

# ITALIAN CORSO DOG

# JUDGING INFO

OR CANE CORSO



Courtesy of the



# **THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE JUDGING THE ITALIAN CORSO DOG**

## **ALSO REFERRED TO AS THE CANE CORSO**

From that all –important head to key proportions, Michael Ertaskiran offers 10 aspects you need to know when judging the Cane Corso

### **BREED HISTORY**

The Cane Corso is one of two native Italian “ mastiff type ’ dogs that descends from the Roman war dog, Canis Pugnaces. Adept as a game hunter or farmhand, the Italian Corso is sturdy, strong and athletic, equipped with a vigorous temper, ready to meet an challenge.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Italian Corso dog proved its versatility by being employed in varying tasks, primarily those of a guardian, hunter & farmdog, mostly in southern Italy in provinces such as Foggia, Puglia, Bari and Campobasso. The Cane Corso versatility made him the ideal farmhand, and he was well suited as a flock guardian, often deployed against wolves. He was also utilised in swine breeding and tending, as he was indispensable in keeping boars under control. It was the agile and vigilant Cane Corso’s job to intervene should the boar present a danger, many a farmer was saved by a leaping Corso. The dog grabbed the swine by the ear or flank to incapacitate him, if he grabbed him by the snout, the boar would be strong enough to run him into the ground.

The Cane Corso was also used as a cattle and butcher’s dog. The cattle were raised in wild pastures until the time came for them to be brought to slaughter by the butteri, or Italian cowboys. The Cane Corso also has a history as a hunter of large game. In southern Italy, wild boar was a valued food source, hunting it was a dangerous prospect and proved very difficult without the aid of the sturdy Cane Corso. The badger was also considered prized game in the meridione ( southern Italy), once the badger was cornered, the Cane Corso was set upon him, knocking him to the ground and killing him with a bite to the neck.



**THE CANE CORSO SHOULD BE A LARGE,  
STURDY AND SUBSTANTIAL DOG WITH  
HEAVY BONE - BUT NOT AS LARGE AS A  
GREAT DANE OR MASTIFF.**

The Cane Corso's great versatility and adaptability are the reasons he survives today when other breeds in Italy petered out over time. It is important when you evaluate the Cane Corso that he still appear to be a dog capable of such feats. His physical characteristics should reflect his historical utilizations. This breed was not made, he was forged by the sometimes environment in which he plied his trade. The rule of the Italian south was "if you don't work, you don't eat". Natural selection played a large part in the specialisation of the Cane Corso, as only the fittest, strongest, and best equipped were allowed the privilege to breed.

## APPEARANCE

When looking at the Italian Corso Dog, your first impression is that he is an athlete, reminiscent of a Greco-Roman wrestler. A good adjective to describe the Cane Corso would be "robust". Employing the golden rule of dogdom "form follows function" - the Cane Corso was required to be large, sturdy and substantial dog with heavy bone. When I say large, I don't mean like the Great Dane or Mastiff. The Cane Corso is large and compact at the same time, he must be agile enough to leap onto a boar's ear in mid-charge and skeletally sturdy enough to confront an angry bull. I liken the Cane Corso to a lioness, not the lion (that would be his cousin, the Neapolitan Mastiff) the lioness must be fast and agile enough to catch a gazelle, but also strong enough to confront a zebra or water buffalo.

To use a sports analogy, the Cane Corso is a linebacker of the Utility group - agile, hostile and mobile.

The breed is not overdone in any regard, he does not suffer from any excess. 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 SIZE AND PLANES OF THE HEAD  
ARE IMPORTANT COMPONENTS.**



# SIZE VERSUS SUBSTANCE

When evaluating taller dogs, it is important to note if the dog has sufficient bone, volume of skull and width of chest, as these areas can be lacking when height increases. The extremely large, overly mastiff-type dogs tend to lose their athleticism and agility and have too much loose skin, more reminiscent of the Neapolitan mastiff. When a Cane Corso is moving, you should not see loose skin ripping across his body, you should see taut, sinewy muscles (should appear muscular) being flexed with each movement. Smaller dogs history as a war dog and hunter of boar, boar and stag required that he be a dog of great substance and power.

## HEAD

Your first impression of the Cane Corso should be that the volume of the head is disproportionately larger than the rest of the body.

The head to muzzle ratio is  $2/3$  to  $1/3$ , with the length of the head equal to the length of the neck. Another essential characteristic of the Italian Corso Dog type are the angles of his skull. The Cane Corso has slightly convergent (coming closer together; converging) planes, like a Boxer or Bullmastiff. He is not parallel, like the Great Dane or Neapolitan Mastiff, and never divergent like the Bullterrier or Borzoi.

