

Chapter 3

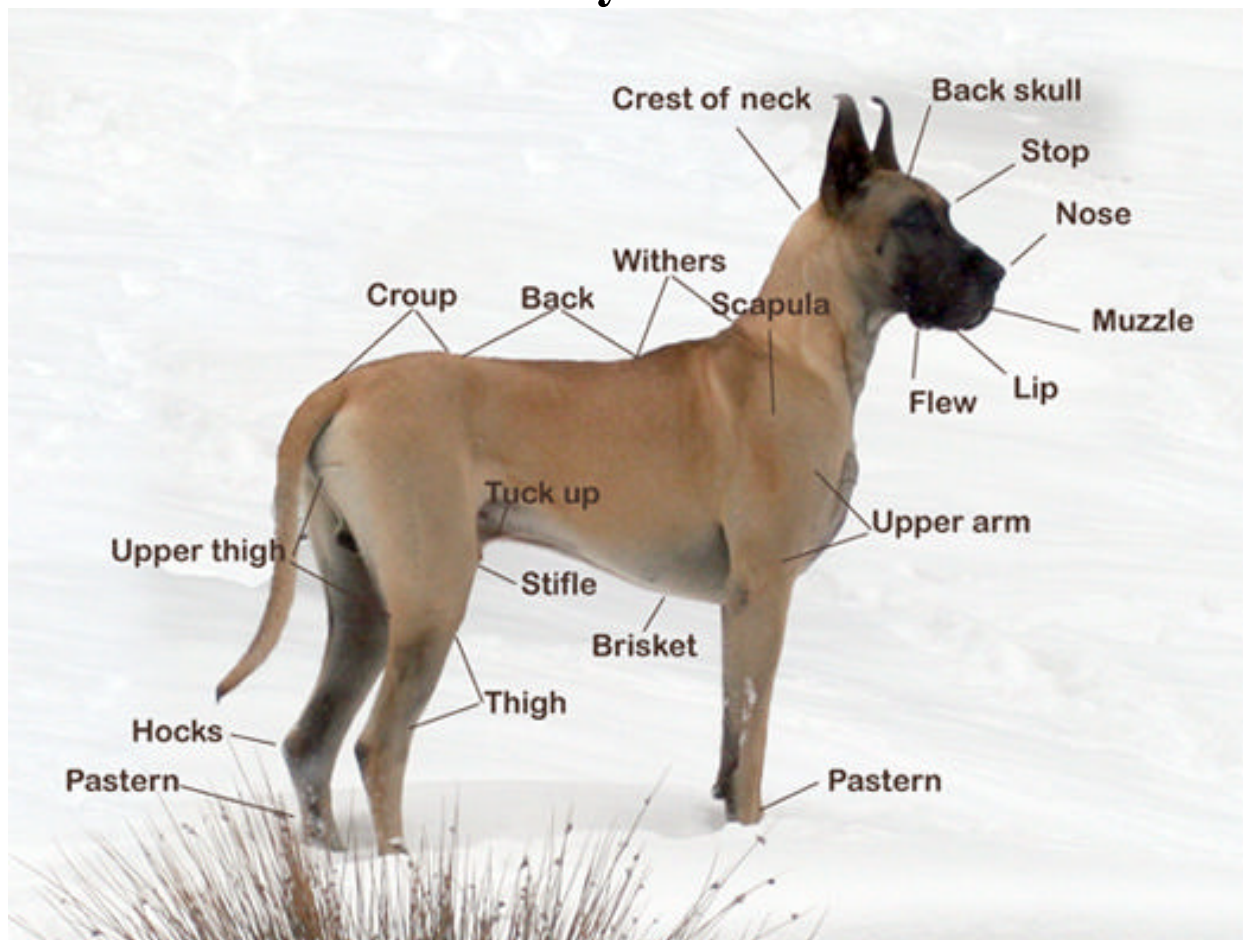
OFFICIAL STANDARD FOR THE GREAT DANE

A breed standard is like a blue print. It is what the Parent Club requires for a perfect Great Dane. Because there is no perfection in nature, breeders can only strive toward this goal. Occasionally we've come close. The American Kennel Club *does not* have any say over our standard other than the format. Only the various breed club affiliates have the authority to change a standard. Standards *are* changed from time to time, but only with the full authority of the breed club in question.

If you want to breed Great Danes it is *imperative* for both the novice and the long-time breeder to fully understand and have a picture in their minds of the perfect Great Dane. You must study the Standard over and over. It is the *only* acceptable ideal of the breed toward which to strive, no matter what your own opinion of it may be.

A novice cannot expect to fully understand the breed standard right away, even if he has memorized it. Understanding what this 'blue print' for a Great Dane truly means, takes many years of dedication and study. If you're new to the breed and just starting out with your first show puppy, ask the breeder from whom you purchased your pup to help you understand the language. It is important that you know the parts of the dog as shown below.

Body Parts



Official Standard for the Great Dane

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 a serious fault.

