

# *The Neapolitan Mastiff*



## *Breed Education Supplement*

Presented by:

*United States Neapolitan Mastiff Club*  
(rev. 2024)

# *United States Neapolitan Mastiff Club*

## *Table of Contents*

History of the Neapolitan Mastiff	3
History of the Neapolitan Mastiff in the United States	3
Commentary By Legendary Italian Judges	4
- Mario Perricone	5
- Arch. Giuseppe Alessandra	8
- Antonio di Lorenzo	14
- Michele Palazzo	17
- Dr. Massimo Inzoli	19
Past Gazette Articles of Interest	22
- Preserving Uniqueness	23
- Examining the Mastino	24
- Assessing Movement	25
- Not Elegant, Cat-like	26
- Muzzle, Lips and Bite	27
- Judging: Traffic Cop Gastalt	28
- Same Words, Different Language	29
- New but Common Misconceptions	30
- A Few Common Questions about the Neapolitan Mastiff	31
- Don't Fear Correct Temperament	35

# History

## *History of the Neapolitan Mastiff*

Synonymous of the Italian Mastiff, this large breed is the result of at least four thousand years of both natural and human selection based on the various descriptions obtained as a gift from the past. According to different sources, the progenitor of this mastiff is a Tibetan dog which directly affected the phenotype of the Persian Mastiff used in battle by King Porus against Alexander The Great.

It was Alexander The Great who admired the strength of these dogs and brought them to his kingdom in Greece to a region of Epirus called "Molossia" (from which the term Molossus used by the Romans to describe this dog, freely translated in English a Molossian), and thereafter, were bred for many years. The Roman Emperor Paolo Emilio, at his triumphal return to Rome after a military campaign in Greece, brought a hundred of these dogs back as war booty. Based on reports of Quinto Aurelio Simmaco, the Romans widely employed these dogs for their fighting games at the Colosseum ("giochi circensis").

At the time of Julius Caesar, the original Greek strain was supposedly bred with the mastiffs encountered during the military campaign in Britannia (the actual Great Britain), most likely brought there by the Phoenicians.

The status of this breed following the decline of the Roman empire is less clear but the breed fortunately survived the Medieval Ages as witnessed by several authors who cite this dog in their works (see the Molossian in the literature).

During this age Molossian dogs were used for guarding castles and for wild boar hunting. A crucial step for the selection of the present day phenotype of the N.M. was the contribution of the Spanish "Perro de Presa" that was bred with the ancient Italian mastiff at the time of the Spanish domination in southern Italy; (the so called "Kingdom of the two Sicilys") around the middle of the XV century (1450 A.D.)

This dog became in vogue for kings as well as for their servants in the region ruled by the royal families of Aragona and later Borboni. This was so evident that the mastiff became a common theme in both sculptures and paintings present throughout the southern Italian peninsula.

In the centuries that followed the end of the Spanish kingdom, in Italy the breed survived in the countryside around Naples thanks to the devotion of individuals who loved the strength, the character, and the loyalty of this dog.

The Italian nickname used to describe these N.M. owners ("Mastinari") is still used by the Italian breeders in southern Italy. However, the contribution of these people would have been unrecognized without the work of another passionate writer, Piero Scanziani, who, following World War II, collected some subjects from the Neapolitan countryside and bred them at the zoo in Rome. This led to the official recognition of this ancient dog in Italy in 1949 by the Italian Kennel Club (ENCI).

## *History Of The Neapolitan Mastiff In The United States*

- The Neapolitan Mastiff has been documented in the United States since the early 1970's when ads for an "Italian Bulldog" appeared in the New York papers.
- The NMCA (Neapolitan Mastiff Club of America) was founded in 1973 by Michael Sottile Sr., Jane and Carmine Pampalone. This was the first United States registry established for the breed at this time. The NMCA acted as the focal point for information on the breed, distributed a newsletter, and hosted a few select large-scale rare-breed shows.
- During the early 1990's, two clubs formed, one being the ANMA (American Neapolitan Mastiff Association), and the other was the USNMC (United States Neapolitan Mastiff Club). In 1991 the nucleus of the founding members of the USNMC were located in the Northeast. The USNMC incorporated in this year and with use of computerization focused on the need to procure a new and viable registry. They worked to improve on education, and promotion of the breed by hosting local rare-breed shows. Shortly thereafter Michael Sottile retired and relocated from the Northeast and the USNMC would become the main registry for the Neapolitan Mastiff.
- It is safe to say that all dogs in the United States today are descendants of dogs obtained from nearly all of the most renowned breeders in Italy. Those Americans serious about breeding then went on to develop their own kennel names, which should appear on the progeny of dogs originating from a successful American breeding kennel.