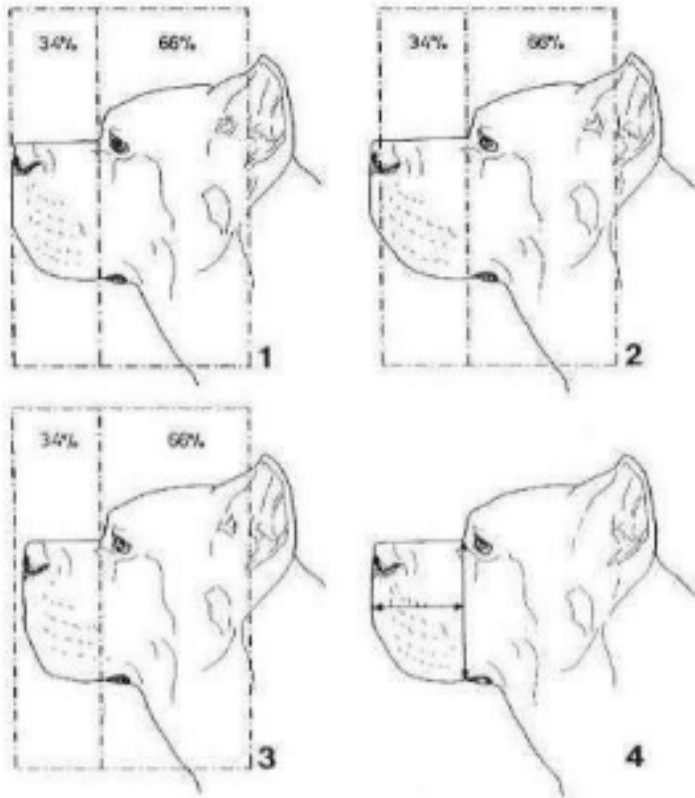


**IN THE CANE CORSO, BOTH THE SKULL  
AND MUZZLE ARE AS WIDE AS THEY ARE  
LONG.**

You should be able to draw a slightly convergent / descending imaginary line from the occiput (back of the head) meeting at the tip of the nose (with the muzzle on a level plane).

The skull, like the muzzle, is as wide as it is long. This characteristic is a fundamental element of the Cane Corso type. When viewed from above, 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 and skull should be powerful, even in bitches. The muzzle should be wide and deeper than it is long. The depth of the muzzle should be skeletal, not a perception of depth created by loose, hanging lips. The width of the muzzle should not be so wide as to resemble a marine mammal rather than a dog. There needs to be a discernable distinction between the skull and muzzle. Head faults are equal, meaning if the dog's muzzle is too long, that is just as unacceptable as if it were too short. The Cane Corso has a marked stop, the angle of the stop should be approximately 105 degrees when viewed from the side.

