

The Dogue de Bordeaux

- an overview



Bull baiting with Dogues de Bordeaux, in 'L'Espresso', March 24, 1912, No. 1422



His strength makes the Dogue de Bordeaux an excellent draught dog. Paris, 'Le Dogue de Bordeaux', 1922



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The Dogue de Bordeaux has served many purposes over the centuries – fighter, hunter, baiter, guard dog, draught dog and cattle herder but fighting and Bull or Bear baiting was that for which the breed was primarily developed.

In the standard pre-1970's the term redoubtable athlete was used and conjured up pictures of a wrestler or boxer which suits the Dogue de Bordeaux well. With regards to the press in Germany for instance and stories of 'tremendously dangerous' molossers the standard now describes them as no more than a dissuasive dog.

Proportions – the body to height ratio is always 11:10 but elements of breadth and depth are more important than length. The Dogue is thick set but not compressed like a bulldog. The statement 'the distance between brisket and ground is slightly less than the depth of the chest' is important but particularly the use of the word 'slightly' to put a stop to all tendency to exaggeration and from that of a lowered front.

'Harmonic' is how the Dogue de Bordeaux is when he doesn't lack balance.

When discussing the standard of the Dogue de Bordeaux and 'breed type' it must be noted that almost two thirds of the standard is dedicated to describing the head. And yet despite it being well described many people come away with the impression that the head of the Dogue de Bordeaux is simply large and wrinkled! In order to differentiate Dogue de Bordeaux breed type from that of the many other Molosser breeds seen in the Utility Group the head of the Dogue is so much more than that!

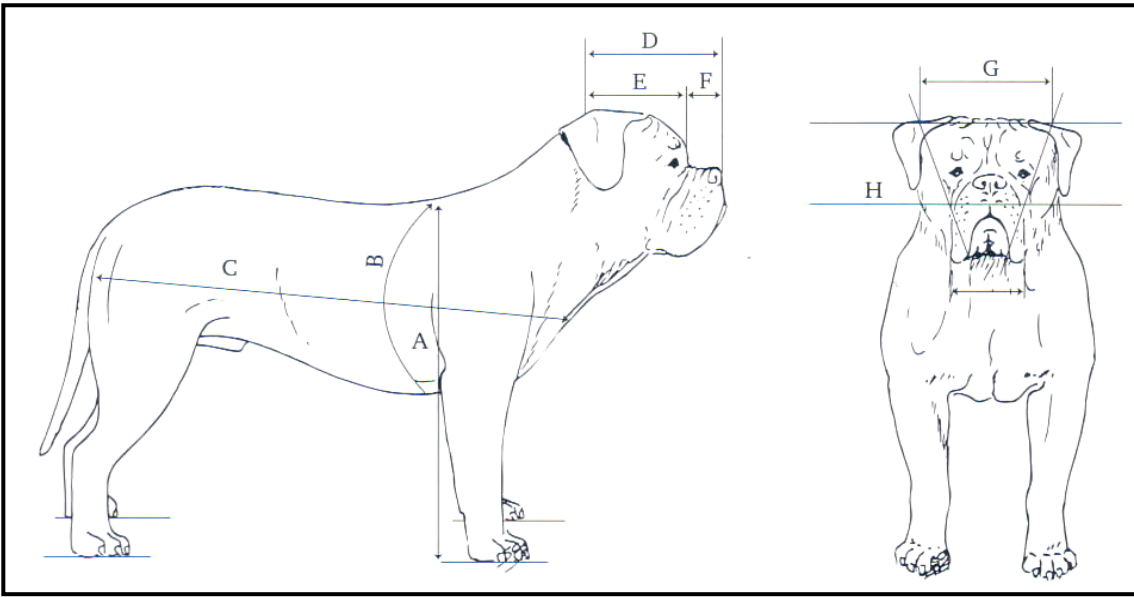
The standard begins the section on the head and skull with the word voluminous so no guessing where the idea that the head is large comes from but how large is ideal? Earlier in General Appearance we are told 'in the male the circumference of the skull corresponds, more or less to the height at the withers'. More or less once again to guard against enormous, disproportionate heads. A dog carrying a head whose perimeter is a lot greater than the height at the withers is described in many texts and articles as a 'monstrosity' to be avoided.