*Commentary  
By  
Legendary  
Italian  
Judges*

The following commentary from five Italian Judges gives insight into the thoughts of breed experts.

# Commentary

## *Breed Commentary by Mario Perricone*

*Mario Perricone was an FCI all-breed judge and was a member of the FCI "Standards Commission." He was the author of many books, and in 1990 was awarded the "A Life for a Dog" Award in Naples. This commentary was originally published in the ATIMANA handbook. The ATIMANA is the International organization for lovers of the Neapolitan Mastiff.*

To fully understand the Neapolitan Mastiff, before even reading the breed standard, one needs to sit down calmly in front of it and patiently observe the rippling movements of its body while listening to its guttural rumblings. One must scrutinize the expressions created by the wrinkles and folds of the skin on its head, in order to notice the fasciculation which alternately intensify or soften the features of the mask designed on its face, or which ruffle the great coat which drapes its body. Only then can someone seek to understand the message it is trying to convey when it widens the thick eyelids to expose its eyes (like crevices in a mountain), revealing an expression of joy and intelligence. Only someone with passion and concern for the breed who can decode its body language, vocal and visual expressions, will be able to gain a true understanding of body language, vocal and visual expressions, will be able to gain a true understanding of its personality, and thereby learn the secrets hiding behind its enigmatic expression which is both serious and smiling at the same time.

After becoming better acquainted with the Neapolitan Mastiff, one will more easily understand the breed standard, which may otherwise seem somewhat obscure. It will then be easier to interpret the standard and thus understand and evaluate this dog, whose long evolution has produced characteristics which may seem nonsensical, and which gave it a flavor of the fantastic and even the surreal. I make this observation on the grounds of my conviction that a breed standard cannot be satisfactorily interpreted through a straight evaluation based on purely standardized measurements of canine conformation. One cannot treat the assessment of a dog as one would a mathematical problem.

The study of the breed standard of the Neapolitan Mastiff should provide a means of appreciating its living and dynamic structure as a complement to the emotions and impressions it arouses in one who has been fortunate enough to uncover its complex and often contradictory personality. Measurements of a dog's body parts, while necessary, can never create a through description of a whole breed. One would run the risk of examining a dog as if it were nothing but a piece of machinery or an animated domestic appliance. Rather, a breed commentary should help breeders, judges, and enthusiasts to gain an overall picture of the breed by noting and explaining the individual characteristics, which can be defined as typical of the breed.

### HEAD

The head is unique. There is none like it among all other canines. It is difficult however, to describe it and just as difficult to acquire the correct concept of it. It is massive and brachycephalic. This means that the bone structure is very heavy and that the width of the cranium as measured between the cheekbones (zygomatic arches) is greater than half the total length of the head.

It is covered by loose skin which forms well-delineated wrinkles and folds. If these wrinkles and folds should be missing the head would not be that of a Mastino. If on the other hand, the skin were too copious, to the point of excess, then the wrinkles and folds would be improperly formed and confused in their design, and therefore would not make a correct head type. In addition, this overly excessive loose skin is an indication that the bone structure of the entire head and the muscles which cover it are not strong, as they should be in a dog which is bred to be able to use its jaws for biting. Also, this excessively loose skin is often a sign of a lymphatic problem that is associated with a generalized constitutional weakness.

Viewed from the side, the head must show perfect parallelism of the cranio-facial axes. Convergence of these axes (the top plans of the cranium and the muzzle) is a serious fault. Divergence of these planes is worse yet.

The cranium is broad, flat between the ears, slightly convex in the anterior part, and should never tend towards the spherical. Any rounding, which extends toward the posterior part of the cranium

# Commentary

should be penalized, as this would make the head too much like that of the Bulldog.

The stop is well defined. The muzzle measures half the length of the cranium, and as viewed from the front, is wide, deep and more or less square. The head is adorned with abundant, thick lips, which should never be flaccid. The upper lips, seen from the front, join in an upside-down "V" shape, with the chin very pronounced between the two halves. Seen from the side, the upper lips form the lower profile of the muzzle.

The mandible is large and powerful with well-developed incisors that close in either scissors or level bite. The teeth should be present in their entirety. The closure of the incisors, as specified by the breed standard, has caused some perplexity. In fact, cases do occur in which the maxilla (lower jaw) is shorter than the mandible (upper jaw), with the result that the lower incisors protrude beyond the upper ones, forming a prognathism or undershot jaw. This prognathic complex is further characterized by converging cranio-facial axes and an unusually short muzzle. In such a case, the Neapolitan Mastiff would lose its typical expression to the point that it would seem "Boxerish" and bear too close a resemblance to the Dogue de Bordeaux.