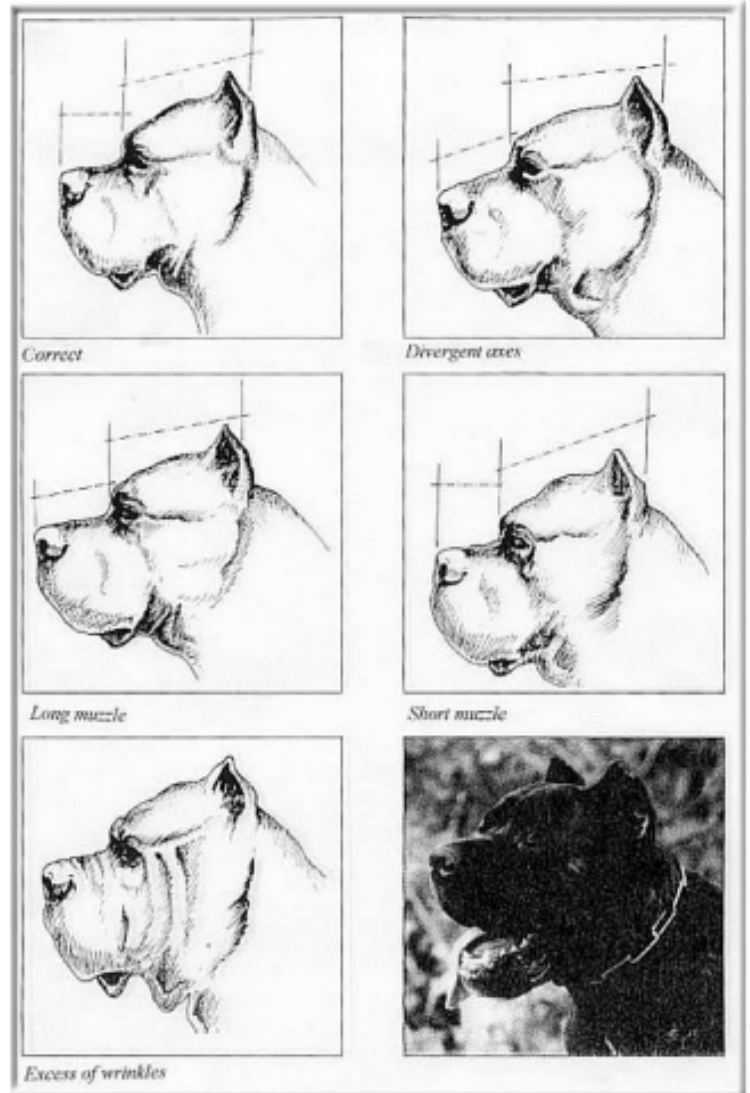


**1 = Correct muzzle to skull proportion.**

**2 = Muzzle too long (fault).**

**3 = Muzzle too short (fault).**

**4 = The muzzle's length and depth are equal and should be 1/3 of the length of the head.**

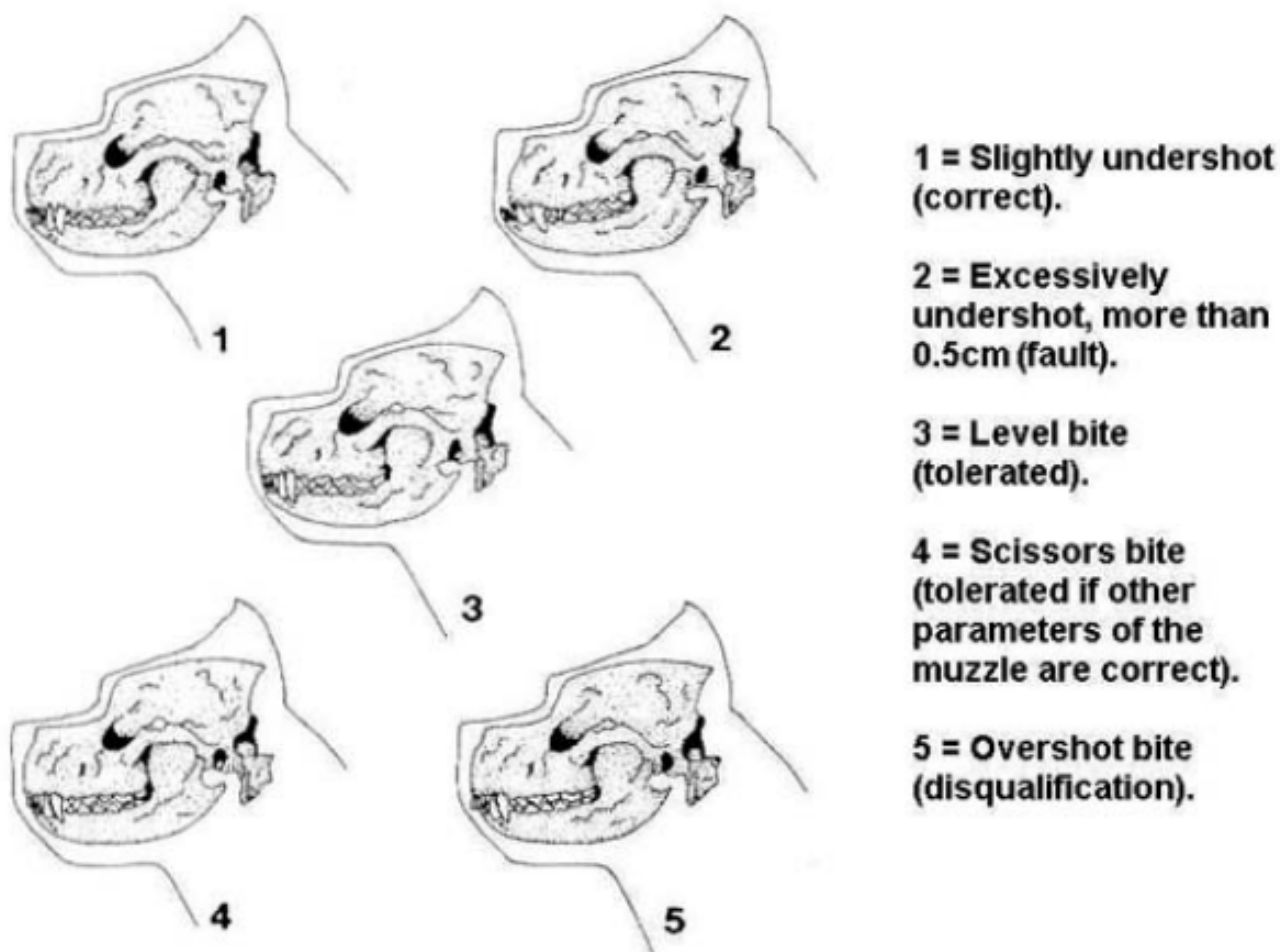


# BITE

The bite of the Cane Corso should be undershot, but not more than quarter of an inch—ad that means up to 1/4 inch.

There seems to be some confusion among judges as to what quarter of an inch is, in relation to the relatively small confines of the dog's mouth, a quarter of an inch is larger than some might think. Picture a number—two pencil's width—that is how much this breed is allowed to be undershot. The incisors should be in a relatively straight line with the canines angled away from each other (divergent). This creates an immovable serrated bite. The teeth are supposed to be big and white, with no more than two missing. Level and scissors bite are acceptable provided all parameters of the skull are correct. More important that what is inside the dog's mouth is whether he has correct angles,

Proportions and type. A dog that has good type and scissors bite is much more desirable than a dog that has a head like a Doberman Pinscher and a perfect undershot bite.



## BODY

The breed is longer than tall, but not as long as a midtown express train. The chest is wide, and the forechest is muscled and prominent. Its width, in close relation to the width of the thorax, reaches 35 percent of the height to the wither, the breastbone is at the same height as the tip of the shoulders. Seen from the side, the chest is visible between the forelegs and slightly curved. The front legs of the breed are to have heavy bone.

