

The Great Dane Breed Standard

An Illustrated Commentary on the FCI Breed Standard No. 235 (2024)

With a Complete Analysis of the 2012–2024 Revisions



FOREWORD

The publication of the updated Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI) Standard N° 235 on August 21, 2024, marks a pivotal moment in the history of the Great Dane. A breed standard is not merely a checklist for dog shows; it is an architectural blueprint, a historical legacy, and a practical genetic map.

This commentary bridges the gap between official standard phrasing and real-world application. Designed for breeders, championship judges, veterinary professionals, and dedicated exhibitors, this volume analyzes every clause of the standard, contrasts the 2012 and 2024 revisions, and outlines the physical and behavioral priorities necessary to preserve the "Apollo amongst all breeds".

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS

History of the Great Dane Standard

The Great Dane's physical layout reflects its origins as a large boar-hunting hound capable of tackling formidable game, blended with the elegance of noble estate guardians. As early regional types in Germany evolved into a unified breed, early standards sought to lock in a combination of high-substance physical power and aristocratic refinement. The FCI standard has undergone periodic revisions—most notably in 2012 and 2024—to refine technical measurements, reflect emerging health and welfare priorities, and clarify breeding allowances.

Purpose of Breed Standards

A breed standard serves three primary roles:

1. **A Uniform Judging Guide:** Ensures consistency across show rings globally.
2. **A Breeder's Blueprint:** Directs selection decisions to preserve breed type, health, and structural balance.
3. **An Educational Resource:** Informs the public, veterinarians, and canine authorities on correct breed traits.

How Standards Should Be Read

A standard must be read holistically rather than as isolated clauses. Features like the head, topline, or movement do not exist independently; they function as an integrated biomechanical unit.

How Judges Should Interpret Standards

Judges must look for balance, overall type, and functional correctness first, evaluating faults according to their degree of deviation from the ideal and their impact on the dog's health and welfare.

How Breeders Should Use Standards

Breeders must use the standard as a tool for structural compensation and long-term planning, avoiding the trap of breeding for individual hyper-exaggerations at the expense of overall harmony and health.

PART I: Understanding Breed Standards

- **Why Breed Standards Exist:** To preserve the functional heritage, distinct silhouette, and temperament of a breed across generations.
- **Breed Type vs. Individual Dogs:** "Breed type" is the combination of features (proportions, head structure, coat, carriage) that makes a Great Dane instantly recognizable. An individual dog may possess high quality while deviating in specific areas; recognizing true type prevents judges from awarding a generic, balanced dog that lacks true Great Dane character.
- **Faults vs. Priorities:** Not all faults carry equal weight. A cosmetic flaw (e.g., slight color nuance) should not take precedence over structural or health-impairing defects, or compromised temperament.
- **Why No Dog Is Perfect:** The standard describes an ideal concept—a "noble statue".

Breeding and judging require evaluating trade-offs while prioritizing structural integrity, health, and true breed essence.

PART II: Evolution of the Great Dane Standard

History of FCI Standard No. 235

Standard No. 235 is maintained under the stewardship of Germany (the country of origin) within the FCI framework.

Key Revisions Timeline

- **2012 Revision (Published October 8, 2012):** Introduced the controversial allowance of the *Grautiger* (grey merle) within the breed framework, stating they were neither desirable nor disqualified, but instructing that they "must never obtain the highest grading".
- **2024 Revision (Published August 21, 2024):** Fully integrated and formally recognized the **Merle** as an official pattern within Variety 2, removed the restriction on top gradings for merles, introduced strict 1:1 head proportions, expanded dental tolerances, and explicitly prioritized "socially acceptable behaviour".

2024 BREED STANDARD REVISION

Published August 21, 2024

1 OFFICIAL MERLE RECOGNITION (VARIETY 2)

Classic Pattern

New: Merle Pattern

Merle pattern now eligible for all top gradings and championship points.

RESTRICTION REMOVED

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Prioritized Socially Acceptable Behaviour

Breed standard explicitly favors stable, reliable, and social temperament as a primary requirement.

2 STRICT 1:1 HEAD PROPORTIONS

1:1 Ratio

Tip of Nose to Stop

Stop to Occiput

Mandatory 1:1 ratio. Must be precise to be correct.

