

Beyond the standard – an in depth look

Origins:

The Cane Corso is an unparalleled working dog, versatile and adaptable. The breed has a rich history that mirrors that of the Italian peoples. His forefathers were present in the arena and circus; He was an auxiliary to the Roman legions and aided the feudal lords during the hunt. He was an indispensable tool in agri-pastoral activities such as incapacitation of a bull destined for castration; he guarded the flocks as a soldier in the war with the Italian wolf and was an invaluable aid in hunting large game such as stag, boar or bear. He was the escort of the Italian cowboys as they drove the buffalo during the murge. He was fearless in the face of the ferocious badger, tireless and faithful as a vineyard guardian and even served dutifully as a beast of burden when the farmer needed a cart pulled. The Corso truly was “all things to all people” in rural areas of southern Italy.

General Appearance;

When looking at the Cane Corso your first impression is that he is an athlete, reminiscent of a Greco-Roman wrestler. He is a Molosser that is balanced with substantial bone and great muscularity, yet agile for his size. He should be alert, fearless and confident. The Cane Corso is a dog of function, he was developed to perform multiple tasks from combat to flock guardian, and the Cane Corso should appear still capable of these tasks. The ideal Cane Corso should be free of defilement from other breeds. You should know instantly when looking at the dog that this is a Cane Corso and nothing else. The Cane Corso should not resemble the modern Neapolitan Mastiff, but he can have minimal wrinkle in the facial region. The Cane Corso can have a minimal dewlap but it should not be excessive. When he is moving you should not see the rippling of loose skin vibrating through his body, what you should see are taut sinewy muscles being flexed with each movement. The Cane Corso is considered a medium to large sized dog. The larger size is preferred. While there is no weight limit on the standard if the dogs size inhibits his movement, stamina, or ability to perform the tasks for which he was bred then he is oversized. It is important to remember that until about 20 or so years ago this dog was used solely as a working dog. If a Cane Corso was not up to the tasks on the masseria (farm), then he did not eat. Undersize or fine boned dogs should be faulted, it is important to remember that this is a mastiff type breed. The smaller dog may move better, but that does not necessarily make it the best Cane Corso. This dog's history as a war dog; hunter of bear, boar and stag required that he be a dog of great substance and power. These dogs are depicted in paintings and sculptures attaching themselves to horses and pigs.

The head should be prominent, and should immediately draw your attention. It is powerful and large in relation to the rest of the body. The muzzle is always short, square, deep and wide. The axis of the skull is slightly convergent with a deep, pronounced stop. There is a noticeable lift of the head coming off the stop to the ear set. The eyes should be almond shaped, set in a sub frontal position, setting 10 -15% above the bridge of the muzzle. If the eye set is too low, the correct expression of alert and intelligent is lost. Instead the dog appears unintelligent and sleepy. The teeth should align in a relatively straight line (not rounded like the Rottweiler's) this is to

accommodate the rather wide muzzle of the Cane Corso. The following excerpt should provide you with a good impression of the Cane Corso. This is taken from the Swiss naturalist Konrad von Gesner (1516-1565) in his "Historia Animalium", from the section "De Quadrupedibus", this chapter about the De Cane Venatico Robustus, Adversus Magnus aut fortes Feris describes a the Cane Corso and his ancient utilizations. *"There are many ferocious canines, fearless in the chase and grip of every type of animal. One must choose those endowed with an impressive muzzle, large head, with the upper lip hanging atop the lower, with reddened eyes, with dilated nostrils that seem to throw fire, with sharp teeth, with a powerful neck and a large chest. They should pursue like lions, with large paws and nails spread, the claws are hard and curved in a way to better violently throw and hold his prey to the ground. With this type of dog, the hunters can better reach and capture the wild game. In Italy and especially Rome, it is said that one is best served by using Cane Corsos against wild boar and wild bulls." "The molosser is of great size and a great biter, like the Cane Corso. I think that one considers him to be a great biter not because he bites without reason, but because he has an energetic grip and has difficulty releasing the bite he inflicts on a wild beast..."*

Cane Corso's that have long and or narrow muzzles, round eyes, parallel axis of the skull, light bone or "leggy" construction are to be faulted as these traits are undesirable and are more reminiscent of a herding dog than a Molosser.

