

# THE ILLUSTRATED STANDARD



## OF THE GREAT DANE

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# **An Illustrated Standard and Guide for the Evaluation of the Great Dane**

This booklet has been prepared by The Great Dane Club of America to assist fanciers, breeders and judges in their assessment and understanding of desired Great Dane type. Nothing in the discussions or illustrations contained herein should be construed as altering or contradicting the provisions of the Official Standard for the Great Dane adopted by this Club and approved by The American Kennel Club. It is rather to be considered as a supplement to, and expansion on, the Official Standard.

The reader should remember that the Official Standard describes the ideal Great Dane. In the following commentary we discuss common deviations from that ideal, and the relative importance to be placed on such deviations in the overall evaluation of an individual specimen of the breed.

Any deviation from the Official Standard should be penalized to the extent of the deviation, keeping in mind the extent to which such deviation affects the structural function of the working dog and the aesthetic appearance of the overall dog. The dog should be judged as a whole, balancing his positive qualities with his faults and giving due consideration to those areas in which he may excel.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The dog we know today as the Great Dane traces its history to the “mastiff” type canines depicted in carvings, pictures and writings dating back to 3,000 B.C. These dogs were used as fierce hunters and were feared as war dogs. They were highly prized for their strength, boldness, and loyalty.

As time passed, these dogs began to be selectively bred in several countries at the same time and were known by many names. In Germany, where they served originally as boar hounds and as guard dogs for baronial estates, they were called the “Deutsche Dogge” and became the national dog in 1870. Standards were being adopted and a more refined looking dog was being developed; in England, crosses between these dogs and greyhounds were made. Meanwhile, in the mid-1800s some fanciers in the United States began importing dogs, primarily from Germany. A specialty breed club was organized in 1889, which evolved into The Great Dane Club of America in 1891.

The American Dane enthusiasts continued to import and breed, refining and delineating the breed's characteristics, eliminating the short legs and coarse bodies and breeding out the aggressive behavior inherent in the early imports.

Today the Great Dane fills a variety of roles. As companions, show dogs, protectors or working dogs, the Dane's versatility, intelligence and adaptability make him extremely popular; just as his size, elegance, symmetry and carriage result in the beautiful animal we call The Apollo of Dogs.

On the following pages the Official AKC Standard is set forth by section, with discussion and illustrations as appropriate.

In conjunction with this material the reader is also encouraged to view the videotape presentation of the Great Dane, filmed and distributed by The American Kennel Club.

## GENERAL APPEARANCE

### AKC Standard

**General Appearance** - The Great Dane combines, in its regal appearance, dignity, strength and elegance with great size and a powerful, well-formed, smoothly muscled body. It is one of the giant working breeds, but is unique in that its general conformation must be so well balanced that it never appears clumsy, and shall move with a long reach and powerful drive. It is always a unit-the Apollo of dogs. A Great Dane must be spirited, courageous, never timid; always friendly and dependable. This physical and mental combination is the characteristic which gives the Great Dane the majesty possessed by no other breed. It is particularly true of this breed that there is an impression of great masculinity in dogs, as compared to an impression of femininity in bitches. Lack of true Dane breed type, as defined in this standard, is the most serious fault.

### Discussion

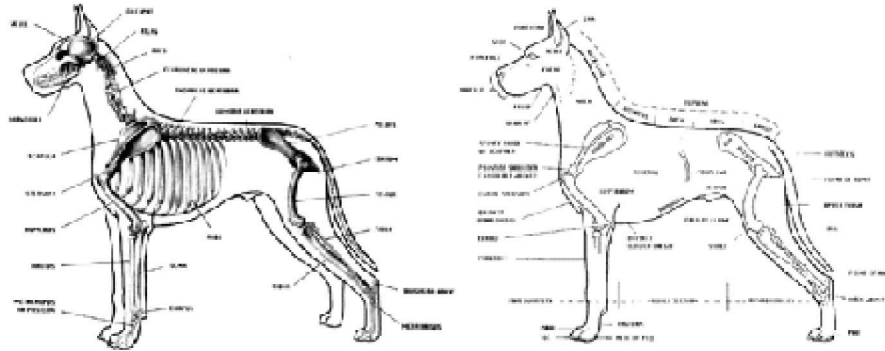
The essence of Great Dane type is created by the balanced combination of sculptured headpiece; long, tapered, clean neck; well developed body; strong bone; and heavily padded feet; clothed in a glossy coat of correct rich color and moving with precision and grace. A substantial deficiency in any of these attributes will result in a lack of true Dane type - a "common looking" dog. The presence or absence of breed type is the single most important factor in assessing the overall quality of the Great Dane.



**The Great Dane Dog**



**The Great Dane Bitch**



**SKELETAL SYSTEM AND.... ANATOMY OF THE GREAT DANE**

## SIZE, PROPORTION, SUBSTANCE: HEAD AND EYES

### AKC Standard

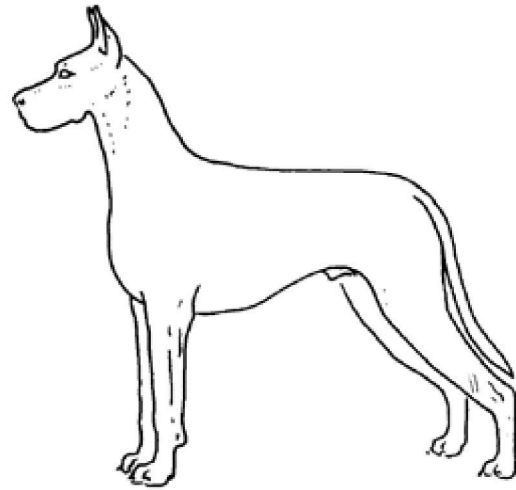
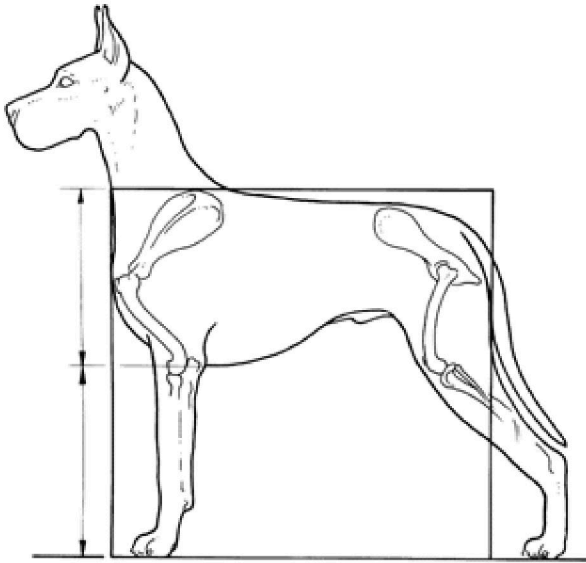
**Size, Proportion, Substance** - The male should appear more massive throughout than the bitch, with larger frame and heavier bone. In the ratio between length and height, the Great Dane should be square. In bitches, a somewhat longer body is permissible, providing she is well proportioned to her height. Coarseness, or lack of substance are equally undesirable. The male shall not be less than 30 inches at the shoulders, but it is preferable that he be 32 inches or more, providing he is well proportioned to his height. The female shall not be less than 28 inches at the shoulders, but it is preferable that she be 30 inches or more, providing she is well proportioned to her height. Danes under minimum height must be disqualified.