3 EXPANDED DENTAL TOLERANCES

2023: Strict Bite Pattern

2024: Expanded Tolerance Zones

Increased flexibility for minor variations in jaw and tooth placement.

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Prioritized Socially Acceptable Behaviour

BREED WELCOMING

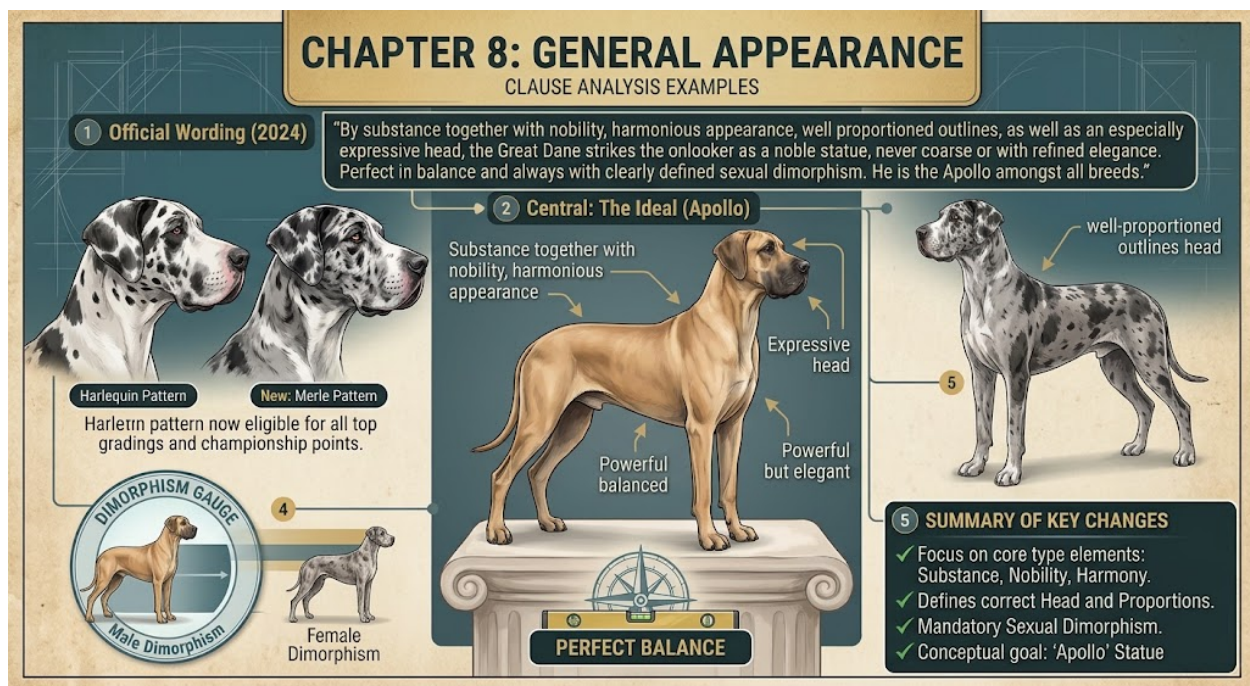
5 SUMMARY OF KEY CHANGES

- ✓ Fully integrated Merle pattern, strict 1:1 head proportions, championship points.
- ✓ Increased flexibility for minor variations in jaw and tooth placement.
- ✓ Breed standard quality favors stable, reliable, and social temperament as a primary requirement.

PART III: Complete Clause-by-Clause Commentary

Clause Analysis Examples

General Appearance Official Wording (2024): *"By substance together with nobility, harmonious appearance, well proportioned outlines, as well as an especially expressive head, the Great Dane strikes the onlooker as a noble statue, never coarse or with refined elegance. Perfect in balance and always with clearly defined sexual dimorphism. He is the Apollo amongst all breeds."*



- **Commentary:** The standard demands a balance between massive substance and elegant nobility. A dog that is overly heavy becomes coarse, while a dog that is overly light loses breed type. Sexual dimorphism must be distinct: dogs must look masculine, and bitches feminine.
- **Ring Application:** Assess the standing silhouette from a distance before examining individual body parts.

Important Proportions

- **Official Wording (2024):** *"Almost square in build, this applies particularly to males. Females can be a little longer in body."*

- **Commentary:** The length of body (measured from the point of the sternum to the point of the ischium) should not exceed the height at the withers by more than 5% in males and 10% in females.
- **Common Breeder Errors:** Selecting for overly long backs to gain reach in gait, which weakens the topline and breaks the characteristic square outline.

