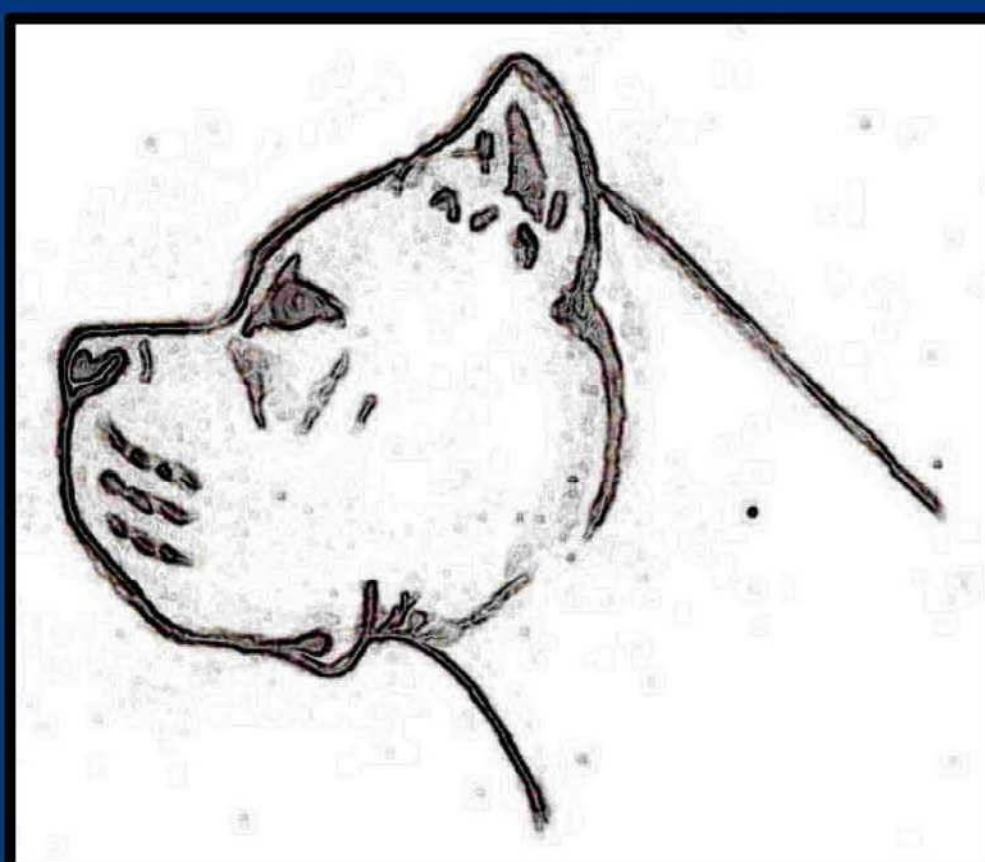


A Judge's Guide for

# The Cane Corso



Applying the Official Breed Standard and  
Beyond

## AKC STANDARD FOR THE CANE CORSO

### General Appearance

The Cane Corso is an ancient Italian breed, medium-large sized molossoid. Sturdy, with a strong skeleton, muscular and athletic. It moves with considerable ease and elegance. It has always been a property watchdog and hunter of difficult game such as the wild boar.

### Size, Proportion, Substance

A muscular, balanced, large boned dog, rectangular in proportion. The length of the dog, measured from the point of the shoulder to the point of buttock, is approximately 10% percent greater than the height of the dog measured from the highest point of the shoulder to the ground. Height: Dogs: 25 to 27.5 inches, Bitches: 23.5 to 26 inches. Weight: Proportionate to height.

### Head

Molossoid, large, its total length reaches approximately one third of the height at the withers. Planes of the skull and muzzle are slightly convergent, they are not parallel. The circumference of the head measured at the cheek bones is more than twice the total length of the head; skin is firm and smooth.

### Skull

Viewed from the front is wide and slightly curved, width is equal to the length. From the side a prominent arch begins above the eyes and then flattens backwards towards the occiput, viewed from the top it has a square appearance due to the zygomatic arches and powerful muscles swathing it.

**Stop:** Well defined due to developed and bulging frontal sinuses and prominent arch above the eyes. Expression: Very alert and attentive. Some wrinkling on forehead occurs when alert.