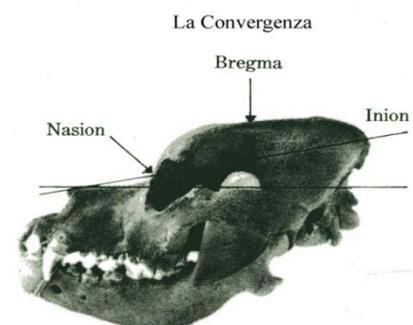
When evaluating the Cane Corso, character must also come into the equation. Timid or scared character should be severely faulted. A fear biter should not be considered for the selection of this breed. A Cane Corso that shows belligerence towards other dog's should not be considered a fault (as long as he poses no threat to others) This breeds history predicates a somewhat belligerent attitude towards other dogs, particularly dogs of the same sex. He should never be overly agitated or fidgety like the Boxer; he is always reserved and confident. The Cane Corso is extremely loyal and bonded to his owner(s). He prefers them to all others. His character is not to be overly friendly with strangers but he tends to be a stoic observer. Reserved indifference should not be confused with fear. The Cane Corso should be territorial, he should be in tune and aware of his surroundings and show a keen interest in them. The Cane Corso should never be fearful, and always ready to meet a challenge. He should be a perfect blend of Combativeness, aggressiveness, docility, sociability, and curiosity. The firmness of his nerves represents the true mental strength of the breed.

Technical Characteristics

Head

Molossoid, large, its total length reaches 1/3 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.

The Cane Corso is brachicephalic breed; his head should be the first thing you are drawn to. Based on the proportions indicated in the standard the head is disproportionately large in relation to the rest of the body. The angles of the skull are



slightly convergent and measured from the occiput to the nose. The bridge of the muzzle is horizontal. You should be able to draw a slightly declined line from the occiput that would meet at the tip of the nose. To draw a comparison using other breeds that would be considered to have convergent axis of the skull would be the Bull Mastiff, Boxer and ST. Bernard. Not listed as a fault in the standard would be parallel axis of the skull. However, this is to be considered a severe fault. Parallelism occurs when the line from the occiput and the line of the muzzle do not converge (meet) basically they are in parallel lines to each other. Comparatively speaking breeds that would be considered to have parallel axis of the skull would be Great Danes, Neapolitan Mastiffs and German Shepherds. To speak in general terms, dogs that exhibit parallel axis of the skull tend to have longer narrower muzzles, have a lack of stop and typically accompanied with a scissors bite and a small nose. Divergent nasal axis of the skull should not be tolerated. Divergence occurs the head is viewed in a level position and the muzzle slopes downward. Examples of divergent breeds would be the Borzoi and the Bull Terrier. On the opposite spectrum, excessively convergent axis of the skull, which is generally accompanied by disturbingly undershot bite, should be viewed as just as serious a fault. The Cane Corso's bite should not exceed more than ¼ inch undershot.

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.

The skull, like the muzzle, is as wide as it is long. This characteristic is a fundamental element in the type of the Cane Corso. When viewed from the top the skull should appear as two squares- the head and the muzzle, both broad and wide. The back skull makes a horizontal line from ear to ear. Everything about the head/skull should be powerful; this should be present even in bitches. And excessively flat skull is to be faulted as it is generally associated with parallelism, just as an excessively round skull is associated with hyper type subjects. *Hyper type would be a dog with round bulging eyes, exaggerated shortness of muzzle, excessive convergence and recessive, tipped up nose.

Stop: *Well defined due to developed and bulging frontal sinuses and prominent arch above the eyes.*

The Cane Corso has a marked stop; the angle of the stop should be at approximately 105 degrees when viewed from the side. When viewed from the front, there is a deep frontal hollow or cavity that starts at the base of the muzzle and extends up between the eyes. This is caused by the forehead sinuses being quite developed. The Dogs that do not have a marked stop or do not exhibit the deep frontal hollow are to be severely faulted, they tend to accompany parallel axis of the skull.

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

The eyes should be in a sub frontal position at approximately a 15 degree angle in males and approximately a 10 degree angle in females. Round bulging eyes are to be severely faulted as bulging eyes are a liability in a breed that has a history as a hunter and combat dog.