Behaviour / Temperament

- **Official Wording (2024):** *"Friendly, loving and devoted to his owners. Might be reserved towards strangers, but required is a confident, fearless, easily tractable, docile companion and family dog with high resistance to provocation and without aggression. Socially acceptable behaviour is of the utmost importance."*
- **Commentary & 2024 Addition:** The addition of *"Socially acceptable behaviour is of the utmost importance"* reflects modern public expectations and breed preservation priorities. A giant dog must display a steady disposition and a high provocation threshold.
- **Ring Application:** Any display of unprovoked aggression, extreme shy behavior, or fear-biting requires immediate disqualification.

PART IV: Detailed 2012–2024 Revisions Analysis

1. Formal Recognition of the Merle

- **2012 Position:** Grey Merles (*Grautiger*) were acknowledged but classified as undesirable traits that could not receive top show awards (*Vorzüglich* / Excellent).
- **2024 Revision:** Merle is now fully integrated into **Variety 2** (Harlequin, Merle, Black). The standard defines Merle as a grey base coat with irregular, torn, jet-black spots, including the "Mantel Merle" pattern.
- **Impact:** Broadens the genetic pool for Harlequin breeding programs without penalizing coat patterns produced in Harlequin litters.

2. Dental Tolerance Expansion

- **2012 Position:** Allowed the absence of PM1s only in the lower jaw.
- **2024 Revision:** Permits the absence of up to **two P1 teeth in either the upper or lower jaw**.
- **Impact:** Reduces harsh penalties for minor dental variations that do not affect jaw function or health.

3. Precision in Head Structure

- **2012 Position:** Distance from nose to stop and stop to occiput was to be "as equal as possible".
- **2024 Revision:** Explicitly mandates a **Ratio 1:1**, adds "angular" to descriptions of the head, front muzzle, and top skull, and defines parallel upper planes.

4. Health and Welfare Disqualifications

- **New 2024 Additions:**

- **Blindness or Deafness:** Explicitly added as disqualifying faults.
- **Permanent Rolled-In Lip (Entropion of lip):** Disqualifies dogs with persistent rolled-in lips that cause inflammation, swelling, or mucosal injury.

PART V: Structural & Anatomical Blueprint

A functional Great Dane requires correct bone structure and angulation to support its weight efficiently:

The Front Assembly: The shoulder blade (scapula) and upper arm (humerus) should form a sound angle to allow free forward reach. Loose, loaded, or overly upright shoulders limit movement.

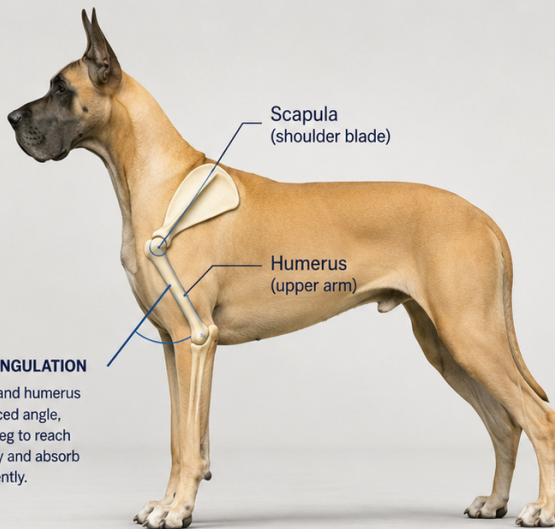
THE FRONT ASSEMBLY

The shoulder blade (scapula) and upper arm (humerus) should form a sound angle to allow free forward reach.

Loose, loaded, or overly upright shoulders limit movement.

CORRECT ANGULATION

The scapula and humerus form a balanced angle, allowing the leg to reach forward freely and absorb impact efficiently.



CORRECT – WELL ANGULATED



Balanced shoulder angle allows free forward reach, efficient movement, and good weight distribution.