**Eyes:** Medium sized, almond shaped, not round or bulging, tight fitting rims preferred with only a minimal amount of haw being visible.

**Eye Color:** Dogs with black muzzles (black, fawn, red, and these colors brindled) dark brown eyes are preferred. Gray muzzles (gray, fawn, red and these colors brindled) lighter shades are acceptable. Pigmentation of the eye rims is complete, pigmentation of eye rim matches pigment color of dog. **Disqualification:** Yellow bird of prey, blue eyes. Wall eyed.

**Ears:** Set well above the cheekbones. May be cropped or uncropped, if cropped it is in an equilateral triangle. If uncropped, they are medium sized, triangular in shape, held tight to the cheeks, and not extending beyond the jaw bone.

**Nose:** Large with well-opened nostrils, pigment color to match pigment color of the dog. Dogs with black pigment have black noses, gray pigmented dogs have gray noses, and pigmentation is complete. The nose is an extension of the topline of the muzzle and does not protrude beyond nor recede behind the front plane of the muzzle.

**Muzzle:** Very broad and deep, width is almost equal to its length which reaches approximately one third of the total length of the head; the depth of muzzle is more than 50% of the length of the muzzle. The top and bottom muzzle plains are parallel and the nose and chin form a perpendicular line. Viewed from the front the anterior face should look flat and form a trapezoid, wider at the bottom. Muzzle is not narrow or snipey.

**Lips:** Rather firm. Upper lips moderately hanging, they join under the nostrils to form an inverted "U". Pigmentation matches color pigment of dog, Dogs with black pigment have black lips, gray pigmented dogs have gray lips.

**Bite:** Slightly undershot (no more than 1/4 inch) and level preferred, scissor bite is acceptable if parameters of the head and muzzle are correct. The incisors are firmly placed on a straight line. Dentition is complete with no more than two missing teeth.

**Disqualification:** More than 2 missing teeth, wry mouth. Pronounced and undershot more than 1/4 inch.

### Neck, Back and Body

**Neck:** Slightly arched, flowing smoothly into the shoulders with a small amount of dewlap. The length of the neck is approximately one third the height at the withers.

**Body:** Depth of the ribcage is equal to half the total height of the dog, descending slightly below the elbow. Ribs are long and well sprung. Moderate tuck up

**Chest:** Broad, well muscled, strong forefront. Back: Wide, strong, muscular. Highest part of shoulder blade slightly rising above the strong, level back. Loin: Well-muscled, and harmoniously joined to the back.

**Croup:** Long, wide, slightly sloping. Rump should be quite round due to muscling.

**Tail:** Tail set is an extension of the backline. It is thick at the root with not much tapering at the tip. When not in action carried low, otherwise horizontal or slightly higher than back, not to be carried in a vertical position, it is docked at the 4th vertebrae. Natural tails are accepted, though not preferred. In the case of natural tails, the tip reaches the hock but not below. Carried low, it is neither broken nor kinked but supple. Hanging when the dog is in repose; generally carried level with the back or slightly above the level of the back when the dog is in action, without curving over the back or being curled. Disqualification: A natural tail that is atrophied or a natural tail that is knotted and laterally deviated or twisted.

#### **Forequarters**

Strong and muscular, well proportioned to the size of the dog. Straight when viewed from the front or side, height of the limb at the elbow is equal to 50% of the height at the withers. **Shoulders:** Muscular, laid back. Upper arms: Strongly muscled, with good bone, powerful. Elbows: Held parallel to the ribcage, turning neither in nor out. Forelegs: straight and with good bone well muscled. **Pasterns:** Almost straight, strong but flexible. **Feet:** Round with well arched, toes (cat like). Lean hard dark pads and nails except in the case of white toes. Front dewclaws: Can remain or be removed, if left intact should only be a single dewclaw on each leg

#### **Hindquarters**

As a whole, they are powerful and strong, in harmony with the forequarters. **Thighs:** Long, wide, angulated and well muscled. **Stifle:** Should be moderately angulated, strong. **Legs:** Strong bone and muscle structure. Hocks: wide set, thick and clean, let down and parallel when viewed from behind. **Rear pastern:** straight and parallel. **Rear dewclaws:** Any rear dewclaws are removed. **Hind feet:** Slightly more oval shaped and less arched toes than the front feet.

#### **Coat**

The coat is short, stiff, shiny, adherent and dense with a light undercoat that becomes thicker in cold weather.