While not mention in the standard, the thorax is extremely important and should be well developed and prominent. 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 would be indicative of a slight-boned dog; too little, a dog absent agility or athleticism. The breed's length of neck is equal to the total length of the head. He has a slight drop (15 degrees ) at his croup to accommodate drive. He should have a level topline. The back should connect harmoniously to the withers. The back line should be horizontal, with the tail being an immediate extension. At the trot, the backline remains level and rigid. A roached or rounded topline is very undesirable.

The Cane Corso has moderate angulation. He is somewhere between the Bullmastiff and the Boxer. It is important he be balanced, the rear and shoulder angulation should be in harmony with each other.

A dog that has no rear or front angulation would be balanced, but not correct. Angle of the shoulder is 50 degrees. It's length, from the top of the withers to the ridge of the shoulder, is equal to 30 percent of the height at the withers.

The Corso should have a low hock set and flexible pasterns—always strong heavy bone.

When in motion, the tail should be carried in the 2 to 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 penalised, as it usually goes with a steep croup and restrictive pelvic tilt.

## MOVEMENT

The Cane Corso is effortless in his ability to cover ground, leaving one to wonder: How does such a big dog get around so easily? The breed should be synonymous with powerful reach and drive.

The quote the CCAA judges manual “The Corso is a Utility breed. The variety of it's tasks did not call for a specialised build, but an adaptable one. The lengthened trot is the ideal gait for a Corso, displaying efficiency and endurance. The Corso has effortless, powerful movement. The length of leg is 50 percent of the height at the withers so the centre of gravity, causing the dog to almost single track. However, it should never cross over the front or back. The spins should remain rigid and level. The head is not carried high but slightly lower and forward at the trot. Bounce and roll are limited. The front reach and back extension are almost equal to the height at the withers. The rear is very muscular and processes powerful drive, allowing for burst of speed when necessary.”

## TEMPERAMENT

When evaluating the Cane Corso, character must also come into the equation. The Corso should never be fearful. If a Corso is afraid, how can he effectively perform his duties as a guard dog? Timid character should be severely faulted.

The breed's history predicates a somewhat belligerent attitude towards other dogs, particularly of the same sex, so a Cane Corso that shows this should not be faulted (as long as he poses no threat to others). He should never be overly agitated or fidgety; he is always reserved and confident. 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 afraid to meet a challenge.

Do not mistake indifference or standoffish behaviour with fear or aggression. Most Cane Corso are not likely to look at you and wag their tail, some yes, but in most cases this will not be so. He should not be outwardly aggressive toward you, he must be under control at all times. The corso should be a very balanced animal mentally as well as physically; he should be confident, secure, and vigilant. The firmness of his nerves represents the true mental strength of the breed.

The Corso should be like furniture, meaning he is just there. He is not acting aggressively, posing threat for no reason. He is not shy or hiding behind his owner's leg. He's just there, ready to act if necessary, and with you only the appropriate level of deterrent. This breed has a profound attachment to his owners, they are his sun and moon. He suffers if left alone or stuck in the yard, he needs social interaction with his family.



## **A DOG WITH A DOCKED TAILS AND CROPPED EARS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE IN NEW ZEALAND**

## **IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS & ANGLES**

- \* The Cane Corso has a number of important angles & proportions that are essential to breed type.
- \* The length of the head is equal to 36 % of the height at the shoulder.
- \* The breed is 10 percent longer than tall. The rib cage descends to 50 % of the height at the withers.
- \* The length of the forearm ( not including the pastern) is equal to 32 % of the height at the withers.
- \* The height of the hock is equal to 32% of the height at the withers.
- \* The length at the neck is equal to the length of the head.
- \* The muzzle is equal to 34% of the total length of the head.
- \* The circumference of the head is equal to twice its total length.
- \* The angle of the stop is 105%.
- \* The incline of the neck is 45 degrees, with the shoulder incline being 50 degrees.
- \* The incline on the humerus is 56—60 degrees.
- \* The incline of the tibia metatarsals is 140 degrees.
- \* The angle of the hock is 90 degrees.

Finally, I like to say about the Cane Corso, its not black & white. There is a lot of grey there—and I don't mean just the colour.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Ertaskiran first met the Cane Corso in 1994 at the now-defunct U.S. Neapolitan Mastiff Club's show in Mullica Hills, N.J. He became the president of the International Cane Corso Federation in 1995, and was the driving force behind the breed's pursuit of full AKC recognition. Ertaskiran has judged numerous rare-breed specialty shows, and had the privilege of being the first American to judge the breed in Italy at a Cane Corso specialty show. During his many trips to Italy, he sought out all the breed's old-timers, those responsible for preserving the breed and its recovery.

**\*\*Article thanks to Modern Molosser Magazine \*\***



# THE FINER DETAILS OF THE CANE CORSO

**NOSE:** It is on the same line as the nose pipe. Seen from the side it mustn't stick out the front vertical margin of the lips but be, with its front, on the same vertical line as the front of the muzzle.

Its sides, upper and frontal, seen from the side, form a right angle.

It has to be voluminous, rather flat on top, with wide nostrils, opened and mobile, wet and cool. The nasal wings are quite thin. The pigmentation is black.

