colours being only identified in Norwegian cats where chocolate/lilac, cinnamon/fawn colours do not exist, and having as far as we know no action on red/cream colours, only black, blue, black tortie and blue tortie 4 colours are represented in the cells for amber and amber and white divisions.

All-white coloured cats are traditionally gathered with cats from solid division in traditional category only (red cell in table I)

Table I
Divisions for traditional categories

		Without white				particolor										
		E-		ee		E-						ee				
		ii	I-	ii	I-	ii			I-			ii		I-		
						& white	van	mitted	& white	van	mitted	& white	van	mitted	& white	van
non agouti																
a g o u t i	ticked tabby															
	mackerel tabby															
	spotted tabby															
	blotched tabby															
	shaded															
	shell															

	Solid		Tabby		Silver/smoke		Amber
	Solid and white		Tabby and white		Silver/smoke and white		Amber and white

Note: the merging of the cells corresponding to the different tabby patterns, for « & white van » cats, means that in this case, the type of tabby pattern is not needed. The columns « & white » gather « & white bicolors », « & white arlequin » and « & white » (with no precise proportion).

Table II
Divisions for sepia and mink categories

		Without white		particolor					
		ii	I-	ii			I-		
				& white	van	mited	& white	van	mited
a g o u t i	non agouti								
	ticked tabby								
	mackerel tabby								
	spotted tabby								
	blotched tabby								
	shaded								
	shell								

	Solid		Tabby		Silver/smoke
	Solid and white		Tabby and white		Silver/smoke and white

*Note: the only difference between tables I and II is the non-inclusion of amber division and amber & white division in sepia and mink categories.
The columns « & white » gather « & white bicolors », « & white arlequin » and « & white » (with no precise proportion).*

Table III
Divisions for point category

		Without white		particolor					
		ii	I-	ii			I-		
				& white	van	mited	& white	van	mited
agouti	non agouti								
	tabby								
	shaded								
	shell								

	Solid		Tabby		Silver/smoke
	Solid and white		Tabby and white		Silver/smoke and white

*Note: the only difference between tables II and III is the merging of the lines concerning the different tabby patterns in point cats.
The columns « & white » gather « & white bicolors », « & white arlequin » and « & white » (with no precise proportion).*