#### **Color**

Acceptable colors are black, lighter and darker shades of gray, lighter and darker shades of fawn, and red. Brindling is allowed on all of these colors. Solid fawn and red, including lighter and darker shades have a black or gray mask; it does not go beyond the eyes. There may be a white patch on the chest, throat, chin, backs of the pasterns, and on the toes.

**Disqualification:** Any color with marking pattern as seen in black and tan breeds.

#### **Gait/Movement**

The movement is free flowing, powerful yet effortless, with strong reach and drive. As the dog accelerates, the feet converge towards a center line of gravity in a near single track. When viewed from the side, the topline remains level, with minimal roll or bounce.

#### **Temperament**

The Cane Corso as a protector of his property and owners is unequalled. Intelligent he is easily trained. Noble, majestic and powerful his presence is impressive. He is docile and affectionate to his owner, loving with children and family.

#### **Summary**

The overall confirmation of the dog should be well balanced and proportionate. The foregoing description is that of the ideal Cane Corso any deviation from the above described dog is penalized to the extent of the deviation.

#### **Disqualifications:**

More than 2 missing teeth, wry mouth.

Undershot bite more than 1/4 inch

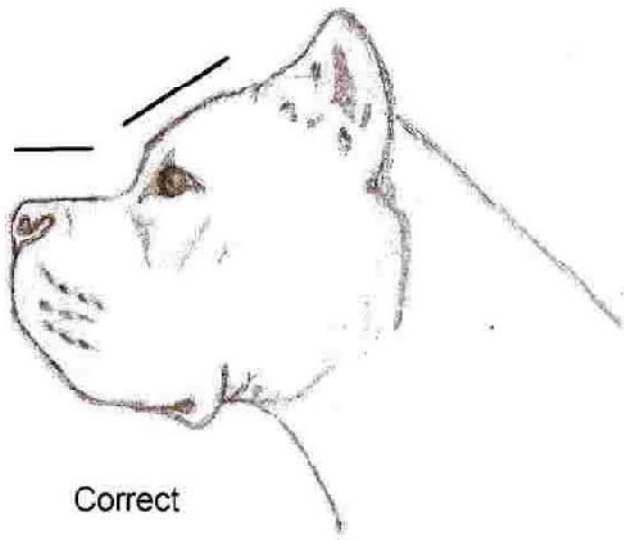
Yellow bird of prey, blue eyes. Wall eyed.

Any color with marking pattern as seen in black and tan breeds.

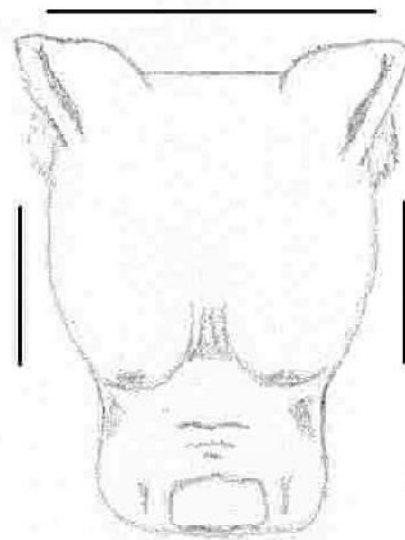
A natural atrophied tail or a natural tail that is knotted and laterally deviated or twisted.

## HEAD TYPE

The Head piece is the defining element of the Cane Corso. Although it should NOT be categorized as strictly a head breed, the truth is the head type is the most prevailing marker that distinguishes it from other breeds. For this reason, extra care should be taken to learn the precise parameters of correct head type.