Prognathism in the breed has become rarer, and when it is present, certainly less pronounced. This is not, therefore, a thing that should worry anybody too greatly. Unfortunately, some breeders who do not understand the true spirit of the breed standard have been worried that a dog with an undershot jaw might be eliminated from shows as a result of this defect. This is a very remote possibility. It may occur if the prognathism is so pronounced that it deforms the muzzle. If it is not so prominent, it should be considered one of the many possible deviations from the standard, and indeed it does not disqualify a well-built and exemplary dog from gaining the highest honors available.

Certain words taken from the Neapolitan dialect exist which are useful for the description of various serious defects of the head (a capa). It is "tonna" if the cranium is rounded and the muzzle too short; "camusa" if the muzzle is arched downward and the nose droops; "cinocogna" (donkey-like) if it has no stop, with a long and even divergent muzzle; "e pecora" if the chin is too weak.

## CONSTRUCTION

The dog should be massive and powerful with a heavy bone structure and full, solid muscles which, though covered at all times by thick, loose skin, should be visible when the dog is in action. To serve its purpose in supporting the head and in balancing the complex movements of the dog, the neck should be extremely powerful. To protect the throat, the lower part of the neck has a dewlap which is divided into two parts, beginning at the jawbone and finishing halfway down the neck. If this dewlap is too profuse and looks like a bib or ruff, it should be heavily penalized as a sign of lymphatism. The standard requires that the length of the trunk should be 10% greater than the height at the withers. What are we expected to do if it exceeds the height at the withers by 9% or 11%? Throw the dog away? As long as the thickness of the spinal discs gives the trunk the appearance of a compacted rectangle, this does not matter in the slightest.

Indeed, the thorax should be very broad and deep, with ribs that extend well back and a lumbar region that joins smoothly with the back and has a well-developed lateral musculature. The chest is ample and has full muscles. A chest that appears to be suspended between the upper sections of the forelimbs is a sign of constitutional weakness that should not be tolerated in a dog that must have great explosive power. The top line is straight with exceptionally powerful layers of muscle and a slightly sloping rump. The withers should not be too elevated. Particular attention should be paid to this factor at the current stage of the breed's evolution, because many dogs, owing to a lack of good musculature, or to a hunched spine, seem to be camel backed. A dog, showing these defects, in my opinion, cannot be awarded a maximum rating, even if the form of the head is exceptional.

The limbs have an extremely robust bone structure and should seem as straight and strong as granite columns. Unfortunately, today, short, narrow, or overly sloping rumps often lead to weak hindquarters, which lack suppleness and look like the thighs of a weak chicken. These should be heavily penalized, both by the judge in the ring, and by the breeder in selecting animals for breeding. The requisite angles for the limbs are well explained in the breed standard but are difficult to evaluate in a meaningful way. Indeed, owing to the looseness of the ligaments, which is a physiological characteristic of the Neapolitan Mastiff, they are very variable. Therefore, to accurately judge the

# Commentary

dog's conformation, which is actually an assessment of its function, it is necessary to pay close attention to the dog's movement.

## MOVEMENT

If the dog is walking at its slow and shuffling gait, it appears indolent and lazy, incapable of the explosive power needed for a guard dog, which must be able to chase and bring down an intruder. As a breed, the Neapolitan Mastiff often paces, and this bear-like gait does not constitute a defect.

At the trot, especially in action such as patrolling the boundaries of its territory, the Neapolitan Mastiff becomes a different, more determined and agile dog. The hindquarters have ample power to propel its considerable weight and the forelimbs stretch well forward. The Mastino movement is fluid and flat, and the bones of articulating joints may be seen to undulate beneath the thick skin. It is more feline than canine. It seems to be a panther, capable of overcoming impossible obstacles to bear down its prey.

## NATURAL BEHAVIOR

Its expression, which at first sight seems to be so detached and aloof, while at the same time attentive and alert, cannot hide its unconditional and absolute attachment to its home territory, where it lives with the family members and property entrusted to its protection. It is such a loyal and resolute guardian that it will not go far from home even if the territory is not enclosed. It is a true armed guard, always aware and ready, and it will allow no stranger to violate the boundaries of its territories.

It is not by nature an arrogant or proud dog. Perhaps it has occasionally been made so by people who believe they are the masters of a killer rather than of a sensitive and at times, shy creature.

