

Variations of Ash-red in the Old German Owl

No doubt one of the more fascinating aspects of keeping domestic pigeons is the seemingly endless range of colorations they are bred in. Often, our interest will lead us to try and identify some of these colorations and gain a better understanding of them. This can be a real challenge at times if we are looking at a shield marked bird such as the Old German Owl. Many important indicators and clues about the color are hidden from our view by the white body and tail. Also, the names we assign to certain color expressions can sometimes be a source of confusion. The base color ash-red in particular presents a lot of questions because of its variability of expression. We'll focus on and discuss some of these different ash-red variations in the OGO and hopefully be able to understand them better.

Probably the most common variation we see is the red shield or what is simply referred to as "**Red**". This is an ash-red T-pattern check, or darkest of the pattern series. In racing homers, this would sometimes be called a "velvet" or on a blue-black bird a "black check". Typically, T-pattern shows just a thin outline of the underlying ground color. In OGO's, the best colored reds are actually a *saturated* T-pattern. In this situation, a darkening modifier, possibly sooty, smoky, or dirty will fill in any outline to the pattern to make it appear solid. The darkening effects also enhance the red to a richer and deeper shade.

When we add the gene for Spread to ash-red, the result will vary depending on the underlying pattern. Spread is the gene that alters the color to become solid or uniform. Thus, a blue bar or check with Spread becomes a black, and a brown bar or check becomes a chocolate or spread brown. The pattern remains present, but is masked or hidden under a solid color. In the Spread ash-reds, the ashy spread color will obscure but not always completely mask the underlying red pigmentation. Red bars (and possibly light checks) that are Spread will generally have a uniform silvery ash coloration that is referred to as **Lavender**. Sometimes on close inspection there will be just a hint of the underlying red pattern still showing. Red T-patterns and checks with Spread generally show more underlying red pigmentation than ash in the shield and this is referred to as **Strawberry**. I should emphasize that the lavender described is not the same color as the combination of the milky gene and Spread blue-black that is well known in Lahores and a few other breeds. If or when the milky gene is introduced into the OGO gene pool, we may have to change some names around.

One of the darkening modifiers mentioned earlier is sooty. Its effects enhance the solid reds as mentioned, but it's not readily visible unless seen on a barred bird. Unfortunately, this is exactly where we don't want to see it! Also called smutty, it shows as blotches or spots of color on the wing shield. Viewed from a distance, it can make a barred bird look like a check. When we take a sooty red T-pattern or sooty dark red check and combine that with Spread, the result is somewhat unexpected. The sooty areas in the center of the feathers are whitened, leaving a darker edging with a scalloped effect for an expression that we call **Lace**. I have some information that indicates this laced expression is

sometimes transient and molts away in the adult plumage. I don't have any firsthand knowledge of this, but would be interested to hear from those of you that might.

It's important to keep in mind that not every expression of ash-red Spread is going to fall neatly into one of these named categories. No doubt there are going to be intermediate expressions. We also need to consider that there can be a dilute counterpart for each color expression described. All told, ash-red in the Old German Owl has many faces.... or should I say shields? Each one in my opinion adds variety and interest to the breed.

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