***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.*

The Rottweiler-ization of the Cane Corso should be avoided and judges should not try and impose Rottweiler sensibilities on this breed. One such characteristic would be the obsession with eye color. The Cane Corso does not come equipped with an eye color chart, nor should it. A rule of thumb in this breed is that the eye should be self coloring; the eye color match's the coat color. A black or dark coated dog would have a darker eye. One of the more interesting color patterns that occurs in the Cane Corso would be blue fawn (light fawn or red with grey pigment), in Italy this color pattern is referred to as Formentino (slang for the color of fermented wheat) The color of the eye is light, it would almost appear clear. Gray/Blue- This color comes in different shades that range from plumb, slate to light gray. They also have self coloring eyes, in some cases the eye is as dark as brown, but most often are amber. Just as common if not more so would be blue brindle. Again the eyes are self coloring, as with all brindle dogs the eye will match the color of the brindle. Brindle dogs such as chestnut or blue, the eyes match the brindle, which is the lightest color of the coat.

***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.*

The ear should be placed high on the zygomatic arch. When cropped the ears are done in a triangle as wide as it is tall. When ears are not cropped, if their base is too large the auricles will tend to form a "butterfly", while if the base is too narrow they will hang limp like a hound, depriving the upper part of the head of its desired angular and marked shape. In both cases the head loses nobility and type.

While uncropped ears are acceptable, cropped ears are preferred; for historical preservation of the breed appearance, health reasons and for the much aesthetically pleasing look of the head piece, as reflect by a proper ear crop. The CCAA does not endorse ear cropping under non-humane and non-sterile conditions.

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.*

The nose of the Cane Corso is voluminous with wide nostrils.. It is level with the muzzle, if placed on an incline to the muzzle (tips back) this is a sign of bi-convergence which is synonymous with hyper type. A small nose is an indication of a snipey narrow muzzle. The nose should not slope downward, nor should it extend past the vertical line of the muzzle.

Muzzle: *Very broad and deep, width is almost equal to its length which reaches 1/3 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. Muzzle is not narrow or snipey.*

The muzzle is an extremely important element of type in the Cane Corso. It is 1/3 the total length of the head (which is 1/3 of the height to the withers) this indicates a brachyamorph. The muzzle should never be narrow or cone shaped, when viewed from the top it is wide and square with the side lines being parallel. The muzzle should be as wide as it is long. The front should be a trapezoid widest at the base. This is to accommodate the divergent canines called for in the correct bite. When viewed from the side the ideal would be a 90 degree angle from the bridge of the muzzle down the interior face. The level of undershot should not be excessive. The breed has a powerful under jaw so the muzzle should never recede, this would be indicative of a narrow snipey muzzle and scissor bite. A Roman nose is also associated with parallelism. Also a muzzle that has excessive bumps of gathered skin should be faulted. But a few wrinkles on the muzzle are tolerated as indicative that the breed is indeed a Molosser.

The muzzle is deeper than it is long. The depth is skeletal. Excessive pendulous lips are not desirable.

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.*

In some subjects the front of the muzzle is not large and flat, but has a tendency to merge and form a large curve with the lateral planes, as a result of insufficiently large jaw-bones. In this case, if the upper lips are sufficiently developed, they cannot find an adequate resting place, and fall in an upside-down "V" instead of the typical "U". There is no hard and fast rule stating the "U" as always accompanying the correct anterior face structure. As the very wide "U" can sometimes accompany the extreme Hypertype (pushed back, tipped up nose). A judge must always consider the whole of the characteristics of the muzzle's attributes.

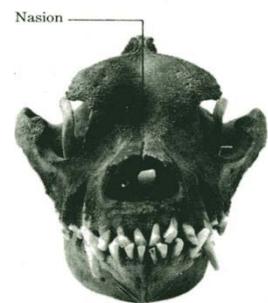
Lips which are insufficiently developed, taut, or receding should be penalized (they usually come with a cone-shaped muzzle). Overdeveloped lips often accompany a general laxity of the skin and modify the typical expression of the breed

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*

The bite is a subject of much discussion. A rule to follow would be to judge the muzzle and head-then worry about the bite. Not that it should be considered an afterthought but if the dog is correct in every aspect of type then the bite should have less weight in the selection. The standard states “*Slightly undershot (no more than 1/4 inch) and level preferred*” This somewhat misleading and one might surmise that level would be the preferred bite, when in fact, the lightly undershot is preferred, while the level and scissor bites are both considered acceptable. The key is if the muzzle and head are correct.

One must always consider the parameters of the muzzle and skull first, as having a correct bite does NOT guarantee the head is correct, which is most important. **Judge the head more so than the bite.** While not preferred because it often accompanies incorrect muzzle structure, the scissors bite is a reality in this breed both functionally and historically. It is a necessity to control the degree of undershot in breeding programs. A dog with a correct muzzle and a scissors bite is not common, but a judge should be aware that it does occur. This combination is perfectly acceptable.