The above describes the overall appearance and desired temperament of the Great Dane. It should go without saying that this is going to be a VERY LARGE dog indeed. One should keep this in mind before choosing this breed.

It is further stated that, "A Great Dane must be spirited, courageous, never timid; always friendly and dependable." This is very important in a breed of this size, that once was extremely aggressive. It's even more important to keep this in mind when you pick a puppy. You do not want the puppy that shies away from you or slinks off into a corner and tries to hide. Nor do you want the puppy that throws himself against your chest and tries to bite your chin! A Great Dane should greet strangers in a friendly manner with a wagging tail. An adult Great Dane should bark (or not) when it hears the doorbell and then happily allow the visitor to enter the house once his owner has said it's OK.

When evaluating a show dog, you look for a dog that is confident, friendly and outgoing. One that will stand quietly and allow himself to be examined, while still maintaining that 'regal' attitude. One that exhibits interest in all around him, while being willing to take direction from his handler.

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.

The above basically means that a Great Dane should resemble neither a Mastiff nor a Greyhound. Males should appear distinctly more masculine and be taller than bitches. Substance means sufficiency of bone, frame size and muscle as to give the impression of great size without being clunky.

While it is possible to have a lovely male specimen that only stands 30" at the shoulder, it's very unlikely that this dog will ever finish his championship. Males that will become show dogs should be a *minimum* of 32" tall and preferably 34 or over. The same goes for a bitch, although it is easier for a smaller bitch to finish her championship than a smaller male.

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.

One should be able to positively identify a breed by its head. The head is very important in the Great Dane as it gives this breed its distinguished appearance and regal attitude. You should be able to ascertain the sex of the dog from seeing its head. It has been said that the head should appear to be 2 bricks of equal length laid one atop the other. A short muzzle or round, wide skull tends to make a Great Dane resemble a Mastiff. Conversely, a long, narrow nose bridge, with no indent (stop) when viewed from the side, and a narrow back skull, are reminiscent of a Greyhound.

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 eyes are serious faults. In harlequins, the eyes should be dark; light colored eyes, eyes of different colors and walleyes are permitted but not desirable.

Whereas eye color has no impact on the health of the eye, a darker eye is most pleasing. Haws, however, can make an eye more prone to eye infections and is, of course, quite unsightly. A haw is when the lower lid droops and the red interior of the lower eyelid is apparent. A Mongolian eye is one which has an exaggerated slant. It should be noted here that the blue coat color, being a dilutant gene, will rarely have a dark brown eye. The dilute attribute of this gene effects all color on the dog. The eyes on blues may range from very pale champagne to a medium light brown color.

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.

Many people think that it is necessary to crop the ears of a Great Dane in order for it to be shown. This is not now, nor has it ever been, true in this country. However, because most American bred Great Danes *are* cropped, breeders have not actively selected for the smaller, high set ear. If left uncropped, many Dane ears tend to hang like a hounds ear; that is, low set and very large and droopy. This is not an attractive look.

A 'high-set' ear is an ear whose bases are set fairly close together on top of the dogs head.

Cropping ears will prevent the dog from developing a hematoma (blood blister in the ear) and makes the ear less prone to ear infection. Cropping also gives a much more regal appearance and is preferred by most exhibitors. However, each year we see more uncropped dogs entering the show ring. (More on the pros and cons of cropping later).

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

A 'split nose' is a nose with a cleft from the top to the bottom. I've never seen one!

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

Unless grossly malformed, an undershot (lower incisors protrude beyond the uppers) or overshot (upper incisors protrude beyond the lower) mouth should have no effect on the health or well being of a Great Dane pet. Dogs do not really chew their food, but tend to swallow it as is. You should not purchase a puppy with a misaligned mouth for a show dog as it would tend to count against it in the ring. Even more important, you should not breed a dog with a badly formed mouth.

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 forechest 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.

Basically this is calling for a long neck that does not have excess skin hanging under it; a back length that is neither as long as a dachshund nor so short that the feet get tangled up when the dog tries to move. The back should not resemble a camel nor be swayed like the old gray mare. It should be level with a slight downward slope of the croup. (The croup falls between where the downward slope over the hips begins and the tail root). When viewed from the side, one wants to see the brisket (chest) be level with the elbows, and gently slope upward towards the hind legs and form a trim 'waist'. If there is no 'waist' (tuck up) either the dog is not correct for this trait, or it's too fat. Neither do you want a 'wasp waist' where the tuck up appears extreme. When viewed from the front, the

chest should not be extremely narrow, nor should there be large bulging muscles on the shoulders like a Bulldog. This is known as 'loaded' shoulders

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. Dewclaws may or may not be removed.

