

# What Makes a Toller a Toller, a Rescue Primer

By Laura G White

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Preamble: First it has to be noted that Tollers are a fairly rare breed, and thus crosses are rare as well. Most likely what a rescue person is looking at is some mix that includes Golden, some kind of “Collie” breed, Spaniel, and sometimes Chow, all common breeds. It has to be recognized that most all Rescue Tollers are not “show dogs” or even companion puppies out of conformation/multi venue breedings that a Toller Fancier is used to seeing, but most likely Tollers that were bred where profit was the only motivation that do not always fit the standard. Therefore, you can only use the standard as a general guide and expect a tremendous variation, noting that even “show dogs” have substantial variation as well. What a rescue volunteer needs to do is look at the overall dog. It would not be one facet alone that one uses to determine if a Toller is a Toller or a “Want-a-be”. It should be noted that photos are highly unreliable. We have seen photos of dogs that we were sure were Tollers, to be on meeting definitely not. We have also seen photos of dogs we knew were registered Tollers that looked so unlikely that if there were viewed in Pet Finders, we might have said “not Toller”.

1. Size: While the standard is 19 inches for a male and 18 for a female, there is quite a range in our breed. But they should be smaller than a Golden Retriever. Rescue “Tollers” that are for females in the 21” range and males 22” are most likely Golden mixes unless there are other strong indicators that say “Toller”. On the small end of the scale we see show females that are 17 inches and we have seen a male (registered) smaller than that, but without other strong indicators extremes of size should be suspicious.
2. Color and Markings: Tollers are normally a darker red than a “typical” Golden Retriever. Color varies from Light Golden Red, sometimes described as Orange, thru Dark Coppery Red. Lighter shadings on the pantaloons and underbelly are normal. There is a tremendous variation in the red color. But the red should not be in the lighter range that you see in some lighter Golden (also called blond or white Golden) or straw Golden with no red hues. There is also a Buff gene in Tollers that looks similar to a Weimaraner in color. A true Buff is a strong positive indicator as so very few other breeds have this color. But from there we have seen “sable” non rescue registered Tollers, “Dark Buffs” which are a real unusual color (Sable with a light undercoat and silver tips), and Tollers with black in their coat (either as patches or interspersed individual hairs). However this is very, very rare in the breed and a dog with black should be suspect unless there are other strong indicators. Ticking of the white markings with red is not uncommon. Other than as described, Tollers do not come in any other color.
3. White Markings are a moderate indicator. Tollers normally have some amount (some more, some very little) of white in the following places: Chest and throat, feet, blaze, tip of tail. You might see some white on the top of neck as a mismark. They do not have any body patches of white, as there is no pinto pattern in the breed. Some have quite a bit of white, and mis-marks in rescues should be expected. Some rescues might not have any white. Thus the amount of white markings is only a moderate indicator, especially if a dog has a white pattern with a full collar, full white stockings, ect or absolutely no white I would say is suspect, as is a “pinto or patch”.
4. Coat: Tollers are a double coated breed and seasonal shedding should be expected. Different body parts having different lengths like a Golden. This kind of coat is common in Golden and the collie breeds. But the lack of a double coat would be a strong indicator that the dog is not a Toller as would be a very curly or course coat.
5. Pigmentation: Most Tollers are “self” colored and have pigmentation that could be described as “flesh” or “tan” on nose, lips, and eye rims. Self-colored pigmentation is a strong indicator

because it is not found in mixes commonly associated with “want-to-be” Tollers. Some Tollers have black noses and pigmentation, but these are generally not a dark black, they are faded somewhat, especially in an adult dog. A dog with a dark black nose and other suspect characteristics can be ruled “not Toller” this way. Tollers do not have any black on their tongues. This indicates a chow type or other breed heritage. The roof of their mouths (upper pallet) can be black.

6. Ears: Normally drop, but half dropped like some BC’s exhibit (also called Wonkie) are seen. Some Toller ears are pointed at the tips, some round, some relatively small and some large. But some form of triangle should be present, not a setter type. Some Tollers grow a lot of hair in this area, some not. However, very short hair in the back of the fold is suspicious.
7. Temperament: Temperament should be determined if it will make a suitable companion. If the dog is aggressive our Rescue regulations do not allow the dog into Toller rescue. Very few Tollers are aggressive, but this IS getting worse as more indiscriminate breeders are out there placing Tollers in inappropriate homes and not supporting their puppy people. Many seen in rescue are shy and timid. With love and attention they will heal. You cannot expect in a shelter environment for the temperament to be obvious. But the better temperament the easier it will be to find the dog a home.
8. Head shape. In the show ring you see a tremendous variation, so this can be expected in rescues. We think that it is difficult to put a real finger on it. We have seen Tollers that we know are purebred with everything from an almost “collie” head to a “bear” type of some Golden.
9. Webbed feet. Many dogs have webbed feet, not just retrievers or the sporting group, however the lack of certainly is a very suspicious indicator. We do not know of a Toller without webbed feet.
10. Retrieving. We would not use this trait as an indicator. Breeds that are found in “want-a-be” Tollers: Golden and Collie breeds are natural retrievers, so this would be of no help, Further a shelter environment is intimidating and stressful and the dog may not retrieve. Some are so traumatized that it might take months in a new home for the Toller to retrieve. And while we would like to say this is not so, not all Tollers are retrieving maniacs.

It is very important when determining if a Toller is actually a Toller to take these things all together. It is always a good idea to check for microchips or Tattoos (on belly/flank area or ears). Most reputable Toller breeders permanently identify their pups. While these are not normally found in a rescue situation, there is always a possibility that the dog escaped or got lost. There are a few Toller breeders where profit is the only motive, so most of the true “rescue” Tollers will not be PI’ed.

There is much discussion about “Gut Feeling” and yes in the end this is what a rescue person is faced with. So if your gut says yes, it looks like a Toller and acts like a Toller, then we would call it a Toller.

Thank You All for supporting Toller Rescue.