The degree of undershot should be no more than 1/4 inch of space, that means that up to 1/4 inch is completely acceptable and preferred as it most often gives the desired effect of a deep square muzzle with a flat anterior face. While the standard does not state this, a overshoot should be considered a severe fault. The canines of a Cane Corso are divergent,(they are set on angles that oppose each other) accompanied with incisors in a relatively straight line thus creating an immovable serrated bite. The standard does not point out the divergent canines but that is the typical bite of this breed. The incisors are in a **relatively** straight line and not rounded like the Rottweiler. Generally speaking when teeth are congenitally missing in this breed they are the P1 premolar, this is a byproduct of the shortening of the jaw/muzzle. The teeth of the Cane Corso are strong, white and of size. Small or insignificant teeth are not desirable.



Neck: *Slightly arched, flowing smoothly into the shoulders with a small amount of dewlap. The length of the neck is 1/3 the height at the withers.*

The length of the neck is fundamental because of its function in the movement of the dog. In general, a long neck is a characteristic of gallopers, while a trotter doesn't need one quite so long.

The Cane Corso has a relatively long neck, even though it is shorter than that of a pure galloper, and his characteristic gait is, in fact, a lengthened trot. A neck which is not well merged with the withers, shoulder and chest should be penalized, since it almost always leads to low withers and a straight shoulder. The neck is somewhat narrower than the head in this breed; it does not equal or exceed the width of the head when viewed from the front. The angle/slant of the neck is 45 degrees.

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*

The ribs are long and well sprung to accommodate the Cane Corso's high breathing capacity. This breed has a moderate tuck up; too much tuck up would be indicative of a slight boned dog, too little would indicate a dog absent agility or athleticism.

Chest: *Broad, well muscled, strong forefront.*

The chest of this breed is wide and forechest is muscled and prominent. Its width, in close relation with the width of the thorax, reaches 35% of the height to the withers; the breast-bone is at the same height as the tip of the shoulders. Seen from the side, the chest is outstretched forward between the fore legs and slightly curved. The front legs of the breed are to have heavy bone. While not mentioned in the standard the thorax is extremely important in this breed and should be well developed and prominent.

Back: *Wide, strong, muscular. Highest part of shoulder blade slightly rising above the strong, level back.*

The back's function is to maintain the rest of the body, and to transmit the rear impulse to the front. The Cane Corso has a rectangular profile. The back should connect harmoniously to the withers. The Back line should be horizontal with the tail being an immediate extension. At a trot, the backline remains level and rigid. Roachie or rounded topline is very undesirable.

Loin: *Well-muscled, and harmoniously joined to the back.*

The lumbar region has to be short, wide, well joined to the back and to the rump, very muscular, very solid and, seen from the side, slightly convex. Its length, slightly longer than its width, is equal to 20% of the height at the withers. A short, broad, and solid loin is an important functional quality in the dog.

The loin must be short because a short bridge is stronger than a long one. A long, weak loin will bounce as the dog moves instead of remaining firm. The loin must be broad because, if the transversal vertebral apophyses are well-developed in length, the muscular masses around them will be equally developed.

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

The croup is of fundamental importance in animal mechanics, because it is the corner-stone of the transmission of the posterior impulse (hocks) to the anterior, and its inclination is directly

correlated to the length of the posterior muscles and hence to their angulation. The ideal croup for the Corso is almost horizontal with a well open pelvis tilt allowing for ample back reach in the lengthened trot. A steep croup (over 35°) is a serious fault since it means an insufficiently angulated posterior and severely limits the reach.

The croup should be long, because it acts as the fulcrum of transmission; the efficiency of action is in relation to its length. The width of the croup is in relation to the construction, and consequently to the development of the muscular mass. The croup of the Cane Corso must be broad because he must develop more power than speed.

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.

When in motion, the tail should be carried in the 2-3 o'clock position. **The tail should never be carried straight up like a candlestick; this is considered a serious fault.** A low-set tail should be penalized as it usually goes with a steep croup and restrictive pelvic tilt. Docked tails are preferred and should be cut between the 4 or 5th vertebra. However, the length of the tail dock can vary for several reasons, including natural space or the size of the vertebrae, or error when docking, but this should be considered a cosmetic issue.

