

The Cane Corso

CCAA Judge's Manual
2026



The Cane Corso

Breed overview

The Corso's headpiece is large and wide with slight convergence. It should not have traits reminiscent of other breeds but is distinctly his own. **A blocky muzzle of functional length (33%-38%) attached to a large, square head is fundamental to correct breed type.** Eyes and Ears are wide set. The stop is pronounced, but **the skull flattens above the brow and gradually inclines toward the back skull.** His expression is striking and intelligent; Often referred to as "piercing" in historical writings. He is the **ultimate utility Molosser, whose structure communicates versatility and endurance.** The Cane Corso is a large dog; Power, muscle mass and bone are the backdrop of athletic ability and balance. **He is rectangular in proportion with a level backline; Shoulders well laid back; pelvic tilt open.** The elongated trot is the most utilized gait of the Corso. He moves with surprising effortlessness. His ample reach and drive allow him to **cover ground with maximum efficiency.** He should be alert and confident but is often detached when it comes to strangers.

The Cane Corso is a dog of function, a "jack of all trades" developed in pre-industrial Italy's rural, agricultural environment. He is not specialized for one task, but instead, the Corso is a perfect blend of traits that equip him to be a multi-purpose helper. **The ability to function is an intricate part of breed type. Correct structure is a must.**

10 points to remember:

- **The headpiece is large, impressive, and unique. It should not remind you of other breeds.**
- **Blocky muzzle of functional length (33%-38% of the skull) attached to a large, square head**
- **Slight convergence between muzzle and head plane**
- **Eyes and ears are wide set; pronounced stop and Brow, but skull flattens above the brow into slight incline.**
- **Ultimate utility Molosser whose structure communicates versatility and endurance**
- **Power, muscle mass and bone are the backdrop of athletic ability and balance**
- **Rectangular in proportion with a level backline static and at a trot**
- **Shoulders well laid back; pelvic tilt open**
- **Covers ground with maximum efficiency, good reach and drive!**
- **Confident Guardian that is often detached and Stoic around strangers.**

Origins:

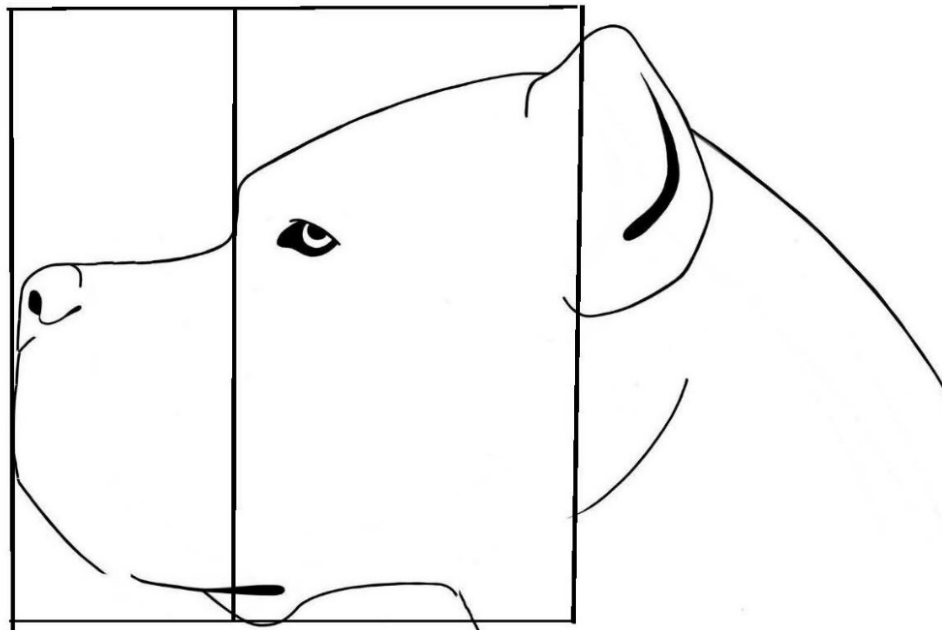
The Cane Corso is an unparalleled working dog; versatile and adaptable. Corso type Molossers were present in the arena and circus; they were auxiliary to the Roman legions and aided the feudal lords during the hunt. They were an indispensable tool in agricultural activities such as Cattle management and guarding the flocks against two and four-footed predators. Their Power and endurance enabled them to aid in the hunt for stag, boar and bear. He was the escort of the Italian cattle herders as they drove to the market. 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 indeed was "all things to all people" in rural areas of southern Italy.