INCORRECT – UPRIGHT SHOULDERS



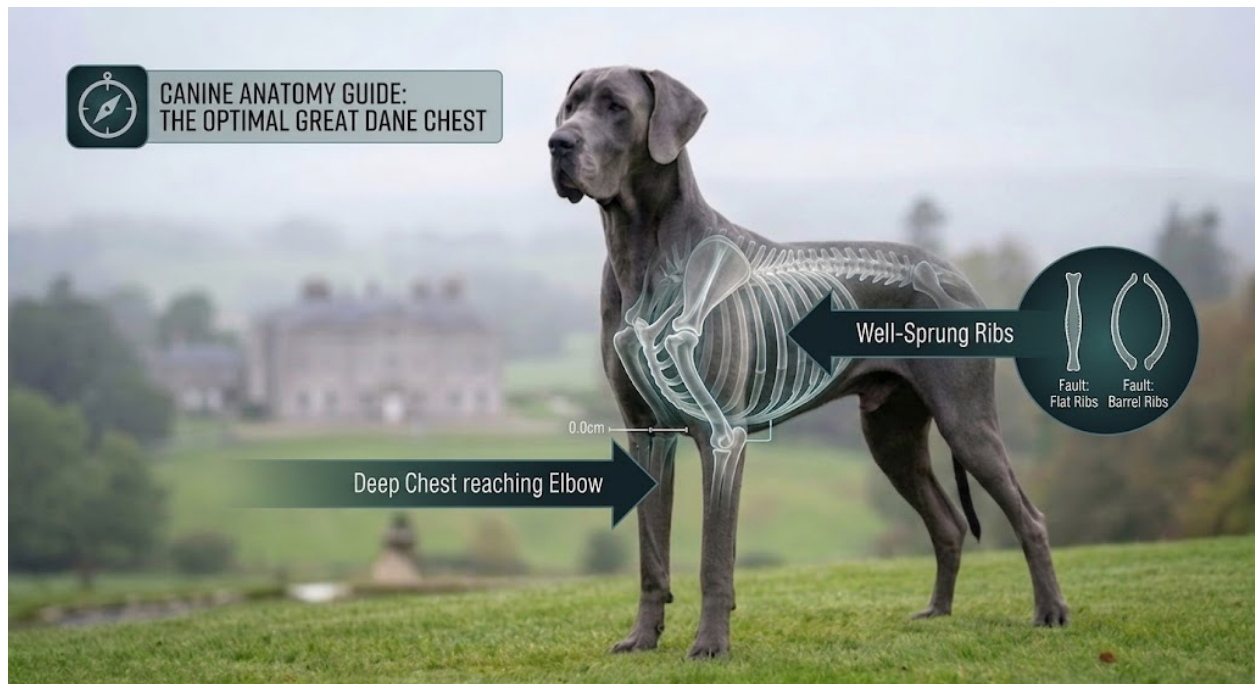
Overly upright shoulders restrict forward reach, causing choppy movement and increased impact on the body.

INCORRECT – LAYED BACK / LOADED



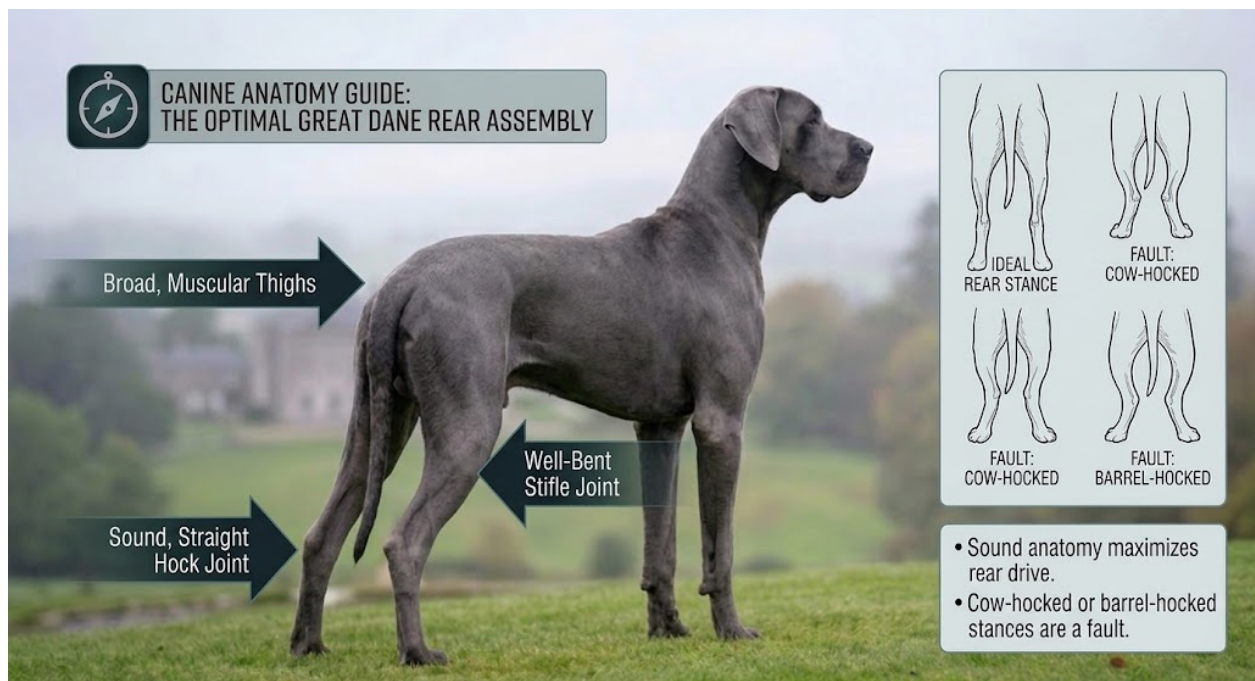
Overly laid back shoulders reduce reach, placing more weight on the front assembly and limiting efficiency.