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.

The width of the chest is equal to 35% of the height to the withers. It is wide, well muscled and powerful.

Viewed from the side; forechest is heavy boned and a vertical line from the point of the shoulder to the ground should divide into two equal parts the upper arm, the body, the pastern, and the paw; the length of the front limb to the elbow should be one-half the height at the withers. Narrow, weak chests are not desirable.

Shoulders: Muscular, laid back.

Angle of the shoulder is 50 degrees. It is Long, oblique, strong, equipped with long, powerful and well divided muscles, and is adherent to the brisket but free in the movements. Its length,

from the top of the withers to the ridge of the shoulder, is equal to 30% of the height at the withers. The shoulder must be not only long and correctly slanted, it must be mobile as well, and for this reason we penalize those that are heavy, frail, badly moving, or too relaxed

Upper arms: *Strongly muscled, with good bone, powerful.*

It is slightly longer than the shoulder, strong, with very well grown bones and muscles, well joined to the trunk in its top 2/3, measured from the ridge of the shoulder to the tip of the elbow, it has a length equal to 1/3 of the height at the withers and an inclination with the horizontal line of approx 58/60%. Its longitudinal direction is parallel to the median plane of the body.

. We do not want short, thin, or weak upper arms.

Elbows: *Held parallel to the ribcage, turning neither in nor out.*

The elbows, long and protruding, adherent but not too close to the ribcage, covered with lean skin, must be strictly parallel with the bottom plane of the trunk. The tip of the elbow is located on the vertical line lowered from the caudal (or back) angle of the shoulder-blade to the ground.

Forelegs: *straight and with good bone well muscled.*

It is perfectly vertical, oval section, with several muscles, in particular in the top-third, with a very strong and compact bone structure. Its length, from the tip of the elbow to the one of the arm is equal to 1/3 of the height at the withers. The carpus-cubital groove is quite marked.

Pasterns: *Almost straight, strong but flexible.*

It is smaller than the forearm and is very strong, lean, elastic, slightly flexed. Its length must not be over one sixth of the height of the forelimb at the elbow. Seen from the front, it follows the perpendicular line of the forearm and of the carpus. A pastern should never weak.

Feet: *Round and tight with well arched, toes .Lean hard dark pads and nails except in the case of white toes.*

They have a round shape, with gathered toes (cat's foot). Lean and hard soles. The nails are strong and curved. Pigmentation of nails and digital pads reflect coat color . Toes which are separated or splayed and not well-arched are a sign of hereditary lymphatism and is a serious fault. Flat or splayed feet tire the animal so that he cannot move for long distances.

Hindquarters: *As a whole, they are powerful and strong, in harmony with the forequarters.*

A vertical line from the point of the buttocks must touch the point of the toes. The rear pastern is always perpendicular to the ground.

Thighs: *Long, wide, angulated and well muscled.*

It is long and wide, with prominent muscles, therefore the nate ridge is well marked. Its length is over 1/3 of the height at the withers. It is well developed and heavily muscled. It is undesirable for it to be a narrow, flat, "chicken thigh" which indicates reduced development or even atrophy of the muscles. Also undesirable is a thigh with a rear rectilinear or caved-in profile, since it is usually due to a lack of development in the point of the buttocks. In synthesis, it is very important that the entire croup-pelvis-buttock-thigh complex be powerful and well-developed.

Stifle: *Should be moderately angulated, strong.*

The angle of the stifle joint is of approx. 120 degrees. Its direction is parallel to the median plane of the body. Angulation is moderate. A perpendicular line goes from point of buttock to the toes. Over angulation forces the leg too far back, in order to have the hocks in the correct 90 degree angle with the ground; this is a severe fault. Straight in the stifle is a very common fault in the Corso and should also be penalized. "Straight as Table legs" are common but not desirable. A judge should realize that the Corso has less angulation than some working breeds. Remember the rule of thumb is the straight line from point of buttocks to toes being the correct amount.

Legs: *Strong bone and muscle structure.*

Hocks: *Wide, thick and clean, let down and parallel when viewed from behind.*

It is wide, thick, clean, with well marked bone. The protruding hock ridge shows clearly the continuation of the leg groove. The distance from the ridge of the hock to the sole of the foot (to the ground) shouldn't be over 26% of the height at the withers. Its direction, in relation to the median plane of the body is parallel. In dogs which are "too straight behind" there can actually be a tendency to the inversion of the angle of the hock. Length is equal to approx 15% of the height at the withers (tarsus and foot excluded).