The Head

Side view

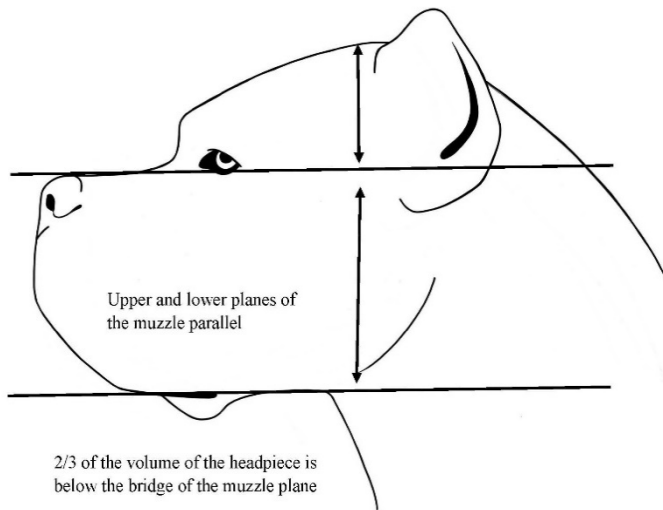
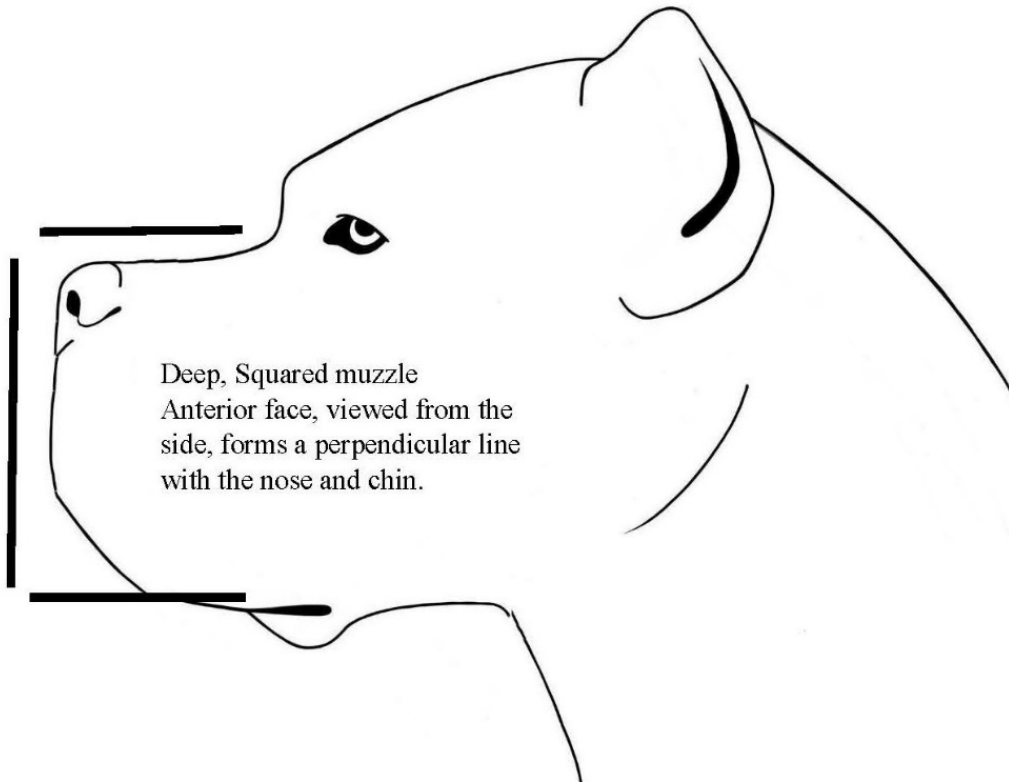


SLIGHT convergence between muzzle and skull planes. The forehead is NOT domed, But flattens and inclines slightly beyond brow and toward the back skull.