It should be remembered that the Neapolitan Mastiff shows its true personality when it is defending the living space of its friends, especially at night when it is silent, tense, and as vigilant as a spider waiting in the shadows for the insect which sooner or later will become entangled in its web.



# Commentary

*Breed Commentary - Transcription of Lecture by Arch. Giuseppe Alessandra*  
In 1997 the United States Neapolitan Mastiff Club held its National Specialty in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. Arch. Giuseppe Alessandra judged at this show. Arch Alessandra is a long-time FCI all-breed judge, and author of a four-volume encyclopedia on the canines. He is founder and President of the ATIMANA, the Technical Society for the Lovers of the Neapolitan Mastiff and is frequently seen judging the Mastino in many countries around the world. On the Saturday evening after the 1997 USNMC National, he also gave a lecture on the Neapolitan Mastiff and participated in a question-and-answer session. This is a transcription of his lecture and of the following questions and answer session.

It is a pleasure to be with you. Because your club is the second-largest club in the world. In 1996 this club registered 851 pups and was second only to Italy. I believe that soon Italy will be number two. This is a wish that I hope with all my heart.

It is a pleasure to speak to you as the president of ATIMANA because our goal is to advertise to the entire world what a Neapolitan Mastiff should be. We want to advertise what a true mastiff should be because often you see dogs that are mastiffs only in name.

It is a pleasure also to speak with you because amongst you there are a lot of true lovers of Neapolitan Mastiffs, excellent breeders, and excellent judges. And finally, I am happy to speak in front of you because there are so many beautiful women. In Italy, the audience is mostly made up of ugly men!

I didn't bring any video or any pictures or any slides because the mastiff is a unique breed. There is no such thing as the perfect Mastino. Every dog is different from another dog. Although they are both mastiffs and both belong to the same breed. It is a breed that has a lot of type and therefore there are no two dogs that are exactly the same. Therefore, I think it is easier for you if I speak about the ideal model rather than speaking about individuals by showing you pictures of individual dogs. Mastiffs are dogs that must be seen. There is no video, no slide, no picture that can actually show what the Neapolitan Mastiff should look like.

I will try to be as simple and as clear as possible. This is not a lecture, but a discussion amongst friends about Neapolitan Mastiffs, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Let me start by saying, again, that this is a unique breed. And we must understand clearly one thing. The Neapolitan Mastiff is not like any other breed of dogs. It's not like in type, it's not like in build, it's not like in movement, it's not like in terms of temperament, or character. For this reason, it may be the most difficult breed to breed, to grow, and to judge. It's a very ancient breed, being 4000 years old, and when you see a Neapolitan you see History with the dog. You can say that the Neapolitan Mastiff is an archaeological find in modern breeding.

So, let's look at the general aspect of the dog. It's a dog that must appear massive. It must appear heavy. The legs are like columns in a building that must support a powerful animal. Just to give an example, a Neapolitan Mastiff must look like a Greek Temple, where you have the huge columns which support all the architecture, which is extremely heavy. The Neapolitan Mastiff is a Greek Temple, even now. Because it is a very harmonious dog. If you look at an ancient Greek temple, from any side, it's always a harmonious construction, and the Neapolitan Mastiff must be the same way.

There must be harmony between the muzzle and the head, harmony between the head and the body, harmony between the body and the legs. With that, it must be clear to all of you, that it should never never look light. It must never look weak. It must never appear not harmonious.

The head is what is most noticeable about the Neapolitan Mastiff. The head is made up of two cubes, one attached to the other. The muzzle is one, which represents 1/3 of the total length of the head. The width of the muzzle should be as close as possible as the length of the muzzle. It must have a very wide jaw, powerful teeth, and it must appear in the form of a cube from whichever way you look at it. The other cube is the cranium, the head, which must be twice the length of the muzzle. And here, as much as possible, the two sides of the head must be parallel. The cranium must be flat. And the ears must be very high.

That's the outline. On this construction, you have the wrinkles. The wrinkle must be clearly demarked. It must never be thin. It must be made up of very heavy skin. The most important thing,



# Commentary

when you look at the dog from the front, the upper lip must be an upside-down V. It must be a very abundant lip. And from the outside of the eye, you have two wrinkles, that seem to

have been put in by an axe, these come down to the jowls, which must be abundant and clearly separated into two dewlaps, which should droop about half-way down the neck.

