

What's in a Head??

When it comes to discussing the Dogue de Bordeaux and 'breed type', there is quite a lot in the head! Nearly two thirds of the breed standard is dedicated to the finer points of the head. However, despite so much of the standard being dedicated to it, people still seem to think that all that is required is for it to be large and wrinkled! To be able to differentiate a Dogue's breed type from that of any other Molosser seen in the Utility Group, more attention needs to be given to understanding what makes a strong head in our breed.

The standard's section on the head and skull commences with the word 'voluminous', so no guessing where the idea that the head is large comes from, but how large is ideal? In the section under 'General Appearance', we are told the perimeter of the skull in males corresponds, more or less to the height at the withers. 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.

Now we can discuss the wrinkle. The forehead has a distinct symmetrical wrinkle pattern evident but these wrinkles while deep must remain mobile, if they are immobile, then the head appears too wet. 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. 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). Trapezoid means that two sides only are parallel. The back skull is broad and slightly convex from one side to the other (this forms the base or top of the trapezium) 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. The Breed Club in France is putting a lot of emphasis on the trapezoid shape as many Dogues are not displaying this shape presently. *A rounded or square skull should be penalised* to encourage breeders not to lose sight of what is required in the standard.

The muzzle is well developed, short and broad with the upper profile slightly dished although this is often obscured by the wrinkle on the muzzle in mature dogs. The end of the muzzle forms the bottom of the trapezium with the sides of the trapezium angled outwards towards the base or top of the skull. The upper line of the muzzle in relation to the skull forms an obtuse angle upwards lending to the term 'closed head'. While many comparisons can be made to the other Mastiff breeds perhaps the breed which nearest resembles the Dogue in profile is the Boxer. The Munich Silhouette fits very well with that of the Dogue's profile except that in the Dogue the length of muzzle should be slightly shorter and the lower lip is deeper and rounded by the 'moderately' pendulous flews.

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. 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 characteristic of type in the Dogue, and one that is quickly diminishing. Once again, the Breed Club in France is placing much emphasis on this area to ensure correct type is present.

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 mark, 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-rounder Judge, but it is far from the ideal.** The jaw should also be broad with the incisors forming an apparent straight line and canines should be well set. When judging the Dogue canine placement and the curvature of the jaw should always be checked.

The lower lip should be visible at the peak of the reversed, wide V formed by the upper lip. This can be affected by a combination of factors such as the degree of undershot, the amount of curve (or lack of) to the jaw and the length of the upper lip.

The length of the muzzle is given as a maximum of one third and minimum of one quarter of the length of the skull with the ideal being in between. It should be noted that the maximum and minimum are extremes, neither of which are ideal.

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 eye colour should tone with that of the coat and will be slightly darker in Black masked dogs.

Moving away from the head, it should be recognised that while the Dogue is powerful and muscular, it is not a massive dog and should not possess the bone or mass which desirable in the Neapolitan Mastiff. This is a current deviation in the breed which it seems the French Breed Club is attempting to guard against. Coupled with this deviation head type is often lost along with dogs becoming increasingly larger and flat sided.

It has been noted during the last few years that colour has also become an issue, with the appearance of some chocolate coloured 'Dogues' and as such, breeders are warned to avoid breeding for the deepest red as the hair must always show an agouti pattern (darker tipped with lighter root). The standard shows no preference for colour with all shades of fawn from isabella to mahogany allowable.

*In summary, 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, however, it should be noted that the above characteristics relating to the head 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.*

If you can see any other breed when looking at a Dogue de Bordeaux, you should question if breed type is present.