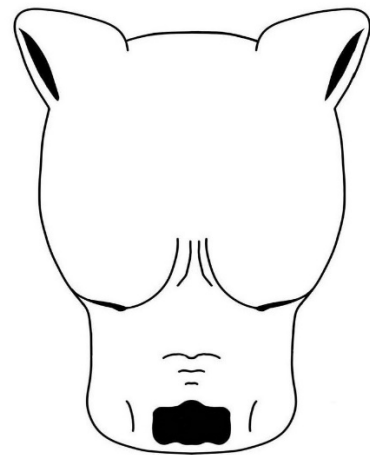


Muzzle is 33-38% the length of the total headpiece. NEVER shorter

The Muzzle

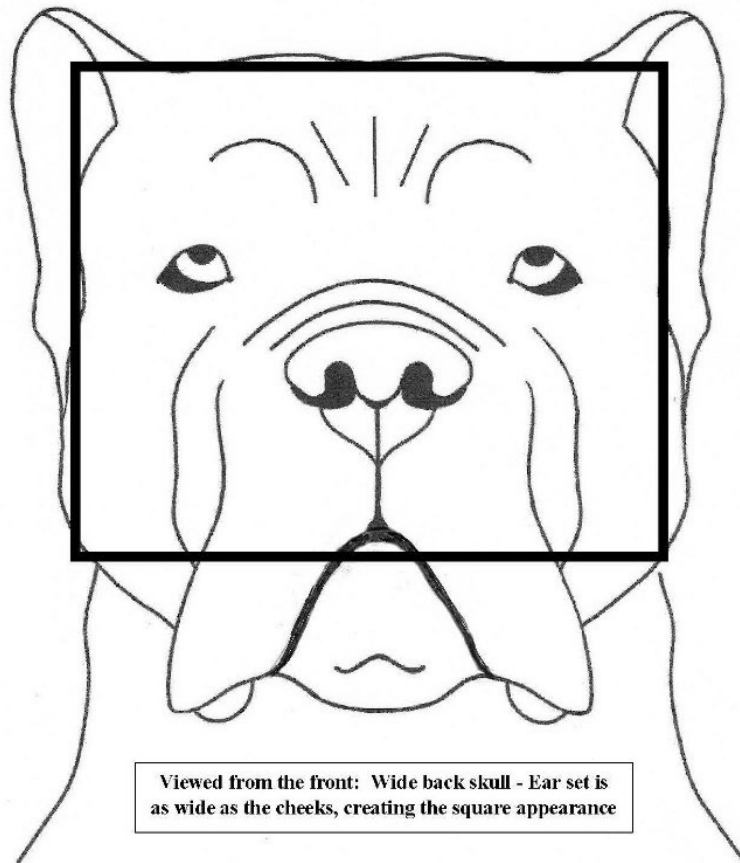
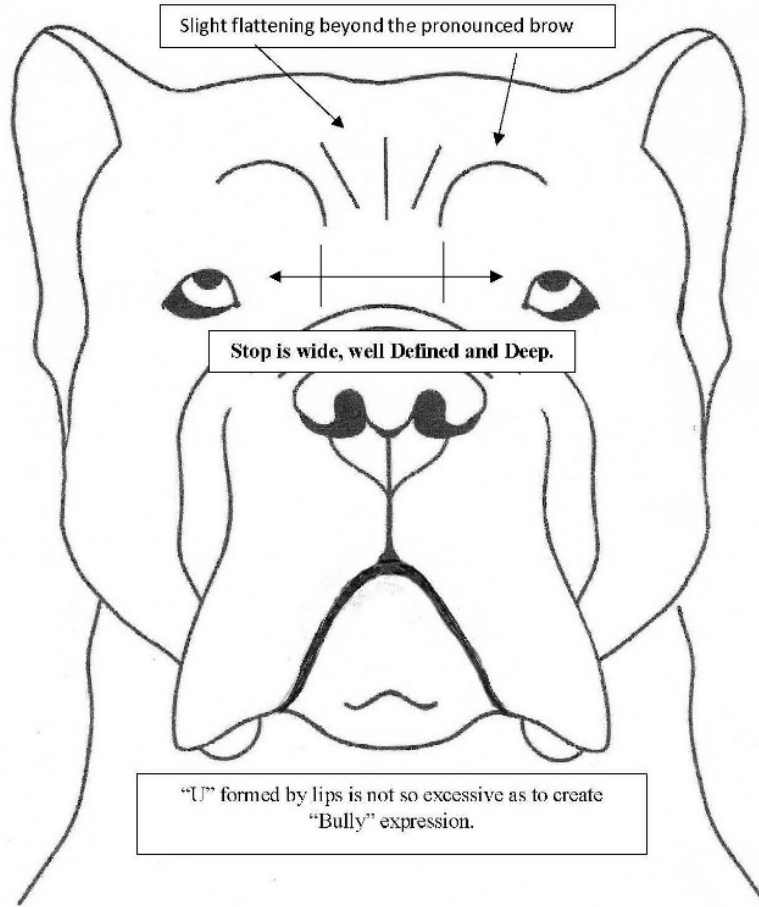


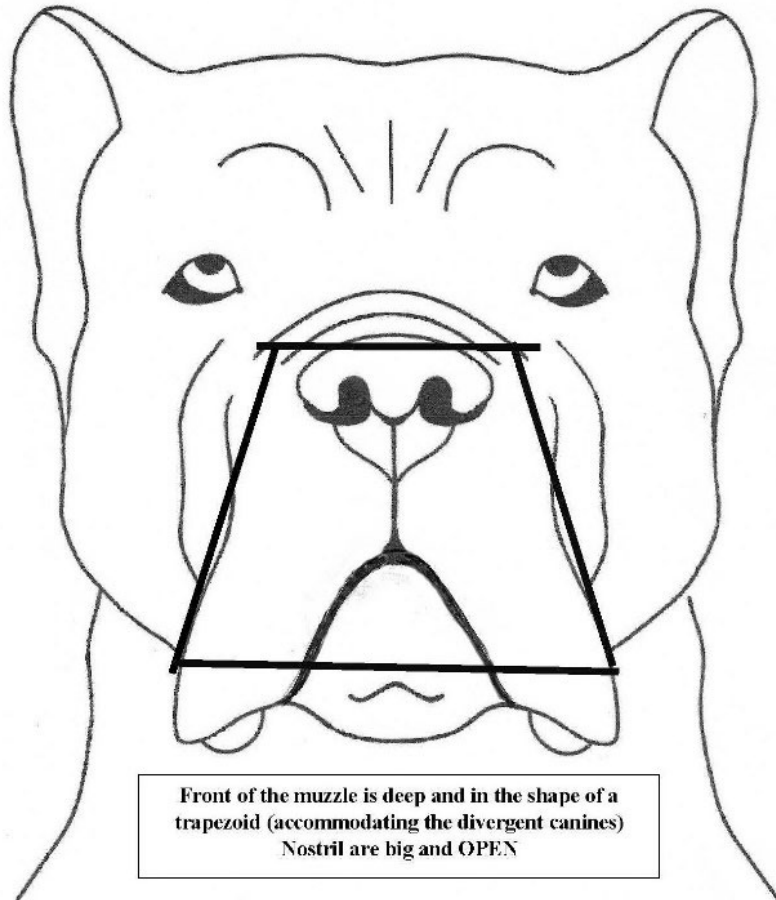
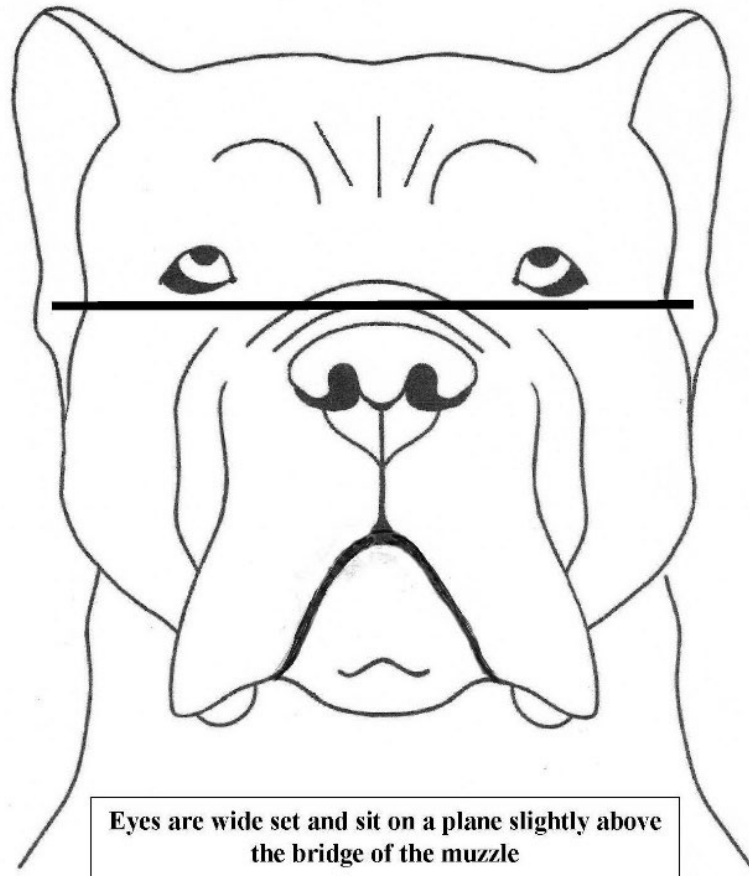
Viewed from the top,
Skull is a square.