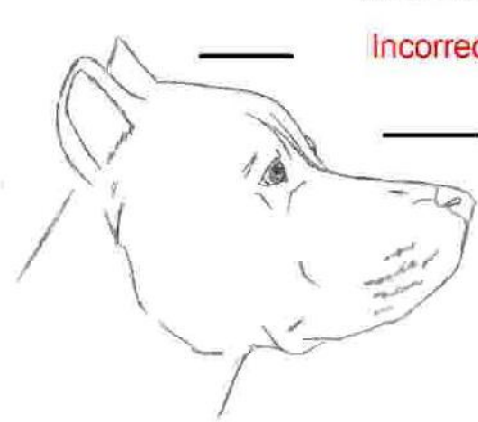
Correct



Correct

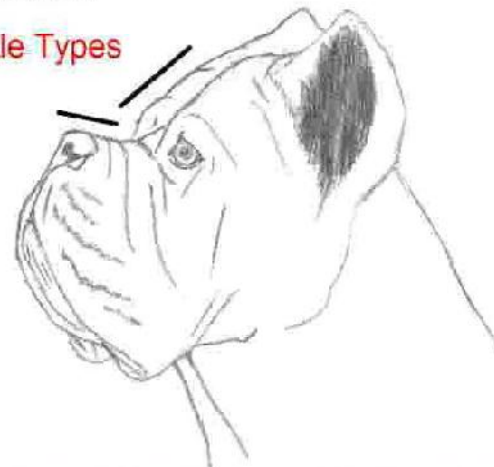
The Corso's Brachycephalic head is large, measuring twice as big around as it is long. The width and depth of the skull (not including the muzzle) is equal to its length. The plain of the skull is slightly convergent in relation to the top line of the muzzle. The Stop is well defined.

When viewed from the top, one gets the impression of a square because of the pronounced cheekbones and powerful jaw muscles.



Long, Conical head & muzzle, with protruding, pointy nose should be severely penalized.

### Incorrect Head and Muzzle Types



Very short, muzzle with recessive nose and round eyes are reminiscent of "boxer expression". It should be penalized.