### Discussion

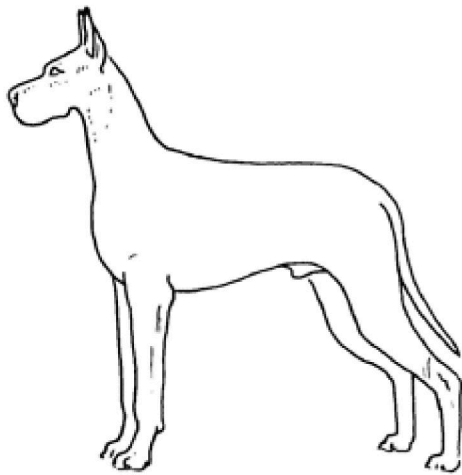
The minimum size requirements set forth in the Standard apply to all Great Danes age 6 months and over; however, the judge will rarely encounter a 30" male or a 28" bitch after the 6-9 month puppy class. Probably the average height for mature specimens will be about 34" for males and 32" for bitches. All things being equal, the larger Dane is preferred; but great height at the expense of overall soundness and balance is not desired.

The "square" of body called for is measured from the withers to the ground, and from the point of shoulder to the back of the upper thigh. Any deviation from the square appearance, other than the allowance permitting a slightly longer body in the bitch, should be penalized according to the extent of the deviation.

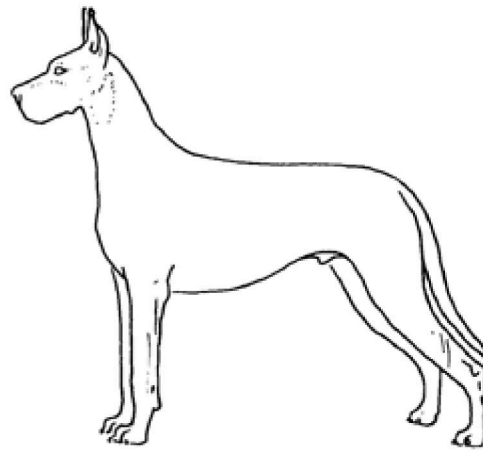
Substance has been defined as the sufficiency of bone and muscle to round out a balance with the frame. It should be recognized that coarseness is not a substitute for substance, or an overabundant of flesh a cover-up for lack of it.



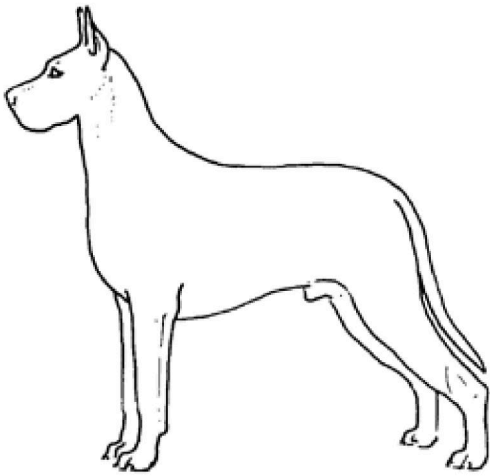
Correct



High on Leg



Long of Body



Coarse



Refined

### AKC Standard

**Head** - The head shall be rectangular, long, distinguished, expressive, finely chiseled, especially below the eyes. Seen from the side, the Dane's forehead must be sharply set off from the bridge of the nose, (a strongly pronounced stop). The plane of the skull and the plane of the muzzle must be straight and parallel to one another. The skull plane under and to the inner point of the eye must slope without any bony protuberance in a smooth line to a full square jaw with a deep muzzle (fluttering lips are undesirable). The masculinity of the male is very pronounced in structural appearance of the head. The bitch's head is more delicately formed. Seen from the top, the skull should have parallel sides and the bridge of the nose should be as broad as possible. The cheek muscles should not be prominent. The length from the tip of the nose to the center of the stop should be equal to the length from the center of the stop to the rear of the slightly developed occiput. The head should be angular from all sides and should have flat planes with dimensions in proportion to the size of the Dane. Whiskers may be trimmed or left natural.

### Discussion

The correctly chiseled head, with the strong square jaw, broad muzzle and parallel planes of skull and foreface, all in proportion to the size and gender of the Dane, is indispensable to the achievement of true breed type.

The head is well described in the Standard and in the accompanying illustrations. Please note the requirement that the length of muzzle and skull be equal; too long a muzzle is a deviation from the desired proportion, although frequently seen; the long, narrow head is just as faulty as the short face, blocky head. The mouth should be 'dry' without an excessive pouch in the flew to collect saliva. A loose "fluttering" lip overlapping a weak under jaw may give the appearance of the desired square muzzle, but is not correct.



**GREAT DANE DOG HEAD**



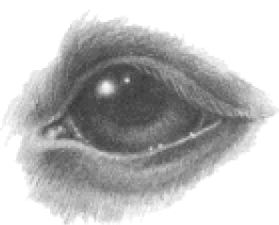
**GREAT DANE BITCH HEAD**

### **AKC Standard**

**Eyes** - shall be medium size, deep set, and dark, with a lively intelligent expression. The eyelids are almond-shaped and relatively tight, with well developed brows. Haws and Mongolian eye(s) are very serious faults. In Harlequins and Merles, the eyes should be dark, but blue eye(s) , and eyes of different colors are permitted.