Rear pastern: *straight and parallel.*

Always at a 90 degree angle to the ground.

Rear dewclaws: *Any rear dewclaws are removed.*

Front dewclaws are allowed to remain but not required.

Hind feet: *Slightly more oval shaped and less arched toes than the front feet.*

Should be tight and not splayed, toes should be together.

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

The Cane Corso should not have a coat like the boxer. His coat can be somewhat longer, and in colder climates significantly heavier to protect him from the elements. The breed can present a light fringe on the thigh from beneath the tail to above the hock joint. The old-timers used to describe this coat as “cow hair” meaning the guard hair is a little coarse. The coat is not plush nor would you say soft to the touch. In blue dogs the coat tends to be less dense. While armed with a sturdy under coat the Cane Corso suffers the cold and is not equipped to live out doors unsheltered. The coat is short with vitreous texture, shiny, adherent, stiff, and dense, with a light layer that becomes thicker in winter (but never crops up on the covering hair). Its average length is approx ½ in. On the withers, the rump, the back margin of the thighs and on the tail it reaches approx. ¾ in without creating fringes. On the muzzle the hair is very short, smooth, and adherent; not more than ¼ in. There can be a light fringe behind the thigh.

***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.*

No color is preferred over another and all have important historic value.

Black- Black as with the other base colors in this breed will often present a brindling. Solid black with no white or brindling is not common. White on a black dog (and other colors as well) should be confined to no more than described in the standard. There should be no white on the muzzle. A black dog should have a dark eye. A rule of thumb in this breed is that the eye should be self coloring; the eye color match's the coat color or brindling if present. Dark coat, darker eye. It is important to note that the Cane Corso should never have the black and tan (or blue and tan) color pattern associated with the Rottweiler. The display of these markings with brindle in lieu of solids is not preferred.

Red/Fawn- In actuality the dilute fawn is more common than red. Red/fawn Cane Corso's will have a black mask. The mask must never exceed the eyes, if so that is evidence of defilement from another breed. Sometimes in puppies this phenomenon is present, but fades over time. Younger reds and fawns will often have a blue or black saddle; this too will fade as the dog matures. The eye color once again matches the coat. One of the more interesting color patterns that the Cane Corso occurs in would be blue fawn, in Italy this color pattern is referred to as Formentino (slang for the color of fermented wheat) This is essentially a washed out or carbon colored fawn that will have a blue nose and mask. This is a unique color to the Corso and should be given full consideration. The Cane Corso should never have a red or violet colored nose. The color of the eye is light, it would almost appear clear.

Gray/Blue- This color comes in different shades that range from plumb, slate to light gray. They also have self coloring eyes, in some cases the eye is as dark as brown. As a dilute color, blue

dogs will have a blue nose and toe nails. Blue puppies will usually have a blue eye; however that eventually darkens with age. Just as common if not more so would be blue brindle. Again the eyes are self coloring, as with all brindle dogs the eye will match the color of the brindle. Interestingly, in the European standard there is no reference to a blue dog. The color is described only as gray.

Brindles- Brindle dogs generally have a mask that is the color of the darkest part of the brindle. In a brindle dog it is less common to see brindling to the tip of the muzzle, but it does present itself. The opposite is true of a blue or gray brindle dog where it is common to see the brindling reach the tip of the muzzle. The eye, again, is self coloring matching the brindle. This color pattern in Italy is sometimes affectionately referred to as “Tigrato” because of the spectrum of brindles can vary much like the big cat. It is said that no two tigers have the same pattern of striping.

***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.*

The Corso is profoundly devoted to his family and prefers their company above all others. He is NOT a social butterfly and should not be expected to happily greet a stranger. He is more of the stoic observer. He tolerates examination of a judge because he is obedient. He should be approached with confident indifference.