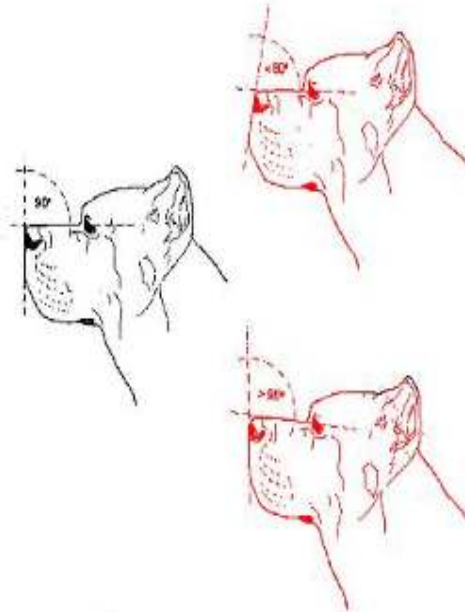


1 = Narrow nostrils and rounded nose (fault).

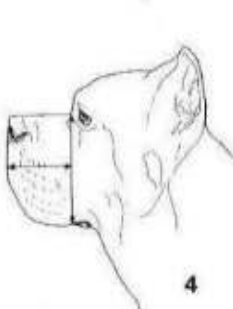
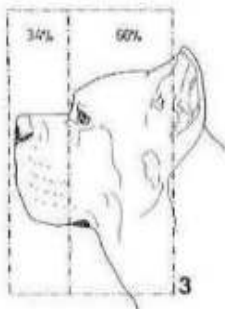
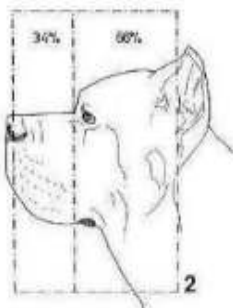
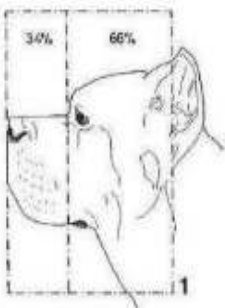


2 = Optimal squariness of the muzzle, voluminous nose. Nostrils open, wide and with correct and thin nasal wings.

3 = Correct muzzle, but the nose is shallow and small (fault).



**NOSE PIPE:** Straight, rather flat. For the length and the direction in connection with the skull axis, see "head". The width, measured at half-length, is equal to approx. 20% of the total length of the head and to approx. 59% of the length of the nose pipe.



1 = Correct muzzle to skull proportion.

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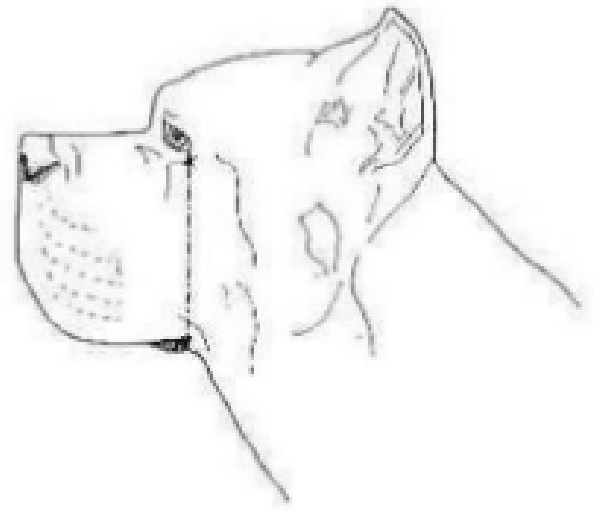
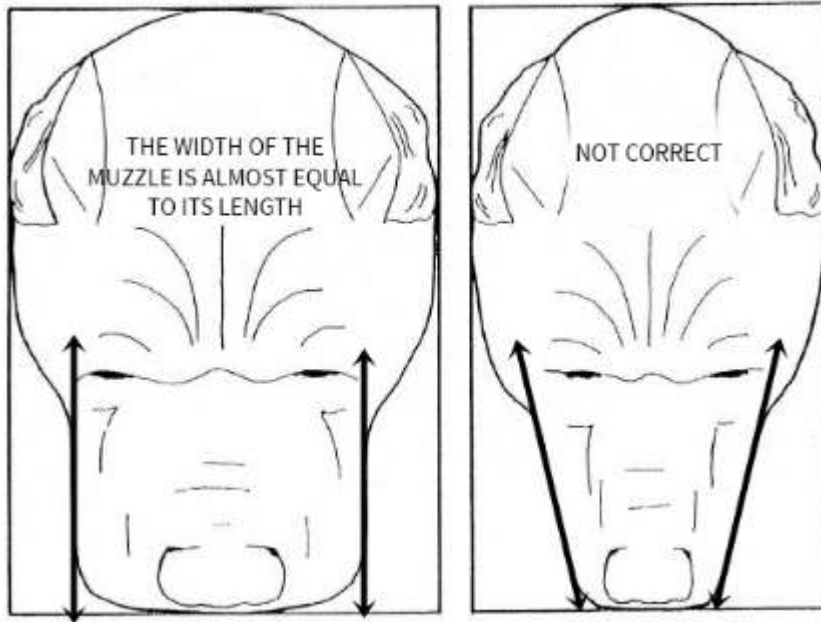
4 = The muzzle's length and depth are equal and should be 1/3 of the length of the head.