### **Discussion**

The desired alert, intelligent expression is projected through the correctly placed, almond shaped, dark eyes. In Blue Great Danes, a somewhat lighter eye is permissible. In Harlequins and Merles, blue eyes and/or flecked eyes or eyes of a different color are acceptable but darker eyes are more desirable. Yellow, piercing eyes detract greatly, giving a mean-spirited look; round or protruding eyes likewise are unattractive, as are eyes placed too close together. Any abnormality of lids or lashes should be noted and faulted.



**ALMOND**



**ROUND  
WITH HAW**



**SLANT MONGOLIAN**



## EARS, NOSE, AND TEETH

### AKC Standard

*Ears* - shall be high set, medium in size and of moderate thickness, folded forward close to the cheek. The top line of the folded ear should be level with the skull. If cropped, the ear length is in proportion to the size of the head and the ears are carried uniformly erect.

### Discussion

High-set ears, be they cropped or natural, highlight the outline of the Dane head and create the desired alert appearance. Low-set cropped ears detract from the smooth lines of the skull, and the low-set natural ear gives the skull a round, hound-like appearance. Lack of erectile ability in the base of the natural ear will also give a hound look and should be faulted. Although it is desired that the cropped ear be of a length to properly balance the head and be carried uniformly erect, so long as the set of the ears is correct the dog with too short or too long an ear or with imperfect carriage should not be unduly faulted for this man-made error. There should be no preference between cropped and natural ears, either being correct.



**CROPPED EAR**



**UNCROPPED EAR**

### AKC Standard

*Nose* - shall be black, except in the Blue Dane, where it is a dark blue-black. A black spotted nose is permitted on Harlequins and Merles; a solid pink colored nose is not desirable. A split nose is a disqualification.

### Discussion

In Harlequins and Merles, the degree of spotting or pink on the nose should not be penalized unless it affects the overall picture. However, a black nose is more desirable.



**CORRECT**



**SPLIT NOSE**

**AKC Standard**

**Teeth** - shall be strong, well developed, clean, and with full dentition preferred. The incisors of the lower jaw touch very lightly the bottoms of the inner surface of the upper incisors (scissors bite). An overshot bite is a serious fault. jaw is a very serious fault. undershot and wry bites are very serious faults. Even bites, misaligned or crowded incisors are minor faults.

**Discussion**

There should be no penalty for “distemper” teeth or for teeth spotted or pitted from medication. Crowded lower incisors are deemed a minor fault; however, it should call the judge’s attention to ascertain whether the crowding may be due to an inadequate, narrow lower jaw. While there is no requirement to “count” the teeth as for a Doberman or Rottweiler, obvious gaps should likewise be noted and faulted to the extent of deviation from the desired full dentition.



**Correct**



**Level**



**Overbite**



**Undershot**

## AKC Standard

**Neck, Topline, Body** - The neck shall be firm, high set, well arched, long and muscular. From the nape, it should gradually broaden and flow smoothly into the withers. The neck underline should be clean.

Withers shall slope smoothly into a short level back with a broad loin. The chest shall be broad, deep and well muscled. The fore chest should be well developed without a pronounced sternum. The brisket extends to the elbow, with well sprung ribs. The body underline should be tightly muscled with a well-defined tuck-up.

The croup should be broad and very slightly sloping. The tail should be set high and smoothly into the croup, but not quite level with the back, a continuation of the spine. The tail should be broad at the base, tapering uniformly down to the hock joint. At rest, the tail should fall straight. When excited or running, it may curve slightly, but never above the level of the back. A ring or hooked tail is a serious fault. A docked tail is a disqualification.

## Discussion

The elegance of the breed is created here. One should be able to draw a smooth line from the skull, down the strong, tapered, clean neck, over the withers to the short, level back, broad loin and very slightly sloping croup. The neck slopes smoothly into the withers. The tail is a continuation of the spine, extending the angle of the croup when at rest and curving up saber-like in action. Deviations from the Standard would include a short, thick neck; a “ewe” (Deer) neck; a long, thick and weak “goose” neck. Your hand should follow the neckline smoothly into the withers and should not come to an abrupt halt.

The length of the body has been described in the section dealing with proportion and calling for a square outline, but it is important to remember that the proper length should be achieved through the extension of the rib cage and not in the length of the loin.



Skeleton of Neck



Correct Neck

## Neck Deviations



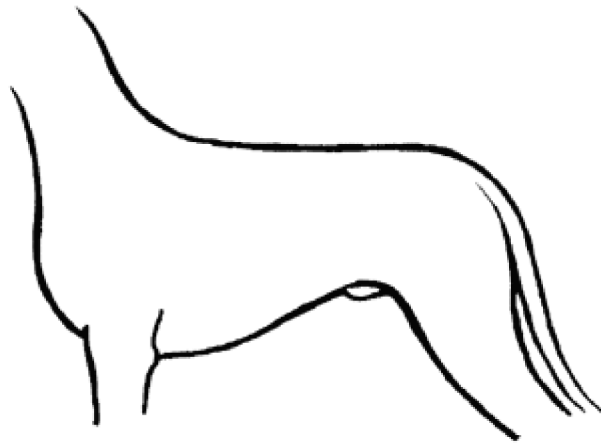
Ewe Neck



Stove Pipe  
Thin - No Taper



Short Neck  
Thick, Coarse  
and Throaty (Wet)