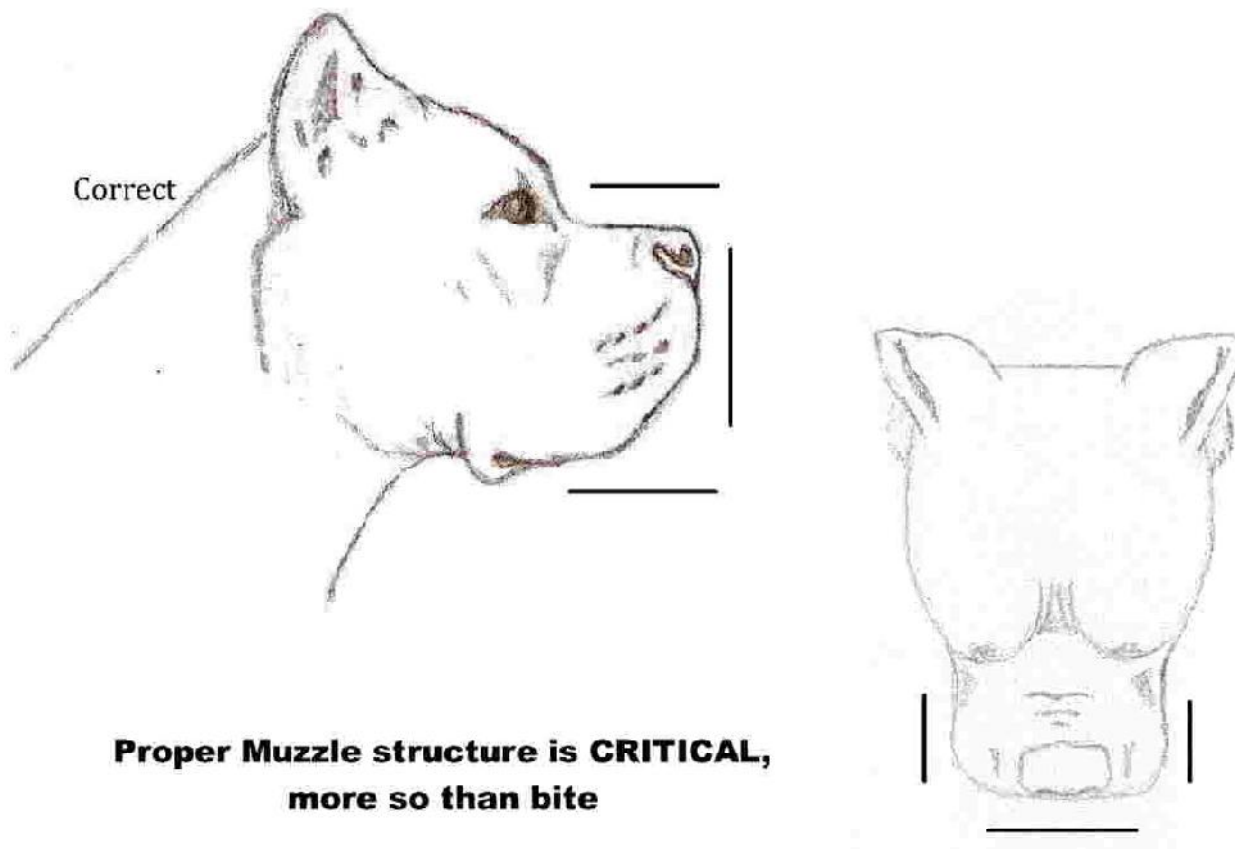
## HEAD TYPE

The Corso's Muzzle is broad and deep. Its width is almost equal to its length. The muzzle should measure a 1/3 of the length of the entire head piece.

**Side View** - The top plane of the muzzle (the line from stop to tip of nose) is parallel to the muzzle's bottom plane (the line of the bottom jaw). The tip of the nose, down the face of the muzzle to the tip of the lower jaw forms a perpendicular line. The muzzle, when viewed from the side, has the appearance of a square.

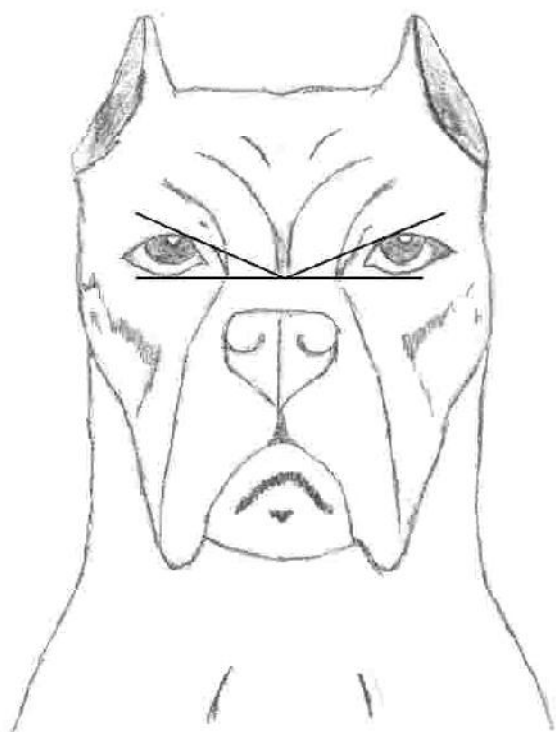
**Downward view** - Given the parallelism of the lateral sides of the muzzle, it must maintain the same width from base to the extremity. The nose and end of the muzzle is blocky and over all, the downward view should be reminiscent of a square.

**The nose must not be protruding or pointy; Neither should it be recessive or "pushed" back.**



One of the most important aspects of the breed is its square muzzle. A judge will notice that the bite will vary widely, so the judge must put more emphasis on the structure of the muzzle; relying on the exterior appearance more so than what is in the mouth. Just because a Corso has a correct bite, does not mean the structure of the muzzle is correct.

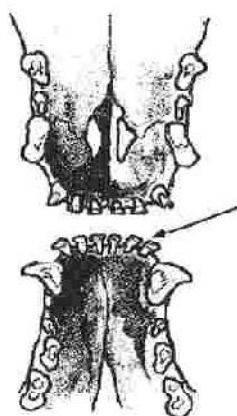
## FRONTAL ASPECTS OF THE HEAD



### Eyes

Eyes are wide set, medium sized, almond shaped and sit in a sub frontal position; They are set on a plane slightly above (15 degrees) the bridge of the muzzle. The forehead sinuses are quite developed resulting in a deep frontal cavity or "hollow" between the eyes. Round, bulging and/or low set eyes are not desirable.

**Important note about eye color:** Amber eyes are historical and acceptable in the breed. A judge must be very cautious to not confuse amber with "yellow" (which in this case means almost clear). Grey and Formentino (fawn with grey face) will always have a lighter eye as genetics dictate. Darker dogs traditionally have eyes that match the lightest color of brindle in their coat. In both cases this is not only common, but acceptable.