**SKULL:** For the direction in relation to the muzzle axis, see "head". The length is equal to 6,6/ 10 of the total length of the head and the width is equal to the length. The zygomatic arches are quite grown and stretched outwards.

Seen from the front it is wide and slightly curved, seen from the side it draws an irregular curve that, accentuate in the sub-region of the forehead, becomes flat along the external sagittal crest (the skull sub-region). Seen from the top, it looks square because of the outstretching of the zygomatic arches and for the powerful muscles swathing it. Frontal eminences that are well grown and stretched forward, deep forehead hollow and visible centre groove.

The hollows above the eye-sockets are slightly marked.

# MUZZLE WIDTH



The beginning of the lips forms an upwards perpendicular line to the outer angle of the eye.

**CHEEKS:** The masseter region is full and evident, but not hyperthropic .

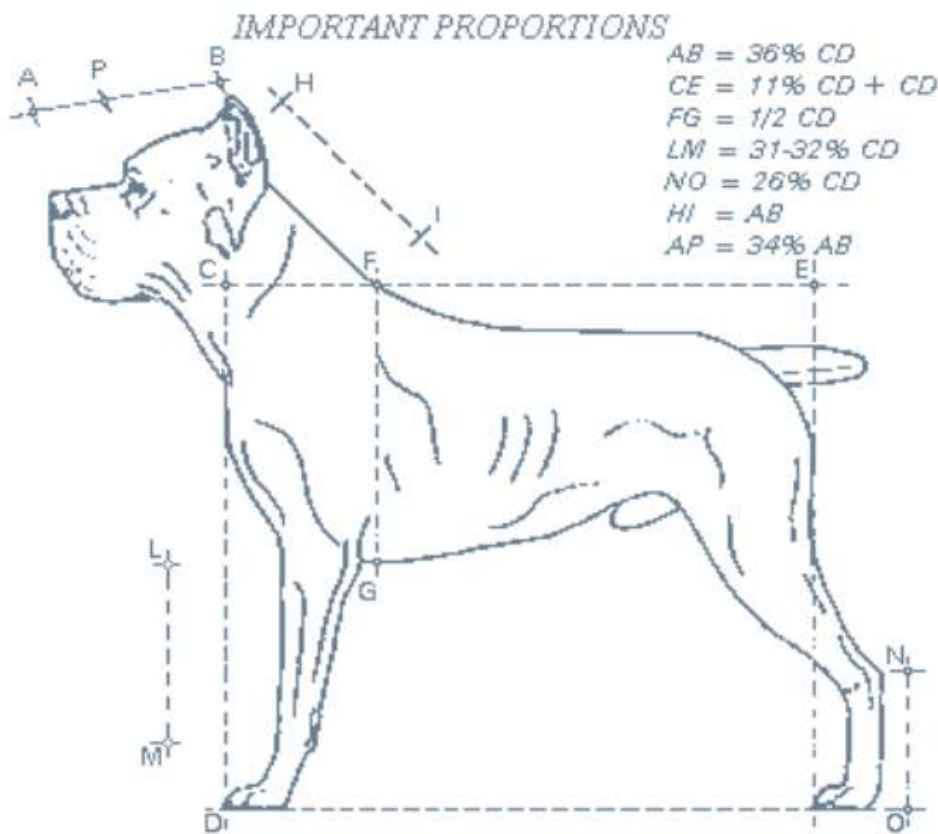
## Expression

### Expressions incorrect



**EYES:** Of medium size compared to the size of the dog, in a sub-frontal position (slant of the palpebral axis from 5° to 15°), well spaced out seen the considerable transversal growth of the frontal sinuses. Rima palpebrarum nearly oval, eyeballs slightly protruding , adherent eyelids with the borders pigmented of black. The eyes , seen from the front . Mustn't let the sclera be seen. Nictitante strongly pigmented. Iris as dark as possible according to the color of the coat. Look intelligent and alert.