Tail set

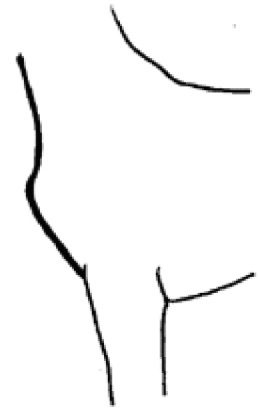
## Forechest Deviations



Straight



Overdone



Pigeon



Excess Slope



Flat Level, Gay Tail  
No Rise To Withers

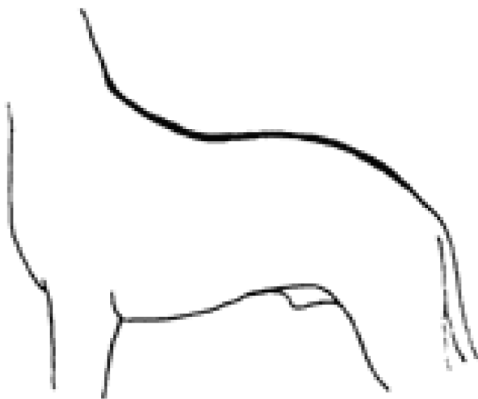
## Topline Deviations



High In Rear



Sway Back

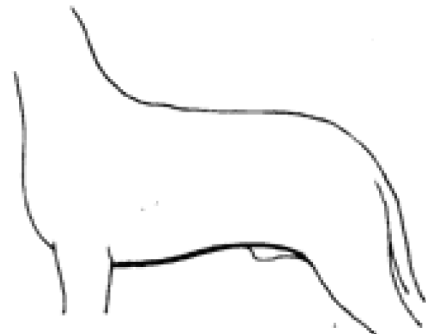


Roach Back

## Underline Deviations



Herring Gut, Wasp Waist



Lack of Tuckup

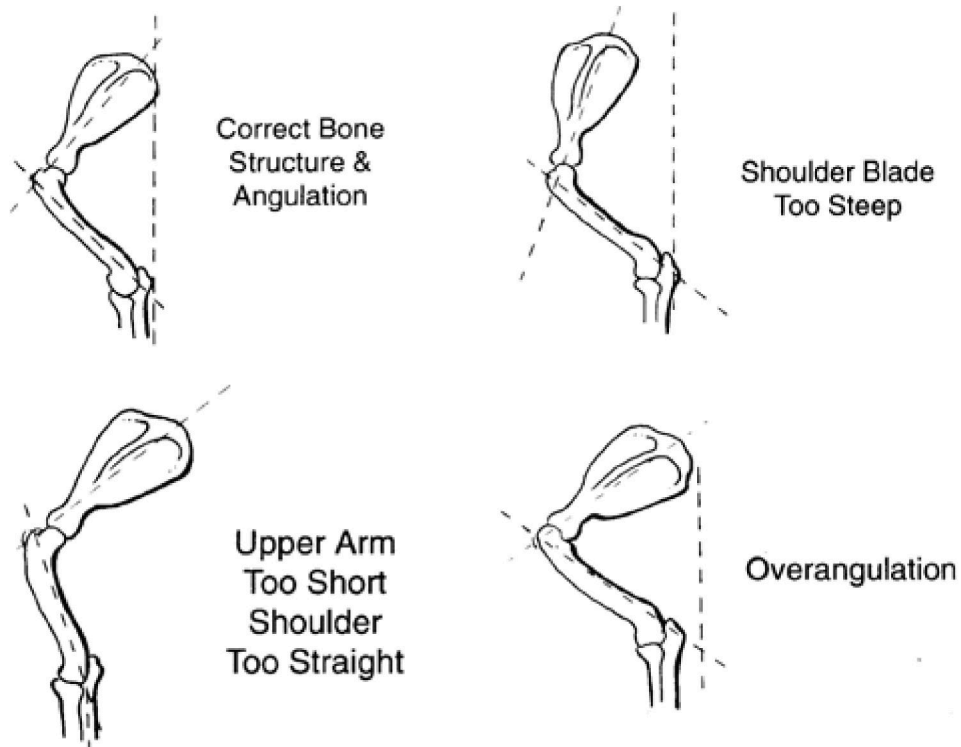
## FOREQUARTERS AND HINDQUARTERS

### AKC Standard

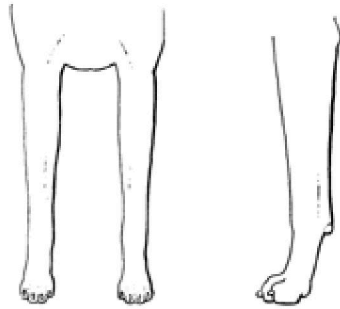
**Forequarters** - The forequarters, viewed from the side, shall be strong and muscular. The shoulder blade must be strong and sloping, forming, as near as possible, a right angle in its articulation with the upper arm. A line from the upper tip of the shoulder to the back of the elbow joint should be perpendicular. The ligaments and muscles holding the shoulder blade to the rib cage must be well developed, firm and securely attached to prevent loose shoulders. The shoulder blade and the upper arm should be the same length. The elbow should be one-half the distance from the withers to the ground. The strong pasterns should slope slightly. The feet should be round and compact with well-arched toes, neither toeing in, toeing out, nor rolling to the inside or outside. The nails should be short, strong and as dark as possible, except that they may be lighter in Harlequins, Mantles and Merles. Dewclaws may or may not be removed.

### Discussion

The greatest amount of work in supporting the dog falls to the forequarters, which carries the body's weight during stride, absorbs the weight as the step is completed, and provides directional thrust. Correct placement and angulation of shoulder and forearm give the dog greater reach, and the slightly sloping pastern and well cushioned pads absorb the shock as the foot hits the ground.



Correct Front  
Legs Straight  
and Parallel  
Correct Elbows,  
Forelegs and  
Feet

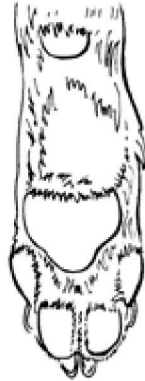


Correct Side View  
Front Leg  
8-Degree Bend  
in Pastern

Detail  
Front Foot



**Bones of  
the Foot**



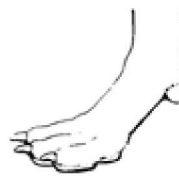
**Pads**



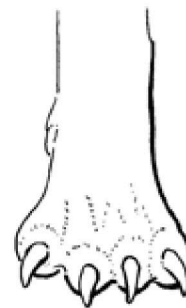
**Round,  
Cat Foot**



**Hare Foot**



**Flat, Down  
in Pastern**



**Splay Foot**

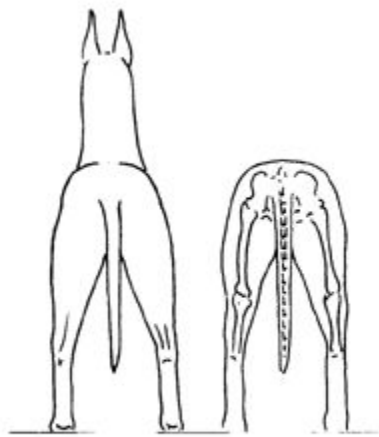


## AKC Standard

**Hindquarters** - The hindquarters shall be strong, broad, muscular and well angulated, with well let down hocks. Seen from the rear, the hock joints appear to be perfectly straight turned neither toward the inside nor out. The rear feet should be round and compact, with well-arched toes, neither toeing in nor out. The nails should be short, strong and as dark as possible, except they may be lighter in Harlequins, Mantles and Merles. Wolf claws are a serious fault.