And so we come to wrinkle. The forehead has a distinct symmetrical wrinkle pattern evident but these wrinkles while deep must remain mobile. The muzzle is described as only having moderately obvious folds. We do not want to see thick, deep, fleshy folds on the muzzle as seen on the Bulldog. There should not be fleshy wrinkle filling up under the eye (some chiselling under the eye is desirable). Also to be avoided is the deep wrinkle running from the outside of the eye down the cheek and to the flew. This is a characteristic of the Neapolitan Mastiff and if present gives the Dogue a very sombre look. . In the Neapolitan this wrinkle is typical from the outer corner of the eye and forms more of a fold. The cheeks should be relatively clean. There is movement towards a somewhat lesser wrinkled, cleaner head at this time to avoid the comparison with the Mastino

The sum of the following characteristics (in no order of importance) is what determines the degree of breed type seen in any particular Dogue.

The skull is angular with a trapezoid shape and this shape should be apparent both from above and in front of the Dogue (see diagram below). The back skull is broad and slightly convex from one side to the other with the ears set on high at this level to accentuate the width (although higher set, rose ears on top of the head are undesirable). The cheeks are described as prominent but once the cheeks become overdeveloped this trapezoid shape is quickly lost and the skull becomes square from in front; characteristic of the Mastino, the Bullmastiff and the Mastiff. Cheeks should be prominent but not so developed that the trapezoid shape is lost. A rounded or square skull should be penalised.

The width and depth of the skull and muzzle, prominent cheeks and zygomatic arches, and the high wide forehead coupled with the convergence of the longitudinal lines of forehead and muzzle give rise to the trapezium. It's the combination (volume, trapezium, wide-set eyes, very pronounced stop, broad, short muzzle, chin, wrinkles, direct regard) that gives the required expression: a deterrent face, very dissuasive, the 'sour mug'. A good DDB displays something of the touching expression seen in the large apes. The forehead should remain wider than it is high.



The above diagram is an excerpt from the book 'The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux' by Prof. Raymond Triquet and published by Bas Bosch Press.

Feature		Important Proportions/Standards
Height	[A]	Height at the withers. Males 60-68cm (Less for Bitches) 1cm under and 2 cm over accepted
Chest	[B]	Circumference of the chest taken at the elbows = [A] Height at the withers + 25 to 30cm
Body	[C]	Length of the body = 11/10's of [A]
Head	[D]	Length of the head from occiput (back of the skull) to the nose leather = 3 x [F]
Head	[E]	Skull from occiput to stop = 2 x [F]
Muzzle	[F]	Length of the muzzle = maximum 1/3 of [D], minimum 1/4 of [D]
Head	[G]	Width of the skull seen from the front = greater base of a trapezium
Muzzle	[H]	Width at the end of the muzzle = smaller base of a trapezium
Head		In the male , circumference of the head = [A] Height at the withers
Chest		Depth of chest = more than half of [A] Height at the withers
Coat	Fawn to Mahogany	Fine, short, soft to the touch. Coloured from dark mahogany to red to light fawn & Isabella

The muzzle measures between one third and one quarter of the total length of the head, from nose to occiput. One third is a maximum which should never be exceeded; even better not to come too close to it as that's long. One quarter is a minimum which shouldn't be aimed for either as that's too short. The truth lies somewhere in between; neither the nose of a gundog nor that of a bulldog is to be desired. When measuring the 'ideal' the occiput should fall in middle between the thumb and forefinger of the 3rd muzzle measurement on the skull. It should be noted that extremes in any regard are to be avoided, lack of type, hypertype etc; however impressive.

In profile the muzzle presents 2 important points; the upper line of the muzzle is 'very slightly dished' and in relation to the front of the mouth the nose is set back, so that the end of the muzzle recedes slightly upwards. This is in no way comparable with the 'layback' of the Bulldog. Personally, I find the profile is very much like that of the Munich silhouette for the Boxer excepting that the Dogue has a slightly shorter muzzle and requires a more pendulous lip and dewlap.

The muzzle should be approximately 2/3 the perimeter of the skull so there should be a great deal of strength to the muzzle.

As with the Boxer the nose is slightly higher set than the root of the muzzle and may also be upturned. Nostrils should be well opened and the colour of the nose leather will be pigmented according to the mask colour. Regarding the statement 'the muzzle isn't filled up under the eyes' this means that there's nothing fatty, overdone or fleshy at the root of the nose, as in the Bulldog. The wrinkle should be mobile.