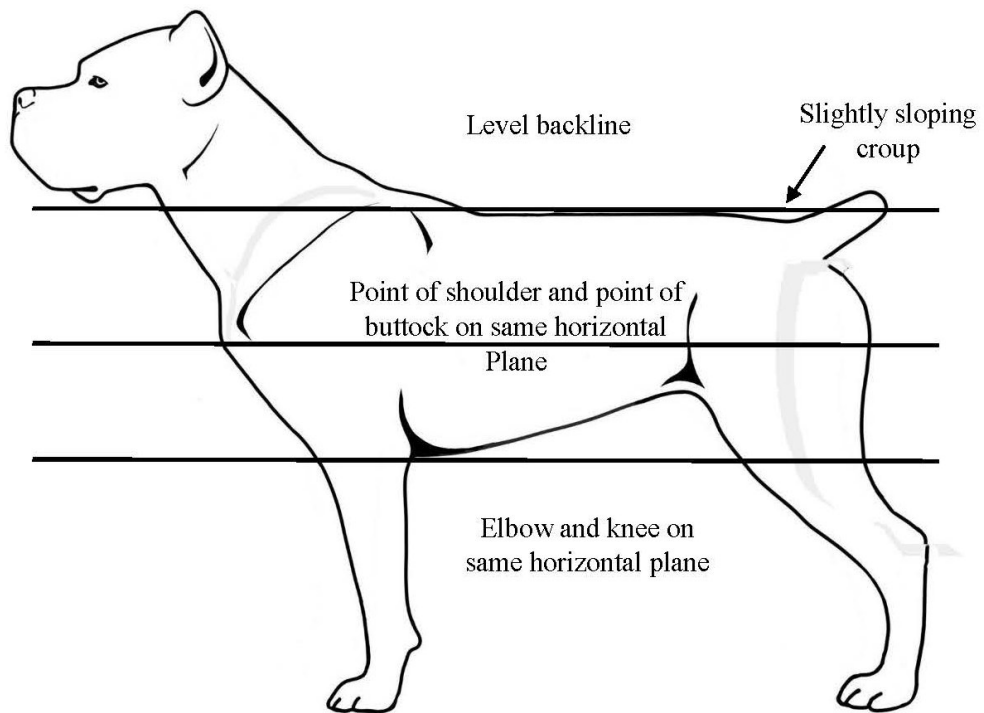
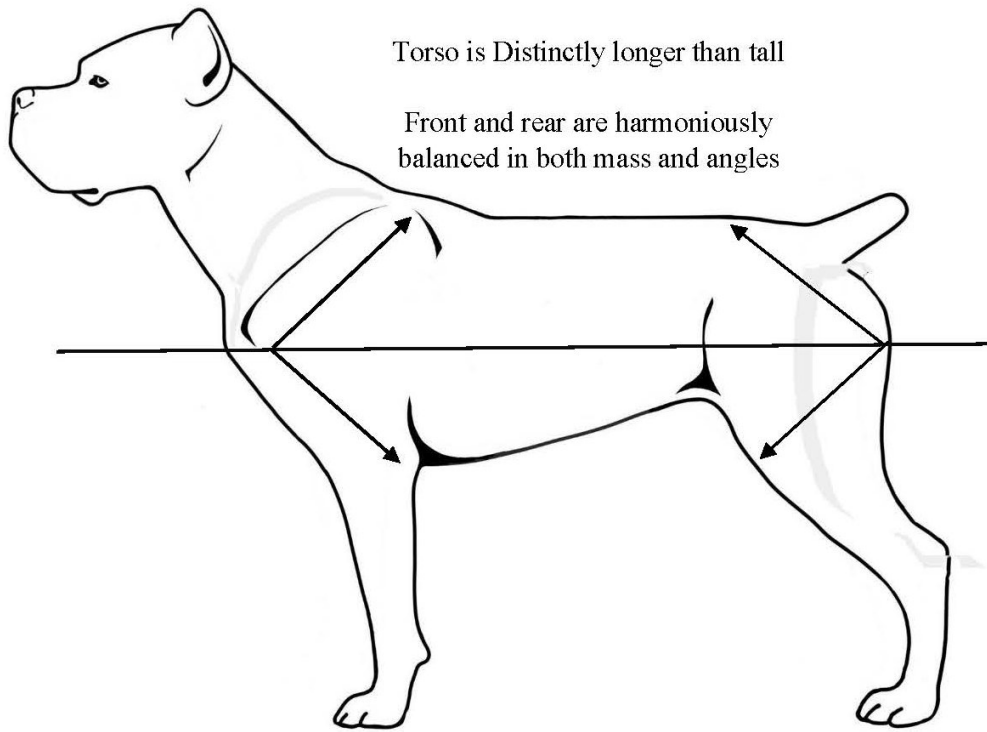
Viewed from the top, the
muzzle is as wide at the
base as it is at the extremity.