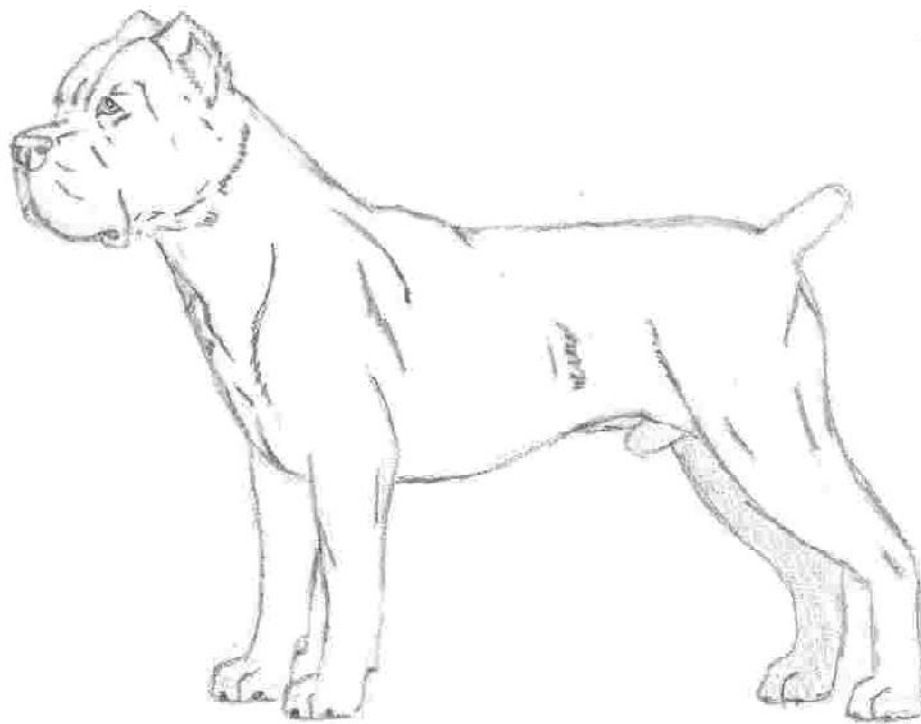


### Muzzle front and bite

The muzzle, viewed from the front, appears as a trapezoid. The thick lips form an up-side down 'U'. Undershot, level and scissors bite acceptable. The incisors are firmly placed in a straight line, ensuring that the anterior face of the muzzle is flat. Canine teeth are distinctly divergent helping to create the trapezoid appearance of the face of the muzzle. Excessive pendulous lip not desirable.

## THE BODY

Males should be imposing, proud and powerful. Females should be sturdy, feminine and distinguished. Both should be very muscular and well defined.



The Corso's body is rectangular in proportion to its height. The Chest of the Corso is a perfect balance between strength and efficiency. Viewed from the front, it is an amply wide oval with moderately flat ribs. The bottom of the brisket should align with the elbow. Forechest is well defined. The shoulder is set around 50 degrees and ensures ample reach. Withers are higher than the level back line. Tail should NOT be carried higher than a 45 degree angle.

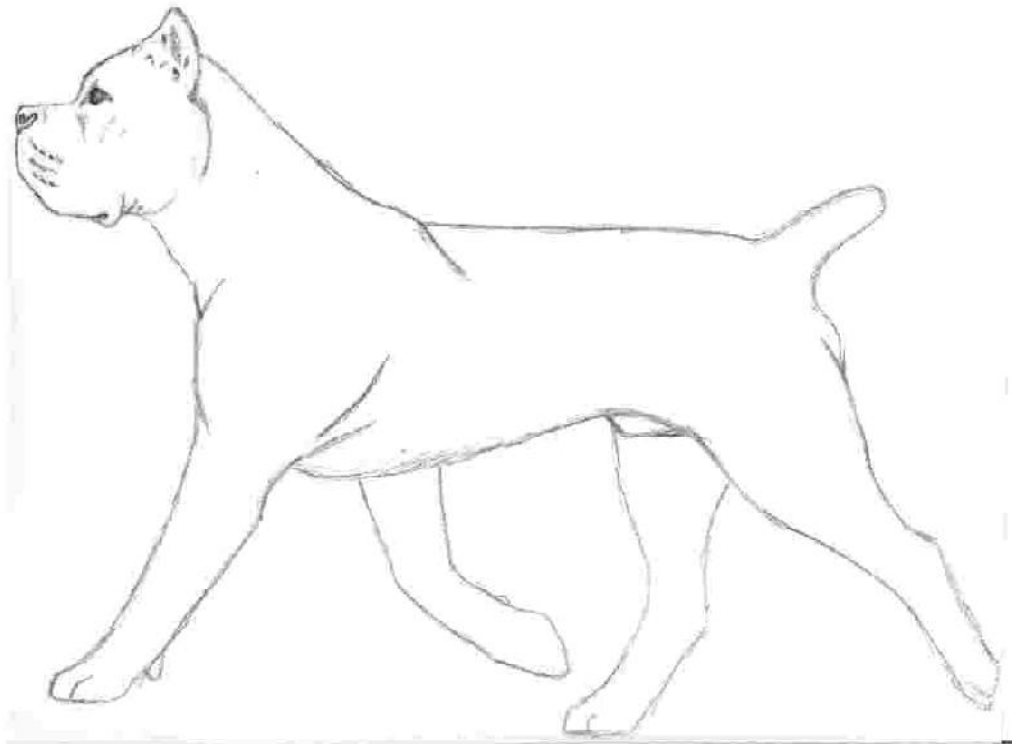
The tail set is high and the pelvis lays about at a 30 degree plain, allowing for sufficient back extension. Low tail set and steep shoulder are not desirable because it inhibits proper reach and drive.