Chest & Ribcage: Deep chest reaching the elbow, with well-sprung ribs that are neither flat nor barrel-shaped.



Topline & Loin: A short, firm, and muscular back sloping imperceptibly to the rear. Sway or roached backs disrupt movement efficiency.

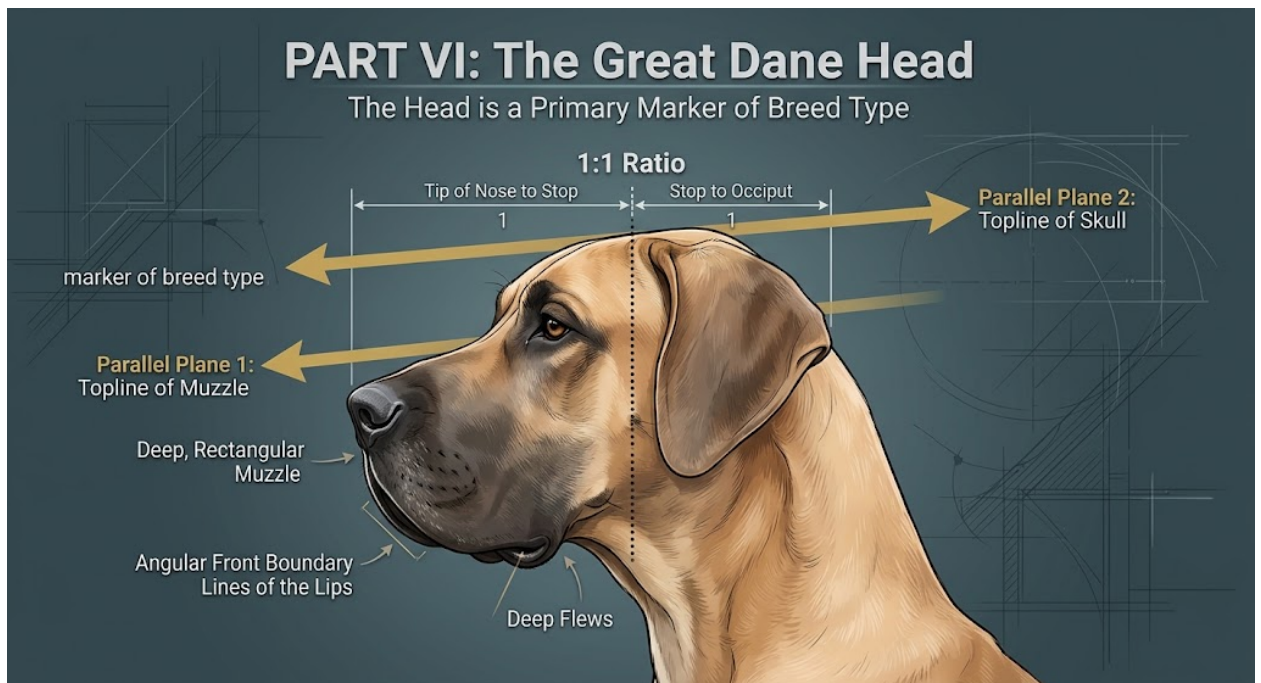
Rear Assembly: Broad, muscular thighs with well-bent stifles and sound hocks. Cow-hocked or barrel-hocked stances reduce rear drive.