From the Front

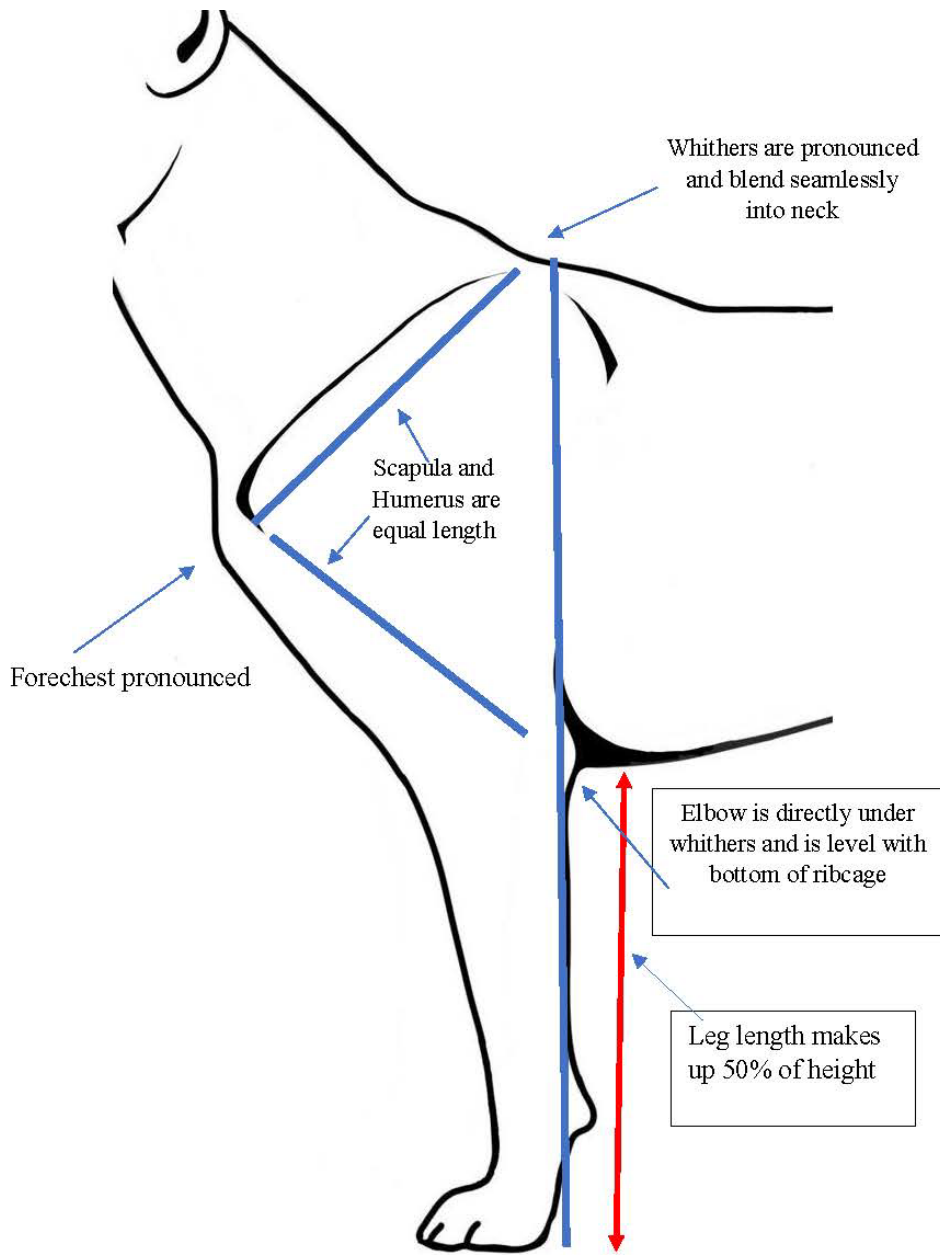




The Body

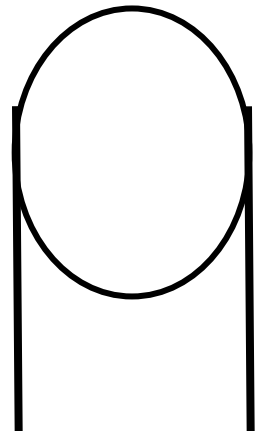


The Front

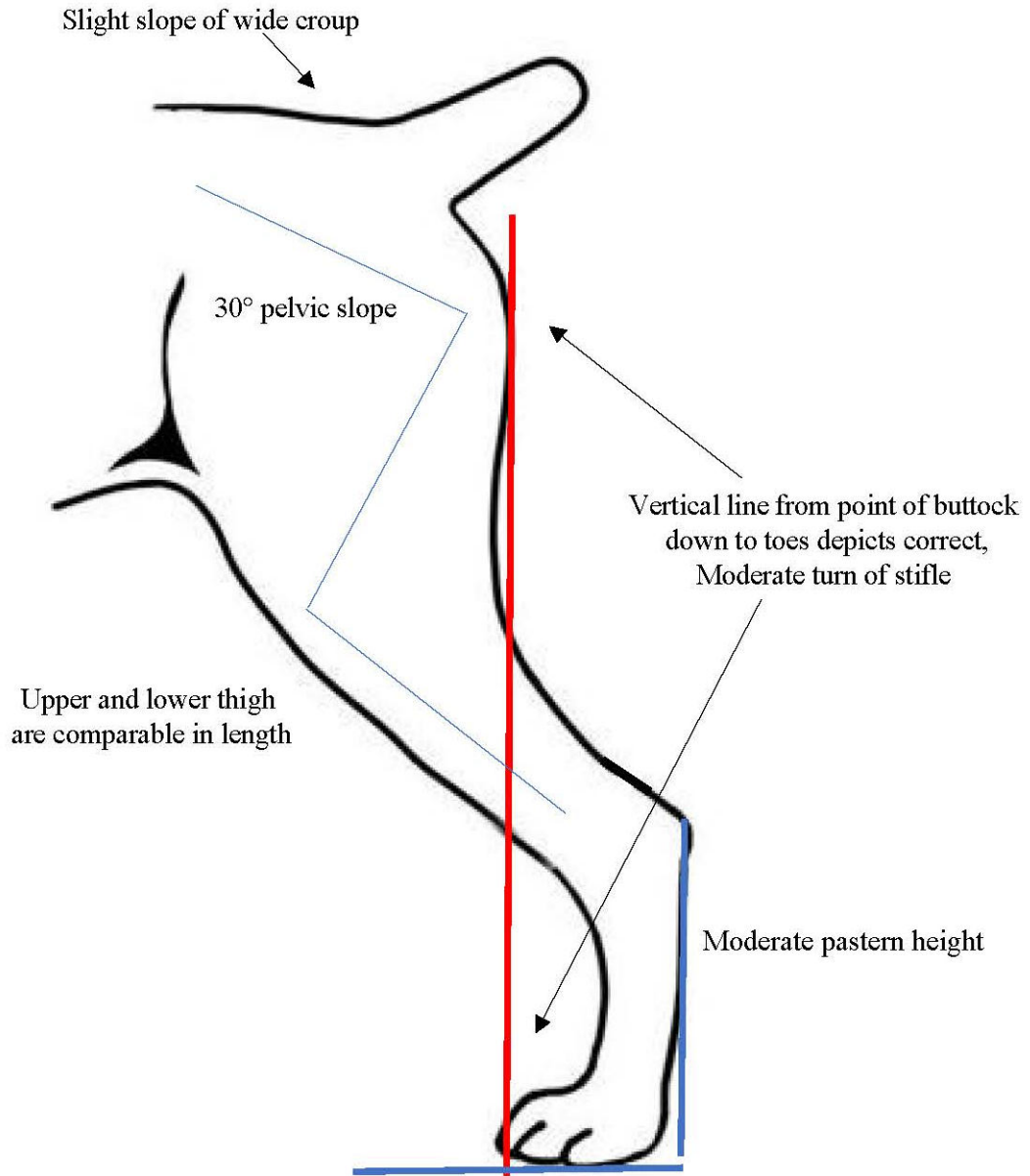


Oval chest

Straight front legs and Feet
Directly under shoulders

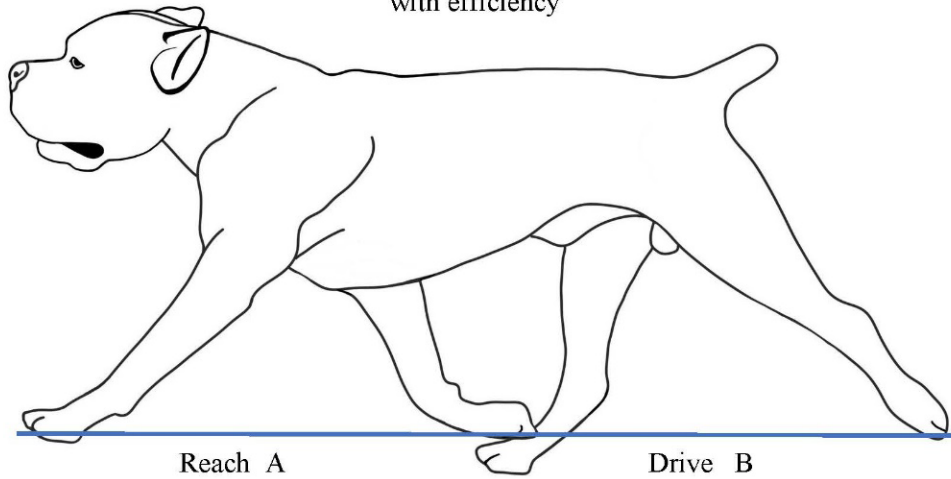


The Rear



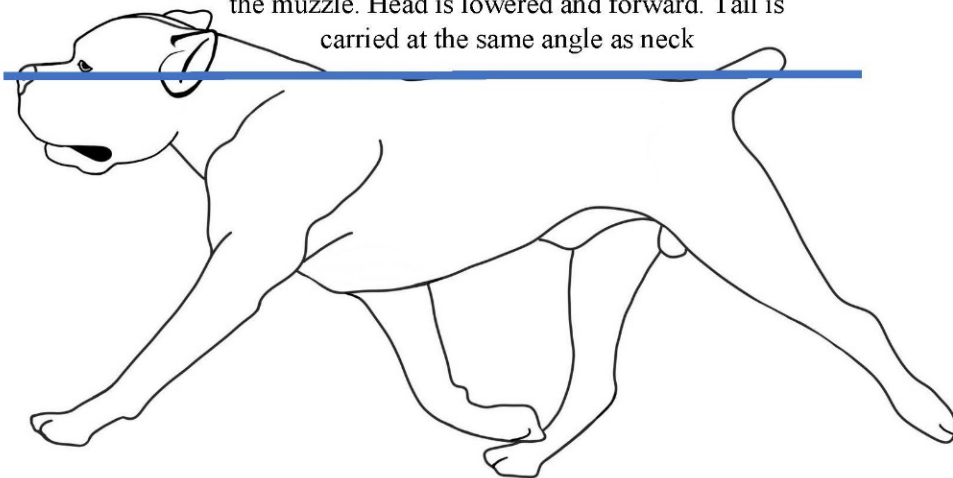
Movement

The Extended Trot is the Corso's Primary gait. He uses it to cover ground quickly with efficiency



Reach and drive are of equal length

Backline is level in motion and on the same plane as the muzzle. Head is lowered and forward. Tail is carried at the same angle as neck



Coming and going is clean and feet move under the body.

Technical Characteristics (Standard wording in Italics)

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 cheekbones is more than twice the total length of the head; skin is firm and smooth.

The head of the Cane Corso should capture your attention. The head is large in relation to the rest of the body, with a length slightly greater than 1/3 of the height at the withers. The profile of the headpiece is defined by a muzzle to skull proportion of 1:2. NOTE: this measurement for muzzle length is the extremity, not the midpoint. The Muzzle should not be shorter than 1/3 of the entire length of the head. The Head planes formed by the top of the muzzle and top of the skull are slightly convergent, ideally intersecting at the tip of the nose. The bridge of the muzzle is horizontal. The surfaces should appear linear, giving a "hard" or "chiseled" look.