## Discussion

Strength and power must also be embodied in the rear assembly which supplies the drive to force the body forward. The set of the croup combined with the angulation of the upper and lower thighs provide the leverage to transmit the maximum power. The work required of the hindquarters requires strongly muscled upper and lower thighs, strong parallel hocks and the same degree of angulation to balance that of the forequarters. A steep croup, lack of rear angulation or over-angulation of the rear are all deviations from the Standard and should be penalized to the extent of the deviation.



Correct Rear - Well Muscled

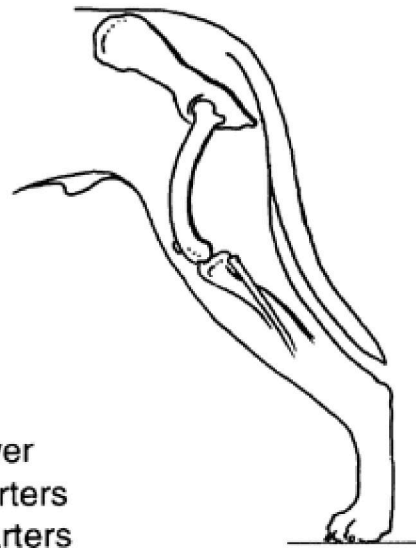


Correct  
Rear Foot



Correct  
Hock & Tail

## Ideal Angulation



Correct Upper & Lower  
Shanks Equal Hindquarters  
Balances With Forequarters

## Angulation Deviations



Overangulated



Too Straight  
Angulation



Sickle Hock  
Overangulated

## COAT, COLOR, MARKINGS AND PATTERNS

### AKC Standard

**Coat** - the coat shall be short, thick and clean with a smooth glossy appearance.

### Discussion

The coat lies flat. Trimming of stray hairs is acceptable.

### Brindle:

**Color** - The base color shall be yellow gold and always brindled with strong black cross stripes.

**Patterns and Markings** - Brindle shall have a chevron pattern with a black mask. Black should appear on the eye rims and eyebrows, and may appear on the ears and tail tip. The more intensive the base color and the more distinct and evenly brindled, the more preferred will be the color. Too much or too little brindling are equally undesirable. White markings at the chest and toes, black-fronted, dirty colored Brindles are not desirable.

### Fawn:

**Color** - The color shall be yellow gold.

**Patterns and Markings** - Black should appear on the eye rims and eyebrows, with a black mask and may appear on the ears and tail tip. Deep yellow gold must always be given the preference. White markings at the chest and toes, black-fronted; dirty colored fawns are not desirable.

### Blue:

**Color** - The color shall be a pure steel blue.

**Patterns and Markings** - White markings at the chest and toes are not desirable.

### Black:

**Color** - The color shall be a glossy black.

**Patterns and Markings** - White markings at the chest and toes are not desirable.

### Harlequin:

**Color** - Base color shall be pure white with black torn patches. Merle patches are normal.

**Patterns and Markings** - Black torn patches well distributed over the body; with whole or partial white neck. Black pigment may be seen on the skin in white areas. No patch should be so large as it appears to be a blanket. Eligible but less desirable, are black hairs showing through the white base coat which gives a salt and pepper or dirty appearance.

### **Mantle:**

**Color** - Black and white with a black blanket extending over the body.

**Patterns and Markings** - Black skull with white muzzle; white blaze is optional; whole or partial white neck; a white chest; white on whole or part of the forelegs and hind legs; white tipped black tail. A small white break in the blanket is acceptable. Black pigment may be seen on the skin of the white areas.

### **Merle:**

**Color** - A pale gray to dark gray merle base color with black torn patches within.

**Patterns and Markings** - May be a Solid Merle (white on chest and toes permissible) or a Merle with a Mantle Pattern (solid merle blanket extending over the body; merle skull with a white muzzle; white blaze is optional; whole or partial white neck; a white chest; white on whole or part of the forelegs and hind legs; white tipped merle tail. A small break in the blanket is acceptable. Black pigment may be seen on the skin in the white areas.

**Disqualification** - Merlequin, a white dog with ONLY patches of merle.

**Faults of Patterns and Markings shall NOT carry as much weight as faults of conformation and breed type.** Any variance in Patterns /Markings as described in the above colors, shall be faulted to the extent of the deviation. Any COLOR other than the seven described shall be disqualified.

### **Discussion**

Faults of color, with the exception of serious deviations, should not be considered as important as faults of structure and type. THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THE DOG IS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE. Natural graying of the mask due to age should NOT be penalized; in the Dane, some graying at the front of the muzzle may occur at a relatively early age.

**Brindle** - The black stripes should be clearly defined and evenly distributed, meeting or nearly meeting at the topline. The acceptable amount of brindling will vary, but very sparse (mostly fawn, with a few isolated areas of striping), or very heavy (to the extent that black appears to be the base coat with fawn striping) are deviations from the Standard and should be penalized according to the extent of the deviation.

**Fawn** - The rich golden fawn color is correct. Faults include pale, washed out biscuit, sooty and grayish yellow. The black mask will vary in area; preferably it will cover most of the forepart of the muzzle and may extend up past the eyes. Occasionally, a dark shading will appear about halfway up the tail, which is unimportant.

**Blue** - the steel blue referred to is a deep, rich color. Pale, washed out grayish-blue or brownish tinged blue should be faulted.

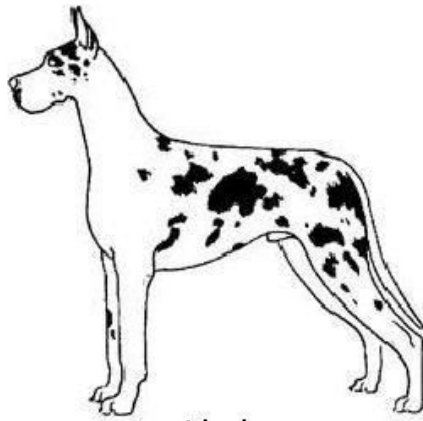
**Black** - To borrow from the English standard, black is black. There should be no tinge of fawn, rust or other color discernible.