PART VI: The Great Dane Head

The head is a primary marker of breed type.

- **Parallel Planes:** The top line of the muzzle and the top line of the skull must run parallel.
- **1:1 Ratio:** Equal distance from tip of nose to stop, and from stop to occiput.
- **Muzzle & Lips:** Deep, rectangular muzzle with angular front boundary lines of the lips and deep flews.



PART VII: Colour Varieties & Genetics

The FCI 2024 standard categorizes Great Danes into three distinct judging varieties:

Variety 1: Fawn & Brindle

- **Fawn:** Pale golden yellow to deep yellow-gold with a black mask. Small white markings on the chest are permitted.
- **Brindle:** Basic color golden yellow to deep yellow-gold with clear, evenly distributed black stripes running in the direction of the ribs. Small white markings on chest permitted.



Variety 2: Harlequin, Merle, and Black

- **Harlequin:** Pure white base coat with torn, jet-black patches distributed across the body.
- **Merle:** Grey base coat with irregular, torn jet-black spots. Includes *Mantel Merle* (grey-black spotting covering the back like a blanket with white muzzle, neck, chest, belly, legs, and tail tip).
- **Black:** Shiny black coat. Includes *Mantel* (black blanket covering body with white markings) and *Plattenhunde* (white base with large black patches).
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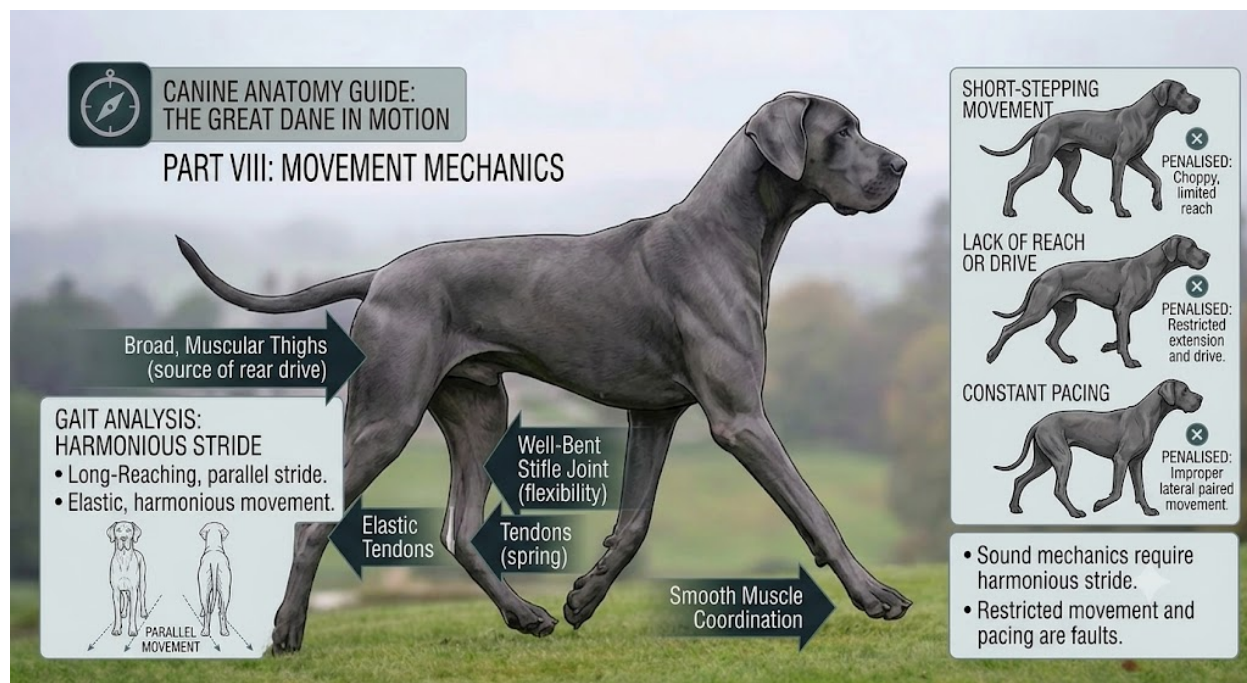
Variety 3: Blue

- **Blue:** Pure steel-blue color. White markings on chest and feet are permitted.