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 backward 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 a cube, broad, deep and wide. The back skull makes a horizontal line from ear to ear. **The ears are wide set.** Creating the impression of the "top of the Square". The side planes of the head are parallel to each other, creating the "sides of the square". **Ears set is as wide as the cheeks. The top of the skull, from brow back, is flattened and raising slightly toward the occipital.** The forehead is NOT bulging or voluminous

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 slightly less than vertical 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. **The Brow is pronounced.** The Dogs that do not have a marked stop or do not exhibit the deep frontal hollow are to be faulted.

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

The eyes should be wide set in a sub-frontal position, above the plane of the muzzle and angled slightly higher at the outer corner. Corso should be able to look over his muzzle without turning his head. Round, bulging eyes are to be faulted as bulging eyes are a liability in a breed that has a history as a hunter and combat dog.

The eye color should match some shade within the coat color. The lighter the coloring of the coat, the lighter the eyes. A black or dark-coated dog would have a darker eye. In brindled dogs, the eyes may match the Fawn base coat/coat's lightest color. The eye color of a Corso should not be judged using an eye color chart.

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 **Earset is wide on the back skull.** 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. Head loses nobility and type.

While uncropped ears are acceptable, cropped ears are preferred; for historical preservation of the breed function, appearance and hygiene. The CCAA endorses only ear cropping performed by a veterinarian under humane and 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 open and unrestricted nostrils**. Its top plane is level