**Harlequin** - A wide range exists as to the amount of markings which may be present; however, dogs with very few patches and dogs so heavily marked that little white area is left are both outside the desired range. When all the markings have rounded, well defined edges (spots) as opposed to the required torn edges, the dog does not fall into the harlequin classification. Harlequins may correctly have black patches on the chest and legs, a white neck preferred.

**Mantle**- A wide range exists as to the amount of markings which may be present, keeping in mind the description in the Standard.

**Merle**-A wide range exists as to the amount of markings which may be present, keeping in mind the description in the Standard.

## HARLEQUIN



Ideal

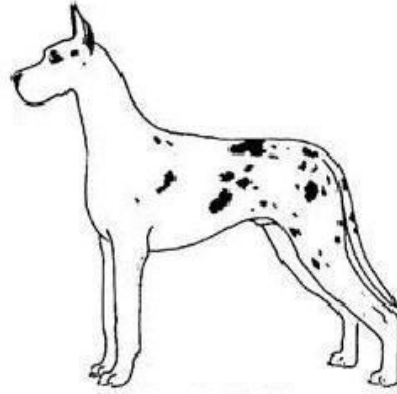


Figure 2

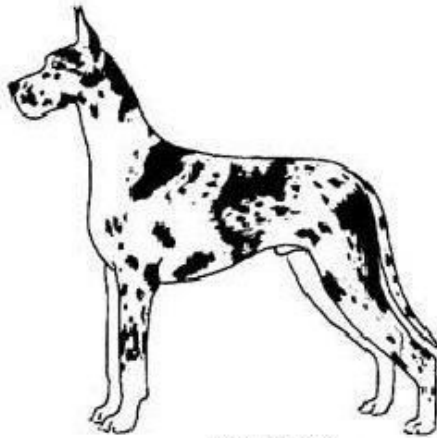


Figure 3

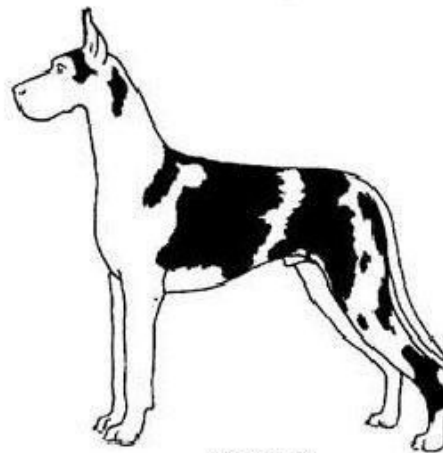


Figure 4

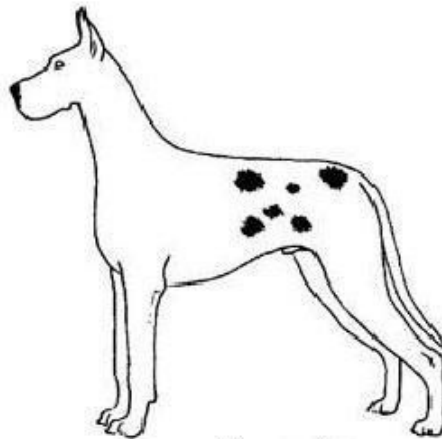
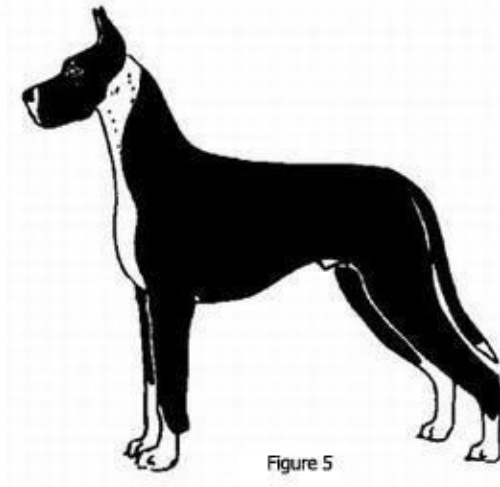
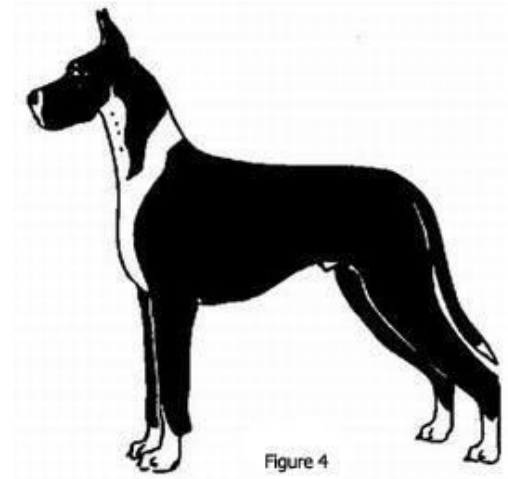
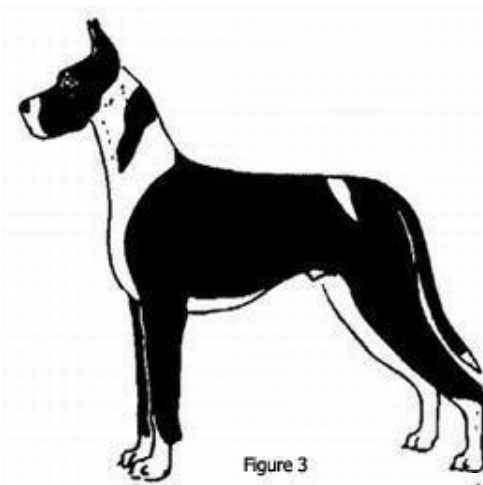
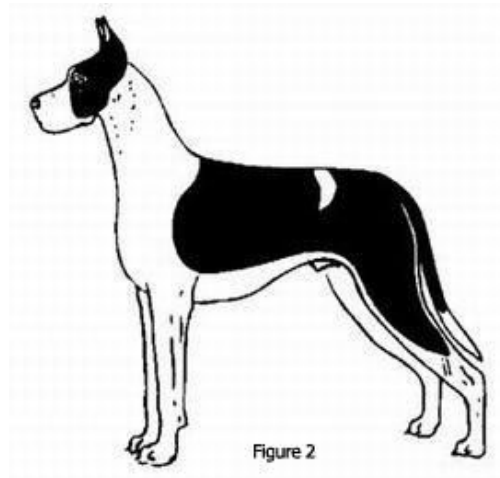
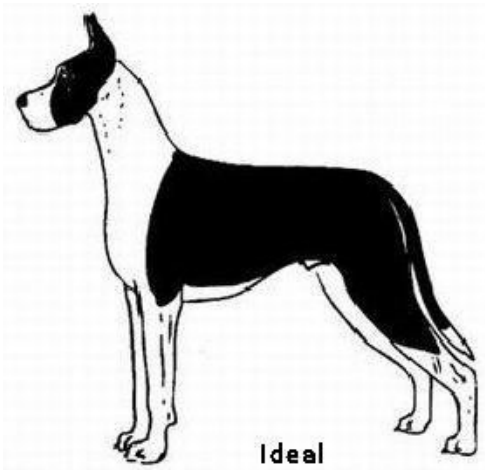