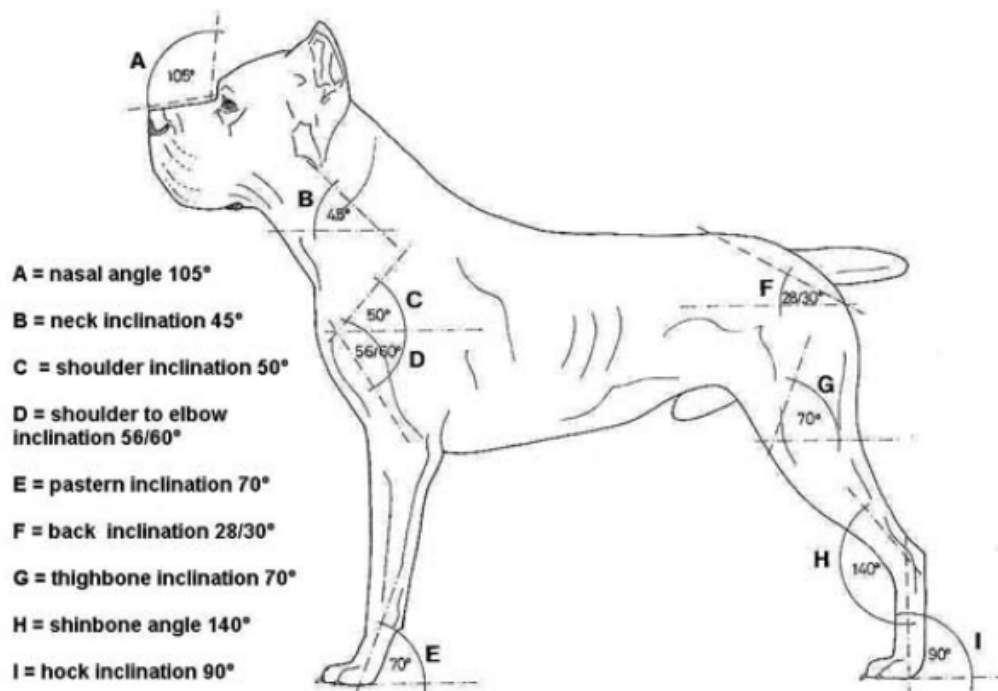




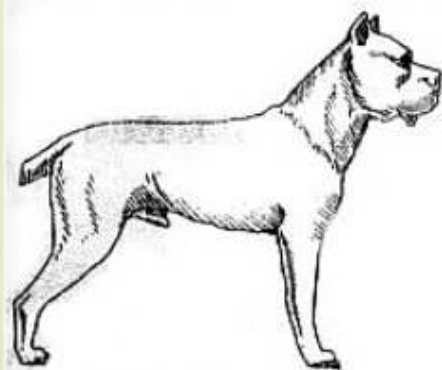
**RIBS:** Long, oblique (curved backwards), wide and well hooped, but without exceeding. Wide intercostal spaces. The 4 false ribs are long, oblique and open.

**WITHERS:** The anatomical base of the withers is found in the first five dorsal vertebrae and the top of the shoulder, and they form the highest point of the top line of the trunk. Because the height of the spinal apophyses rises to the fifth dorsal vertebra and then descends gradually, the height of the dog is determined at this point. Long and prominent withers are a great quality in a working dog. They indicate the length and the consequent slant of the spinal

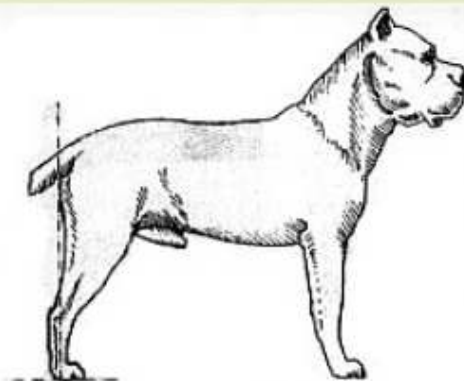
apophyses of the dorsal vertebrae, which make a lever for the back muscles, the cervical ligaments and the trapezoid and rhomboid muscles of the shoulder. Consequently, the higher the spinal apophyses, the greater the contraction of the elevating muscles of the shoulder (and thus the amplitude of the movement of the limbs) and more efficient the action on the cephalo-cervical equalizer (the head with the neck) and on the rigidity and solidarity of the back and loins (factors which favour indirectly the propulsive forces of the hindquarters). In addition, high withers are usually associated with a well-sloped shoulder, a condition which favours, along with the others already mentioned, the maximum in the various gaits. Short and low withers make the back seem longer and, together with a closed scapular-humeral angle or an excessive inclination of the arm, move the center of gravity to the front. The dog will seem to be "thrown ahead" and will move with little energy and awkwardly because of the lacking amplitude in the oscillation of the front limbs and the reduction of impulse from the rear. High and short withers impede the harmonic fusion between neck and back, since they cause an abrupt break with the topline. When the points of the scapulae are too high and too close together they cause the so-called "sharp withers", a fairly rare fault. If the withers are too fat they are usually also short: a grave fault.