The stop is very pronounced, brows are well developed and the frontal groove is deep, diminishing towards the back of the skull. The forehead dominates the face but is never higher than it is wide. Again like the Boxer the lower jaw shows a distinct curve upwards (a repandous jaw) and the chin is well marked. The chin mark is a very important aspect of type and one that is quickly diminishing in the breed.

The Dogue must be undershot but the standard gives little measure as to the desired amount. The undershot coupled with the upwards curve of the jaw has an important role in the appearance of the chin so those dogs with more apparent chins will generally be more undershot. If the undershot is not coupled with the repandous (the jaw is flat) then often you have the undesirable situation where canines will show. A large degree of undershot is perfectly acceptable as long as the canines do not show. Be aware that dogs with a straighter jaw and lesser undershot often have the mouths which appeal to the All-breeds Judge but it is far from the ideal. The jaw should also be broad with the incisors forming an apparent straight line (there is recent preference for larger incisors ie. to quote Prof Triquet 'they should not resemble grains of rice') and canines should be well set (the breed was bred for 'holding' and displaced or laid out canines should be penalized accordingly). When judging the Dogue canine placement and the curvature of the jaw should always be checked.

The trapezoid skull shape, the amount of wrinkle and the degree to which the other aforementioned characteristics are present give rise to the perfectly allowable variation in type seen within the breed but it should be noted that the above characteristics need to be present for there to be true breed type. Dogues with incorrect skull shape, overly long or short in muzzle, lacking in muzzle development, lacking chin mark and repandous, with the lower lip completely covered by the upper lip and/or without the closed profile with the higher set nose (showing undesirable parallel planes) etc should be penalised accordingly as the lack of any or all of these characteristic shows some crossover in type towards that of the other Mastiffs.

To note the importance of skull shape and profile – square with parallel planes belongs to the Bullmastiff, the Neapolitan and the Mastiff with the Mastiff having a quite curved longitudinal axis, the Neapolitan requiring flatness. All 3 of these breeds require a muzzle to skull ratio of 1:2 making the Dogue slightly shorter and the Dogue is the only Mastiff breed requiring somewhat 'closed' angles in profile.

The oval shaped eyes are set forward and wide apart, separated by at least two eye spaces. They should be on or above the level of the root of the muzzle although the correct expression of the Dogue with the slightly higher set nose may give the appearance of the eyes being lower set as it looks over or through the top of the muzzle. (This coupled with the chin mark give a defiant and almost arrogant look.) The haw should not be visible. Unfortunately, reality is sometimes different – in fact very often the lower lid folds slightly in the middle but isn't serious in a dog with loose skin. Eye colour – black masked dogs have hazel eyes but at best Dogues with a brown mask have amber coloured eyes.

Ears are relatively small, triangular, dropping but firm reaching to the corner of the eye. In the Bullmastiff we note the bottom of the ear is 'level' with the eye.

The neck is likened to that of a bull or wrestler and it must be possible to see the bull's neck widening to the base and then smoothly merging with the shoulders. It is almost cylindrical, but not too short and can be spoiled by too much dewlap.

The topline is considered the dorsal-lumbar (back and loins) area and in the Dogue de Bordeaux we aim for it to be as straight as is possible in a concave lined dog. The entire overline should never be level but always has a slight or very slight dip at the withers with the point from whither to loin straight but rising very slightly. The loin is wide, powerful and not too long. It is always slightly convex (arched) which is not to say the dorsal-lumbar section is arched. If it is arched too much there will be a real dip and the exaggeration will produce a roached back. Alternatively a saddle back (concave overline) isn't good but is considered a less serious fault than a roached back.

The croup is moderately sloping, if it is steep (tucked under) the gait is incorrect.

The chest is deep and well let down which creates the 'near to ground' effect. From the front the forechest is impressive both because of its width and power, especially in males. The pectoral muscles are well developed and the lower line of one axilla to the other is convex. The ribs must be well sprung.

The forequarters are described as a wrestler's shoulders, the muscles are prominent. The scapula is set at an angle approaching 45 degrees to the horizontal (well laid). The angle of the scapulo-humeral joint is about 100 degrees so in profile the upright front leg should stand back a little underneath the body. The elbows are in line with the body and supple. The distance between the ribs and the elbows should be no more than a finger width or two. The forearms must be as near vertical as possible but combined with the very broad chest they are often slightly inclined inwards in such a way they come nearer the median plane. The metacarpus from the front are only very rarely in line with the body, often it inclines slightly outwards (sometimes too much – as in a fiddle front). The feet at their best are nearly in line with the body, turning out slightly. The toes are relatively tight but with his weight the Dogue de Bordeaux can't have cat feet.