incorrect

## **MOVEMENT**

The Corso is a utility breed. The variety of its traditional tasks did NOT call for specialized build, but an adaptable one. The lengthened trot is the ideal gait for the Corso, displaying efficiency and endurance.



The Corso has effortless, powerful movement. The length of leg is 50% of the height at withers, so its center of gravity is well off the ground. As the Corso moves, the feet move under the body toward the center of gravity, causing the dog to almost single track. However, it should never cross over the front or back. The spine should remain rigid and level. The head is not carried high but slightly lower and forward at a trot. Bounce and roll are limited. The front reach and back extension are almost equal to the height at the withers. The Rear is very muscular and processes powerful drive; allowing for bursts of speed when necessary.



## CORSO FACTS

1) No one color is preferred over another. The different colors are the results of the Corso's different functions for each region. Black and Grey were used by the pig, goat and cattle breeders. Dark brindles were used for wild boar hunting and herding. Fawns with both black and grey masks were used for Badger hunting and for herd protection. All colors may have white in the appropriate areas. NOTE: Fawn subjects with masks should not have black extending beyond the eye line, appearing on the ears, back or legs.

2) the Cane Corso is in its infancy as a Breed, only 25-30 years in structured recovery. It is imperative that judges place equal importance on type as they do structure and movement. In the past, disservice to the breed has occurred because dogs that moved well with little or no breed type were put up. The dog must look like a Corso first.



### HISTORY

For Centuries, the Cane Corso (Pronounced KHAN NAY Corso) type dog has served the rural inhabitants of Sicily and Southern Italy. Their build, intelligence, drive and loyalty made this type of Molosser an essential building block for utility breeds throughout the Region. These dogs often had type variations, which differed depending on the Region's culture and agricultural needs. Many times each region called the dog by a different name such as Brancheiro Siciliano and Corso di Puglia. Nevertheless, there is no doubt these are only different labels for the same dog, the Cane Corso. Those judging the breed today will undoubtedly still see these type variances. They should be given credence equally as long as the dog falls within the standard.

References to the Corso type dog can be found in art and literature throughout the renaissance period supporting their uses as big game hunters, cart pullers, butcher dog (cattle catchers), the guardians of livestock and property and as devoted companions.

In the late 1970's it was realized by Italian dog fanciers that only a small population of the Cane Corso and its sub-types remained in isolated pockets throughout the southern regions. In the 80's specimens from the regions of Foggia, Bari and Puglia were selected for the Italian recovery program governed by the official Italian breed club, S.A.C.C.

In 1988, Michael Sottlie Sr., imported the first Cane Corso to the US in the form of several complete litters and multiple adults. The population remained fairly isolated with only an occasional import being added to the gene pool for over a decade. Recently however, importing specimens from Italy and Europe have become common.

**For more education materials and a list of mentors, please go to [www.CorsoEd.org](http://www.CorsoEd.org).**

All other inquires should be sent to the Cane Corso Association of America  
Breed Education Director at:

Email: [shauna@castleguardcanecorso.com](mailto:shauna@castleguardcanecorso.com)

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