with the muzzle and its front face is vertical and blends well with the front face of the muzzle. It is not recessed or extend past the vertical line of the muzzle. The nose forms the 90 degree corner of the square muzzle. **Lack of Pigmentation on the nose is a serious fault.**

***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. **Ideally, It is 1/3 the total length of the head or slightly longer, not shorter.** The muzzle should not be narrow or cone-shaped. When viewed from the top it is wide with the sidelines being parallel. The front face 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 chin should never protrude neither should it be weak. A few wrinkles on the muzzle are tolerated as indicative that the breed is indeed a Molosser.

The muzzle is slightly less deep than it is long. The depth is skeletal. Excessively 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.*

The “U” shape formed by the lips is Moderate. It should not be extreme as to give a “bully” expression.

***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.** If the dog is correct in every aspect of type then the bite should have less weight in the selection. Tighter dental closure is preferred. Undershot may be no more than 1/4 inch, meaning that **up to 1/4 inch is completely acceptable** as it most often gives the desired effect of a deep square muzzle with a flat anterior face. The canines of a Cane Corso are divergent (they are set on angles that oppose each other) accompanied by **incisors should be in straight line, bringing width to the muzzle.** Generally speaking, when teeth are congenitally missing in this breed they are premolars, this is a byproduct of the shortening of the jaw/muzzle. The teeth of the Cane Corso are strong, white and of notable size.