When viewed from the side the shoulder should form a 90 degree angle. There are 3 distinct portions of the foreleg; the shoulder blade begins at the base of the neck on the back and slants forward where it articulates (touches) with the upper arm. The upper arm then angles back toward the rear of the dog forming the elbow joint where it articulates with the lower foreleg. The foreleg is what drops straight to the ground. The angles formed by the scapula and the humerus (upper arm) are what form the angle of the forequarters. (This is quite simplified but will suffice for our use here). The degree of the angles here determines how far forward (reach) the dog can move it's foreleg. The straighter the angle, the more stress is put on the joints of the foreleg as it takes the weight of the dog while moving. Straighter joints may be more prone to lameness. Straighter joints also mean it takes more effort to cover the ground.

When viewed from the front, the feet should turn neither in nor out, but point straight ahead. The feet should appear 'cat like' and rounded rather than oval in shape

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 toward the outside. 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. Wolf claws are a serious fault.

As in the forequarters, the hindquarter angles should also form a 90 degree angle that is composed of the pelvis and the femur (upper thigh). The lower point of the thigh (which some might refer to as the rear 'knee') is the stifle joint. It is the rear legs that provide what is called the 'drive' in the gait. Like the forequarters, the greater the angle, the greater the drive and the more effortlessly the dog can move. Although it is important that a dog have the correct angulation, it is also important that the dog be balanced. This means that if the dog has less angulation in front, it's better that the rear angulation match so that the dog will move in a smooth, uniform manner.

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

Color, Markings and Patterns - Brindle - The base color shall be yellow gold and always brindled with strong black cross stripes in a chevron pattern. A black mask is preferred. 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 even the brindling, 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 - The color shall be yellow gold with a black mask. Black should appear on the eye rims and eyebrows, and may appear on the ears and tail tip. The 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 - The color shall be a pure steel blue. White markings at the chest and toes are not desirable.

Black - The color shall be a glossy black. White markings at the chest and toes are not desirable.

Harlequin - Base color shall be pure white with black torn patches irregularly and well distributed over the entire body; a pure white neck is preferred. The black patches should never be large enough to give the appearance of a blanket, nor so small as to give a stippled or dappled effect. Eligible, but less desirable, are a few small gray patches, or a white base with single black hairs showing through, which tend to give a salt and pepper or dirty effect. Any variance in color or markings U described above shall be faulted to the extent of the deviation. Any Great Dane which does not fall within the above color classifications must be disqualified.

For the family pet, color is basically unimportant. Just because a certain color cannot compete in the show ring, does not mean that the dog wearing it cannot become a cherished family member. The only color which may carry some problems is the white dane. It is not uncommon for white (albino) dogs to be deaf and perhaps even blind. This can offer a whole set of major training problems and unless you are prepared to deal with this, you should avoid all white Danes.

According to Dr. Lowell Ackerman in his book entitled Dr. Lowell Ackerman's Book of Great Danes, one should not even *breed* the blues because of their extensive skin problems. Although I'm not a breeder of this color, I know many people who are and they all have said that although blues may be a bit more prone to certain skin problems, they certainly are not as severely affected as Dr. Ackerman would have one believe.

Mantle - The color shall be black and white with a solid black blanket extending over the body; black skull with white muzzle; white blaze is optional; whole white collar preferred; a white chest; white on part or whole of forelegs and hind legs; white tipped black tail. A small white marking in the black blanket is acceptable, as is a break in the white collar.

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.

Just because a Great Dane is huge, it does not necessarily follow that he should be clumsy. If you have a Dane that tends to fall down a lot or lose its balance, it's possible that there is a health problem. You should not hesitate to see a vet. An adult, romping Dane should appear sound and graceful. Even a young puppy should not appear too clumsy.

Movement is the sum total of the conformation of the dog. Although Great Danes are not considered to be the best movers in dogdom, they should exhibit a certain amount of grace and style when moving in the showring. I've seen a lot of poor movers win, but you have a great advantage if your dog can move well.

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

Temperament is *especially* important in a breed the size of a Great Dane. A bite from this big guy can do tremendous damage, especially to a child! Although the breed, overall, deserves its nickname of 'Gentle Giant' there are some that do not. This is why you must buy from a reputable breeder who is willing to guarantee the temperament on the puppy.

This trait is equally important for dogs that will be shown and bred. *TEMPERAMENT IS INHERITED!!* Yes, temperament problems *can* stem from improper socialization and mistreatment. However, it's in the genes and one should never breed or show a Dane that is shy or aggressive.

DISQUALIFICATIONS

Danes under minimum height

Split nose.

Docked Tail.

Any color other than those described under "Color, Markings and Patterns."

When evaluating dogs for potential show/breeding animals, the disqualifications must be considered. Perhaps the only exception might be color patterns, such as some unshowable colors which are part of the harlequin gene pool.

In addition to the breed-specific disqualifications, remember that dogs may be disqualified from showing in AKC conformation events if they are altered, have only one or no descended testicle, are vicious or have been cosmetically altered in some manner.

None of the disqualifications (with perhaps the exception of poor temperament) disqualify any Great Dane from becoming a beloved member of the family!

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