***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.*

***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.*

From the book “Il Cane Corso” by Antonio Morsiani and Stefano Gandolfi, Mursia editore

The Movement

The center of gravity

The mechanism of movement cannot be understood without considering the existence of the center of gravity. It is an imaginary point in which all gravitational forces meet, are equal, and grouped in a focus. In the body of a dog the center of gravity is that place at which, if the dog could be suspended, it would remain in balance. In the majority of dogs in a static position, the

center of gravity can be placed approximately at the center of the trunk, near the heart, at a point where a vertical line, passing at the caudal limit of the chest, intersects a horizontal line drawn halfway up the thorax. If we were to draw a rectangle with the angles at the four feet of the dog (base of support), it would be easy to see that the vertical line falling from the center of gravity to the ground (that is, the gravitational line) always falls, when the dog is not moving, within this rectangle. If the dog moves forward, so does the center of gravity, causing the gravitational line to move forward and outside this sustaining rectangle. The animal loses his balance, and in order to regain it and not fall, he has to move his front feet forward. The hind feet must naturally follow, and in this way movement begins. As a result of this we can see that the wider the sustaining base (feet transversally distant), the greater the static balance (e.g. bulldog). The lesser this base as compared to height (feet close and short body) the easier it is that the center of gravity falls ahead of its base (e.g. sighthounds): the instability of a subject is greater, and so is his speed. It should be added that when the center of gravity is close to the ground the stability is greater, when it is farther from the ground the stability lessens.

The Cane Corso is high on its legs, so the center of gravity is relatively far from the ground; since his sustaining base, however, is rather large and long, his instability and hence his speed are evident but moderate.

General conditions.

We have seen that a certain skeletal and muscular construction correspond to a certain kind of movement. For this reason, before we can express an opinion about the movement of a subject belonging to any breed, we need to know the typical build of that breed. It is wrong to think that the head is the only "characteristic of type" and ignore the rest. In fact, if it is true that a well-built dog with an untypical head is worth nothing, it is equally true that a badly built subject can only express a diminished version of the aptitudes for which he has been bred. The Cane Corso in particular is nothing but an embellished working dog which, if properly trained, can still carry on the hard labour at the side of man that tradition has handed down, and that the standard has taken into account, as well as his forefathers. Dog shows have done much to make this breed known to a larger public, but on the other hand they have led some breeders to transform these working dogs into pure "show dogs". For a correct selection, we should always keep in mind that, as much as the head, construction and movement are special in every breed and represent "breed type". The variety of the traditional tasks of the Cane Corso did not call for a specialized build, but an adaptable one with three fundamental requirements: power, resistance, and impulse.

Power comes from a strong and heavy bone, and consequently a highly developed muscular mass, as well as an ample base of support.

Resistance comes from a good development of the thoracic region, from the angles of the forequarters, the croup, the hindquarters, a slightly long and rectilinear trunk; these make the Cane Corso mainly a trotter, with an ample and fluid stride in which the strong drive of the hindquarters is perfectly absorbed thanks to the perfect angles of the forequarters, permitting the dog to trot for long periods with little force.

Impulse is given by a slight bend of the croup, which makes it possible for the dog to gather himself better on his hindquarters and, making use of an ample angle, produce a great force of rear impulse; he is helped in this by a broad croup and a well-developed muscular mass.

These characteristics make of the Cane Corso a mixture of trotter and galloper, but the trotting element is prevalent.

The trot.

The trot is the dynamic expression of the morphology of a breed, and thus is the gait which permits the most appropriate observation of movement. At a trot, every constructional fault is evident.

In the Cane Corso the lateral displacements of the center of gravity at a trot are generally barely noticeable, while the vertical ones, in relation to the suspended phase and the return to the ground, are more so. The *lengthened trot*: there is a relatively long period of suspension. This is the typical trot of the Cane Corso.

We can observe in the trot of the Cane Corso that the head and the neck are carried slightly ahead and lower. We have seen that the thrust of the hindquarters starts at the hocks and is commensurate with the tibio-metatarsic angle, which, as we have said, is 140° in the Corso. This permits a good drive which is well-absorbed by the lengthened motion of the forequarters. In the show ring a careful examination of the dorsal-lombar segment is very important, because the spinal column must be very solid, even monolithic, and with absolutely no rolling of the plexis.

Note that the spinal column becomes rigid at a trot, so that any sag is a severe fault.

The information in this article on Judging and evaluating the Cane Corso is for informational purposes only.

The sources of the information are as follows;

AKC Cane Corso standard

CCAA Judges Education committee

- Shauna DeMoss
- Mike Ertaskiran
- Derek Matson
- Betty Osing

CCAA Judges seminar

“Il Cane Corso” by Antonio Morsiani and Stefano Gandolfi

ENCI standard for the Cane Corso

Cane Corso standard 2003 (AICC)

Articles written by Michael Ertaskiran

Articles written by Shauna DeMoss