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 for breed. **Judge the head, than the bite.**

Serious Faults:

Excessively short muzzle, extremely convergent planes of the skull and muzzle, an excessive rise of the forehead from the stop/domed skull, tipped up muzzle, tipped up, recessed nose, protruding chin, and round eyes. are all characteristics of an incorrect head type. Nothing about a Corso head should be reminiscent of another breed such as Bullmastiff or Boxer.

On the opposite end of the spectrum: excessively long and /or narrow muzzle, parallel planes of the skull and muzzle, shallow, sloping or absent stop, small nose and incisors set in a semi-circle are all characteristics of an incorrect head type reminiscent of another breed such as Rottweiler or German Shepherd.

The Body

***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 neck is moderate in length, falling between a galloper and trotter. The neck is well merged with the withers, shoulder and chest. 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 or carried at 10:00 at a trot.

***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 Corso is rectangular in proportion; Distinctly longer than tall. The Length is in the rib cage, not the loin! The ribs are long and well sprung to accommodate the Cane Corso's 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 the Corso is wide an oval shape. Forechest is muscled and prominent. The floor of the chest sits right at the elbow. Its width is slightly greater than a 1/3 of the height of the withers; the breast-bone is at the same height as the tip of the shoulders.

***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, rounded, or broken topline is very undesirable in the Corso.

***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. A broad and solid loin is an important functional quality in the dog.

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 rear drive to the front assembly, 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 slightly sloping and yet maintaining an open pelvis tilt allowing for ample back reach in the lengthened trot. A steep croup is a serious fault since it means an insufficiently angulated posterior and severely limits the reach.

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. 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 and 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 a **wide, deep oval shape**, well muscled and powerful. **Viewed from the side;** forechest is distinct. The length of the front limb to the elbow should be one-half the height at the withers. **Narrow or shallow chests or are a serious fault.**

Shoulders: Muscular, laid back. **Upper arms:** Strongly muscled, with good bone, powerful.

Scapula and humerus are of equal length. The front apparatus is equipped with long, powerful and well divided muscles. The shoulder and upper arm are long, correctly slanted and of relatively equal in length. **Steep, shoulders, Short upper arm or restricted movement is to be severely penalized.**

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

The elbows are adherent but not too close to the ribcage, must be strictly parallel with the bottom plane of the trunk. The tip of the elbow is located on the vertical line lowered from back angle of the shoulder-blade to the ground. **The elbows set well under the body** in order to best carry the front of the dog.

Forelegs: straight and with good bone well muscled.

It is perfectly vertical with several muscles, in particular in the top-third, with a very strong and compact bone structure.

Pasterns: Almost straight, strong but flexible.

It is smaller than the forearm and is very strong, lean, elastic, slightly flexed. Seen from the front, it follows the perpendicular line of the forearm and of the carpus. A pastern should never be 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. 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 are not desirable. 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.

In synthesis, it is very important that the entire croup-pelvis-buttock-thigh complex be balanced, powerful and well-developed. Pelvis, upper and lower thigh and hock are all relatively equal in length. Weak hindquarters are a serious fault.

Thighs: Long, wide, angulated and well muscled.

Upper and lower thigh are comparative in length.

Stifle: Should be moderately angulated, strong.

Angulation is moderate. A perpendicular line goes from the point of buttock to the toes. Straight in the stifle is a very common fault in the Corso and should not be rewarded. A judge should realize that the Corso has less angulation than some working breeds but should be careful not to overlook what is correct. Remember the rule of thumb is the straight line from the point of buttocks to toes being the correct amount. Over angulation forces the leg too far back, in order to have the hocks in the correct 90-degree angle with the ground.

Legs: Strong bone and muscle structure.

Hocks: The Corso has a moderate hock height. Hocks, pasterns and feet are parallel when viewed from behind.

Rear pastern: straight and parallel.

Are of moderate length and Always positioned at a 90 degree angle to the ground when the dog is static.

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.

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 significant historical value.

Solid Black

Fawns- Range from light fawn to dark apricot red, have either black or grey pigment, can have subtle counter shading of light fawn on the underside of the body or carbonation (black or grey tipped guard hairs) on ears, shoulders and tail

Grey- Range from charcoal, slate to light grey. They often have light amber eyes but in some cases the eye is as dark as brown. Grey and grey brindles are a dilute and will have grey pigment.

Brindles- come in black, grey or chestnut. The brindling can be slight or heavy. The base color ranges from light fawn to a deeper apricot red. The eye, again, is self coloring and usually matches the lightest color of the base coat.

White patterns are common on the chin, neck, chest, feet and pasterns; occasionally on the belly and bridge of the muzzle.

Color is considered cosmetic in this breed. Unless it is a stated DQ in the standard, it should have no bearing on a judge's decision or award. All colors listed are historic and none is preferred.

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 the examination of a judge because he is obedient. He should be approached with confident indifference, from the front and not with full eye contact. **Timidity or fear should be considered a serious fault and never be rewarded.**

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 labor 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-lumbar 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.

This Manual 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, Chair

CCAA Judges seminar

“Il Cane Corso” by Antonio Morsiani and Stefano Gandolfi

Diagrams used with permission

For more information regarding Cane Corso breed Education contact

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The seminar and list of mentors can be found at www.canecorso.org on the Breed Education page.