Figure 5

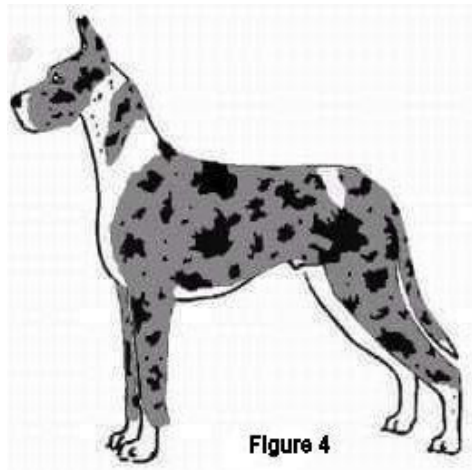
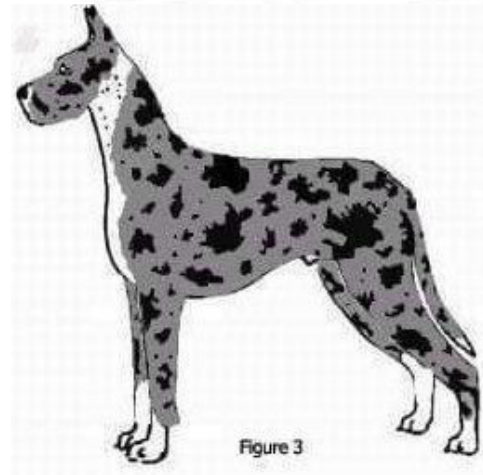
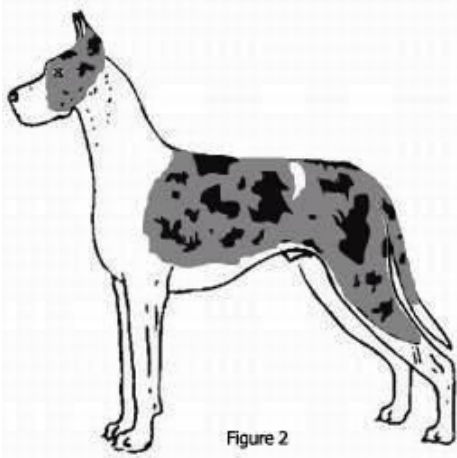
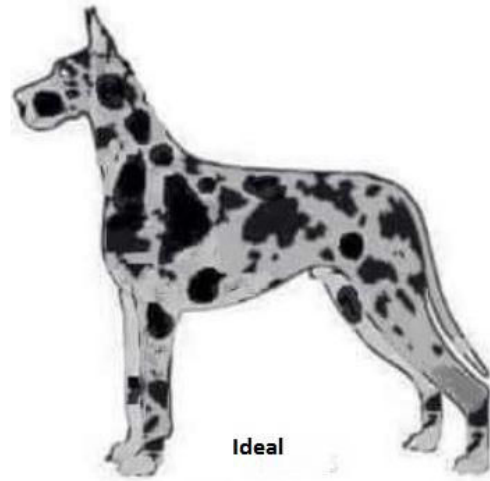
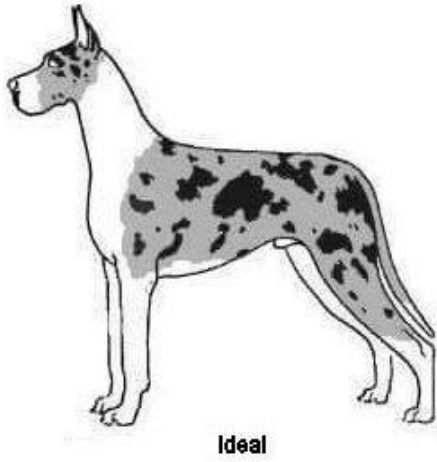
Figures 2-5 are in the acceptable range of variation as defined in the Standard for the Harlequin.

## MANTLE



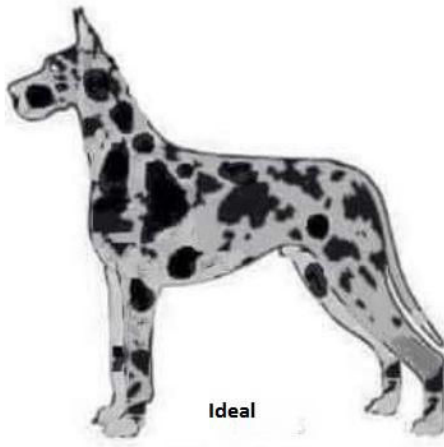
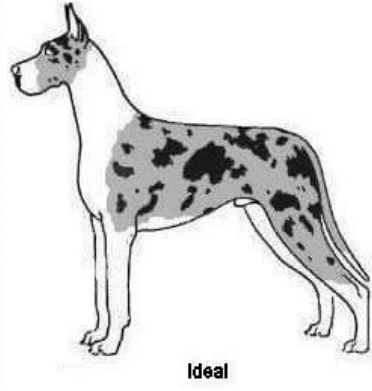
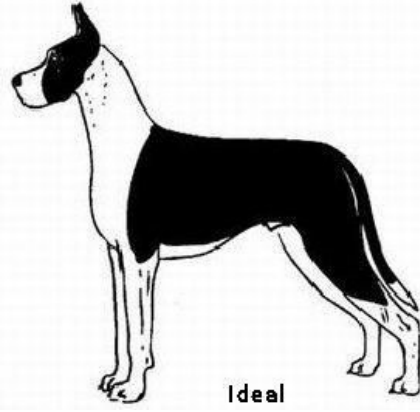
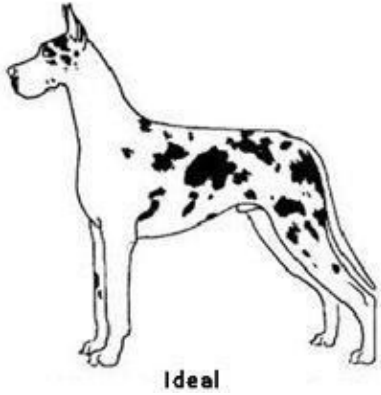
Figures 2-5 are in the acceptable range of variation as defined in the Standard for the Mantle.