PART VIII: Movement Mechanics

- **Gait:** The Great Dane moves with a long-reaching, harmonious, and elastic stride. Legs must move parallel when viewed from the front or rear.
- **Fault Gait Patterns:** Short-stepping movement, lack of reach or drive, and constant pacing are penalised.
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PART IX: Ring Judging & Decision-Making

Ring Priorities Order

1. **Health, Welfare & Temperament:** Confirm steady disposition; eliminate aggressive, overly shy, or health-impaired dogs.
2. **Overall Balance & Silhouette:** Confirm square proportions, proper substance, and noble carriage.
3. **Head & Breed Expression:** Verify parallel planes, 1:1 ratios, and correct expression.
4. **Structural Efficiency & Gait:** Check side reach, rear drive, and clean movement coming and going.

PART X: Breeding Decisions & Herd Planning

- **Structural Compensation:** Never pair two dogs that share the same structural fault (e.g., weak pasterns or straight shoulders).
- **Managing Coat Genetics:** Work within recognized color varieties to avoid disqualifying white patterns, silver-blue/isabella coats, or miscolorations.

PART XI: Comprehensive Fault Analysis

Faults (Deviations from Standard)

- **Head & Muzzle:** Insufficient stop, occasional presence of a rolled-in lip.
- **Dentition:** Irregular incisors, partial pincer bite.
- **Ears & Neck:** Ears set too high/low, lying flat or standing out; ewe neck ("sheep neck").
- **Body & Limbs:** Loose/loading shoulders, back rising toward the rear, flat or barrel ribs, bent forearms, weak pasterns, cow-hocks.

Severe Faults

- **Skin:** Strong wrinkles on muzzle/cheeks, pronounced dewlap.
- **Head & Topline:** Apple head, round top skull, sway back or roach back, overly sloping or horizontal croup.
- **Gait:** Constant pacing, short-stepping gait.

Disqualifying Faults

- **Temperament:** Aggressive, overly shy, or fear-biting dogs.
- **Health & Senses:** Blindness or deafness; permanent rolled-in lip causing mucosal

injury/inflammation.

- **Structure & Dentition:** Overshot, undershot, or wry mouth; pincer bite; missing more than two P1 teeth[cite: 1].
- **Color Exclusions:** Silver-blue or isabella fawns/brindles; solid colors with broad white collars, blazes, or stockings; albino white dogs; porcelain Danes[cite: 1].

PART XII: Judges' Examination & Training Guide

Mock Examination Questions

1. *What is the maximum body length deviation allowed relative to height at withers for male Great Danes?*
 - **Answer:** Males are almost square; body length must not exceed height at withers by more than 5%[cite: 1].
2. *Describe the missing tooth allowance introduced in the 2024 FCI Standard No. 235.*
 - **Answer:** The absence of up to two P1 teeth in either the upper or lower jaw is tolerated[cite: 1].
3. *How does the 2024 standard classify a Merle Great Dane?*
 - **Answer:** Recognized within Variety 2 as a grey base coat with irregular, torn jet-black spots, eligible for all awards[cite: 1].

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Summary Checklist of 2012 vs. 2024 Revisions

- **Temperament:** Added mandatory emphasis on "Socially acceptable behaviour"[cite: 1].
- **Head Ratio:** Defined strictly as 1:1 ratio[cite: 1].
- **Head Lines:** Added "angular" requirement for head front view, top skull, and muzzle boundary[cite: 1].
- **Dentition:** Expanded P1 absence tolerance up to two teeth in upper or lower jaw[cite: 1].
- **Merle:** Formally recognized in Variety 2[cite: 1].
- **Disqualifications:** Added blind/deaf Danes and persistent rolled-in lips causing inflammation[cite: 1].

Sources

1. <https://gesunde-dogge.de/en/information-en/classic-type-vs-hyper-type>
2. <https://gdai.ie/history/fci-breed-standard/>
3. <https://gdai.ie/history/fci-breed-standard/>