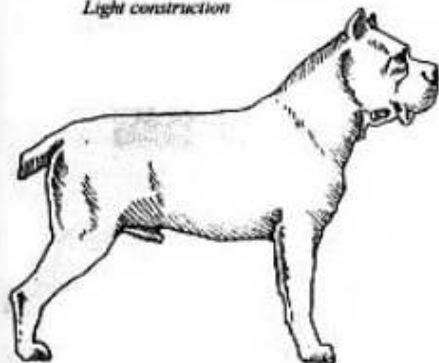




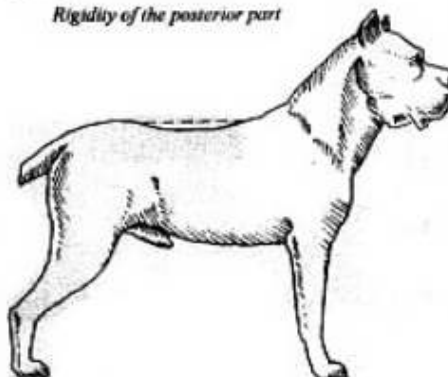
*Light construction*



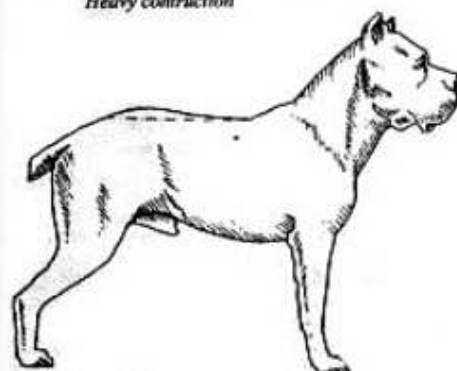
*Rigidity of the posterior part*



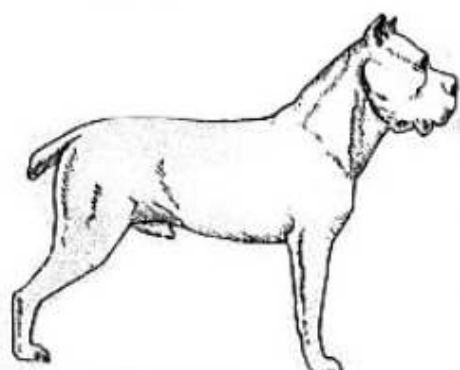
*Heavy construction*



*Lordosis*



*Cyphosis*



*Right construction*

**BACK:** The back's function is to sustain the rest of the body, and to transmit the rear impulse to the front. A back with a straight profile and slightly rampant from back to front assures the best propulsive impulse from the hind legs to the front legs. In fact, since this conformation moves the center of gravity toward the back, it lightens the front, and permits a more efficient forward projection of the trunk. Cyphosis, or a convex or roach back, indicates that the spinal column traces a convex profile in the dorso-lombar region, and is often caused by rickets with the consequent calcification of the intervertebral cartilage. Dogs with this pathology will be shorter and less flexible, suffering a reduction in their movement and in their capacity to develop fast gaits, since the propulsion of the posterior is obstructed by the cyphotic profile which weakens the thrust. Lordosis, or a concave back, indicates that the spinal column has a concave profile in a part of the back region or, more often, from the withers to the croup, and is often correlated with a relaxation of the lower vertebral

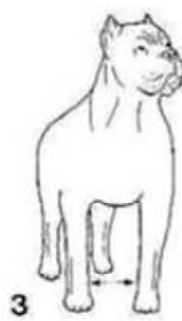
ligaments, with short withers, and a long back and loins. Such an anomaly should be severely penalized in the Cane Corso. Dogs in this condition are less solid and less mobile since they not only suffer, as in cyphotic subjects, from this obstacle to the transmission of impulse from the hindquarters, but must as well use more energy to offset the unnatural lowering of the spinal column.



**1**



**2**



**3**

**1 = Correct front angulation.**

**2 = Narrow front (fault).**

**3 = Wide front (fault).**



**4**



**5**



**6**

**4 = Elbows pointed outwards (fault).**

**5 = Feet turned inwards (fault).**

**6 = Feet turned outwards (fault).**

# COAT COLOUR IN THE CANE CORSO

At the beginning of the 10's, when the recovery of the breed began, it was decided not to prefer any particular colour, but to take into consideration all the tones that history and tradition had given us. Nevertheless, it turned out that the coat colours we found at the time were basically four: black, dark brindle, ash grey, and wheat. As we have mentioned in earlier chapters, the colour of the dog was often directly connected to his function, the geographic area in which he lived, and superstitions which considered this or that particular colour tied to particular attributes. Actual "tribes" had been created of subjects with the same colour and the same function.

A black coat was preferred by pig and goat breeders, and much used by cowboys as well. The black must be intense, bright but not shiny, and never tending to blue. White markings (on the toes and the chest but never large) are admitted, but total black is to be preferred. When the dog is in moult the black may become "bitter chocolate" colour. Dark brindles were chosen for wild boar hunts and were much used for herding. In the Cane Corso the striping covers many gradations of red and is not always clearly delineated but can, in certain cases, fade into the base colour, most especially in the darker brindles. This gives subjects which, due to the mixture of black and red hair, have three tonalities: for example, black, dark red, and light red, all in a mixture of unclear lines in which, however, the black must prevail. Brindles must always have a black mask.

The ashen coat was the favorite of cowboys and herders. Lead and slate grey are occasionally brindled, but more often this is found in the lighter shades, always with the red lines well-marked. In brindles with red lines the mask is rarely present).

A wheaten colour (red with the tone of ripe grain) was preferred for badger and sometimes wild boar hunting, as well as by goatherds. There must always be a black or grey (perhaps the most typical) mask. This is black in the darker reds and grows lighter as the coat colour clears toward wheaten. It is important that the mask not overreach the eye line (when it does there is foreign blood in the subject), but the most typical is a gradual blending as it approaches that point.

A white band on the nose was much appreciated at one time. Together with wheaten, the most typical colour was a light red with pearly tones. We have said that in the past entire "tribes" of the same colour were formed (dogs were rarely exchanged for mating).

Modern breeding has instead given no particular preference to colour, and the result of the coupling of subjects of different coats has been a proliferation of different colours, particularly grey and red. We believe, however, that in the future breeding should be oriented toward the four most "traditional" coats: black, dark brindle, ashen (even if brindled) and wheaten.

**WE SHOULD ALSO REMEMBER THERE ARE MANY WHITE DOGS IMMORTALISED IN THE ITALIAN CORSO DOG.**