## MERLE



Figures 2-4 are in the acceptable range of variation as defined in the Standard for the Merle.





## **Gait, Temperament, Disqualifications, Scale of Points**

### **AKC Standard**

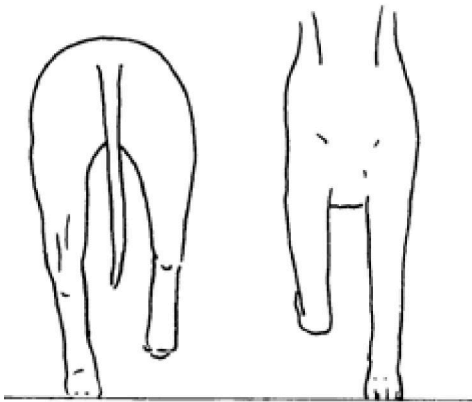
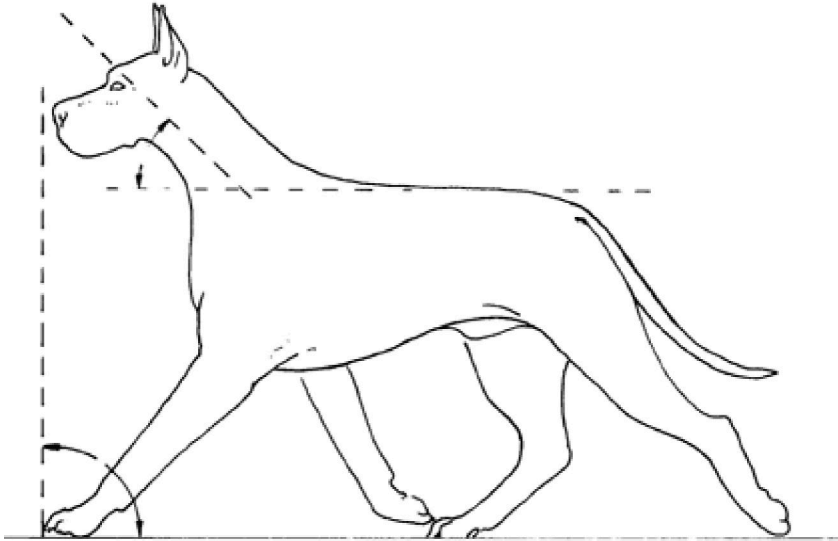
**Gait** - The gait denotes strength and power with long, easy strides resulting in no tossing, rolling or bouncing of the topline or body. The backline shall appear level and parallel to the ground. The long reach should strike the ground below the nose while the head is carried forward. The powerful rear drive should be balanced to the reach. As speed increases, there is a natural tendency for the legs to converge toward the centerline of balance beneath the body. There should be no twisting in or out at the elbow or hock joints.

### **Discussion**

The truth and consequences of structure becomes apparent when the Dane is gaited. Balanced structure and musculature will produce a smooth, effortless gait, indicative of strength, stamina and endurance. He should be allowed to move in a natural manner and “strung up”, no dog can move properly with his head pulled up and back. The hock should fully extend at the end of each thrust of the rear leg and not show restriction (“sickle hocks”).

The front and rear assemblies must be equal in angulation and muscle development so that the effort expended is balanced. Shoulders laid back at an angle with good length of upper arm that permits a long stride are just as important as strong rear quarters that provide the driving power. When viewed from the front, the dog’s legs should appear to move forward in a free and easy manner with no tendency for the feet to cross over or interfere with each other. Viewed from the rear, the hocks should drive well under the body following on a line with the forelegs, neither too widely nor too closely spaced; and a straight line is maintained at all speeds of the trot, from hip to pad.

The importance of correct gait is acknowledged and highly desired as an indication of proper structure. The judge should remember that it is not our task to pick out the best mover, but the best overall Great Dane.



### **AKC Standard**

*Temperament* - The Great Dane must be spirited, courageous, always friendly and dependable, and never timid or aggressive.

### **Discussion**

Intelligence, loyalty and dependability are true breed characteristics. Timidity and aggressiveness are alien traits and should be severely penalized.

### **AKC Standard**

#### **Disqualifications**

- Danes under minimum height
- Split nose
- Docked Tail
- Any color other than the seven colors described
- Merlequin

## Discussion

In addition, of course, all general disqualifications contained in the current edition of “Rules Applying to Registration and Dog Shows” (American Kennel Club) apply.

## Scale of Points

Inclusion of the point schedule is intended to indicate those characteristics of the Great Dane deemed most important in judging the breed; however, the dog should be judged as a unit

### **General Conformation** - 30 points

*General Appearance* - 10 points

*Color Markings* - 8 points

*Size* - 5 points

*Substance* - 3 points

*Condition of Coat* - 4 points

### **Movement** - 28 points

*Gait* - 10 points

*Rear end (croup, legs & paws)* - 10 points

*Front end (shoulders, legs and paws)* - 8 points

### **Head** - 20 points

*Head conformation* - 12 points

*Teeth* - 4 points

*Eyes* - 4 points

*Nose* - 0 points

### **Torso** - 20 points

*Neck* - 6 points

*Loin and Back* - 6 points

*Chest* - 4 points

*Ribs and Brisket* - 4 points

*Tail* - 2 points