Seen from the front, the forehand presents as broader than the rear but this difference should not be exaggerated. Seen from behind the hindlegs are upright and from the side well angulated (in order to achieve balance with the front). In the case of straight angulation the hindquarters are described as overbuilt, or the bum is higher than the back and the dog has a truly plunging topline. The stifle is often slightly turned out, though if not slight there are 'cow hocks'. The hindfeet are then in the line of the body or slightly turned out.

The Dogue de Bordeaux should be well boned and muscled but it is not a massive dog.

The underline slopes upwards from the chest to a relatively tucked up abdomen and resembles the shape of a harp.

The tail must be supple and reach to the hock and ideally not beyond. It should be checked for fusions in two ways. Firstly, by running ones thumb and index finger down either side of the tail. Secondly, by placing ones index finger underneath the tail and the thumb on top and running them down the tail. Fusions often occur in the top one third of the tail.

Movement is active, supple, free, far-reaching, well co-ordinated in line with the body (straight and true) with a mobile shoulder, good drive from the hindquarters and a roomy swing of the forelegs. The Dogue de Bordeaux doesn't raise his forelegs high, but when his speed accelerates he reaches out far in front and the head is lowered in a direct line with the topline, which inclines slightly forward (as with standing the topline should not roach when moving). Movement has been likened to that of the gait of a lion and the Dogue is not a 'fast' trotting breed, but should appear to have distinct purpose. Pay particular attention to Dogues whose forelegs are trotting while the hindlegs are doing a canter.

It should be noted that it is a fault in judging to expect the Dogue to have movement which differs to that called for in the standard. Rotary, hackneyed and springy actions are incorrect no matter how 'showy' this may appear. Movement is one area many All-breeds judges struggle with as there is a tendency to look for 'show ponies' who run with their heads up and bounce or glide around the ring.

The coat is fine, short and soft to the touch and the base colour is fawn. The skin is sufficiently ample. The colour fawn varies from mahogany to a very pale fawn: café-au-lait with too much milk. Due to some breeders (and judges) showing a distinct preference for the mahogany colouring ('colourmania') the standard is being changed to include the requirement for each hair to carry 'agouti' markings (the root should be lighter coloured, darker tipped with a black or brown overlay) but no chocolate coloured coat (hair brown along the entire length) should be accepted. Even on mahogany coloured dogs lighter agouti fawn hair should be present on the 'saddle' mark, sides, underbelly etc. White should not be extensive, not reaching beyond the wrist (tarsus) and hock (metatarsus) on the front of the legs. Some white is acceptable on the chest, but should not run uninterrupted from the brisket on to the chest and

then extend onto the throat. The white on the chest should also not extend onto the shoulders. The chin should never be white.

There are 3 masks: brown, red (or no mask) and black. The only one which really needs explaining is the black mask. Firstly it is never wide spread, some black may be found on the brows, but it is never very dark, it doesn't form 'dark glasses'. The fawn of the coat can always be seen through the black of the mask and black may only be limited to the front of the muzzle and the front part of the upper lips. Very black and pronounced masks are not typical of the Dogue.

As a judge for this breed you will see variance in type (naturally) but you must bear in mind there should **always** be type. If you are looking at a Dogue and you see likeness to other Mastiff breeds then you must question if 'type' is present. At the same time you need to avoid exaggeration but as a judge you must decide what your limits are in either degree as neither exhibits which are light, shelly and lacking in type nor those which are massive, overtyped and exaggerated should receive the highest awards. And of course there are the variations on all of the above; heavy, overboned and lacking in type ranging to refined and overtyped so your job is not an easy one.

The word 'slightly' is often used throughout the standard and it is worth noting as it is of quite some importance!

Regarding the judging of young exhibits, ours is a breed which very often goes through the uglies, often up to the late age of 18 months. Do not be afraid to withhold challenges on young dogs that you feel are lacking in some regard as very often as breeders and exhibitors, we ourselves are taking a wait and see approach and you can only judge the dog as presented to you on that day. Also be aware that the changes in young dogs can be dramatic. Perhaps the more difficult task is what to do with the very 'finished' looking youngster – very often these will not 'go on' (in the case of males they will lack masculinity, females - size) or will become overtyped in maturity.