In all this design of these wrinkles, you have the eyes which are the soul of the Neapolitan Mastiff. The eye must be as expressive as possible. It must show the ability of the dog. It should never be too light. If it is too light, (sky blue in color) the dog is disqualified. The eye must be a slit. When the dog looks at you, it looks as if it is scrutinizing you. It should never be too wide open, too prominent. And the lower eyelid should not be too relaxed. The expression of the eye should tell us immediately if we are looking at a male or a female. Because even the expression of the eye should clearly show the difference in sexual form.

The teeth must be complete. Because if you lack some of the teeth, the jaw gets shorter as you keep breeding the dog. And when I spoke to you about the two cubes before, the muzzle and the head, the axis of the muzzle and of the cranium must be parallel to one another. They must not be divergent or convergent. The teeth must go like a scissors or like a pincher. A little undershot is tolerated, but if there is too much it must be disqualified. And there is something that is must be fought in breeding the dogs. Because we have the undershot situation, the muzzle becomes shorter, and then the axis between the muzzle and the cranium becomes shorter. As an example of this, we have the Boxer, the Dogue de Bordeaux, and the Bulldog.

Regarding how much undershot is too much there is no manual. As far as I am concerned more than two or three millimeters is too much. Because it is a genetic characteristic, it is transmitted from generation to generation, so it must be carefully watched.

The neck must be extremely powerful and very noble. It cannot be straight. Because if the neck is straight, then the shoulder also becomes straight. It should come out from the withers with a nice arc up to the back of the head.

The chest must be very broad and never narrow or slab-sided. The shoulders must have an angle of about 70 degrees. The depth of the chest must be more than half of the height of the dog. The front legs must look like two columns. The feet must be compact, as compact as you can get them. And the pastern cannot be too weak, it cannot have a very sharp angle.

Topline as straight as possible. Again, it is wide and powerful. And the croup must be a continuation of the topline, slightly inclined. The tail must be attached, in a continuous line from the croup. The tail could be held slightly over the topline, never straight up like a pointer. Because this will be a disqualification.

The rear end must be extremely powerful. The minimum size for a female is 60 centimeters. And the maximum for the dog is 75 centimeters (about 31 inches). And a dog that is 75 centimeters, even 77 centimeters, in the best condition, should weight about 220 pounds. The rear end must be that powerful to propel a mastiff of that size. It must never be too much of an angle, if it had too much of an angle, it would be difficult to support that kind of weight. You see the large mammals; they have a shoulder that goes at an angle but have a straight posterior. The mastiff is another large mammal.

I haven't talked about the ears because ears can be cropped or uncropped. If they are cropped, they must be cropped very short. They must form a small triangle that ideally lies on top of the head. If they are not cropped, they should not be too long; they should come down parallel to the side of the face.

The coat must be short in every part of the body. It must never be of different lengths, and the length must be uniform on all parts of the body. In the face and on the muzzle, it is a little shorter, and of a velvet-like quality. The colors are black, gray, and lead, it could be also mahogany or tawny. They can be solid-colored or brindle. It could have a small white spot on the chest, not very wide, not very big. And it could have white on the feet, but it should not extend over the toes. There should never be a white spot on the head, that is a disqualification.

The skin must be thick and abundant throughout the entire body, but it must also display the volume of the muscles which must show enormous power in the neck, the shoulders, the kidneys, and the rear end. From 65 to 76 centimeters height for the male, from 60 to 68 centimeters for the female. You could tolerate 2 or 3 centimeters on the plus or the minus side, but it had better be on the plus side, not the minus side.

# Commentary

The relationship between the height at the withers and the length of the body is another of the basic characteristics of the breed. The length of the body is about 10% more than the height at the withers. In my personal opinion, I prefer a dog that is slightly longer rather than see a Neapolitan Mastiff like a square. Because the length of the body, the angle of the shoulder and the type of angle of the posterior which gives, in the Neapolitan Mastiff, the typical movement, motion, which is a step that is sort of a glide, that makes it very similar to the motion of a lion. I was pleased to see a video that compared the movement of the Neapolitan Mastiff to the motion of the large mammals. It's the best video I've seen in my life about the movement of the Neapolitan Mastiff because it is incredible to see how when he paces, he moves like a bear. And when he trots, he moves like a lion, even down to the movement of the shoulders, and a little pigeon-toed. The dog does not gallop very often, but when he does, he looks like one of the large felines. The movement is another of the very important characteristics of the breed.

The last of the characteristics of this breed is the temperament. It should never be uselessly aggressive. It does not bark continuously. If the Neapolitan Mastiff is by himself, very rarely will he bark. It must be conscious of its own strength, which must be used only when necessary.

So, this is advice to the friend who are visitors as well as friends who are judges never have dogs that are too aggressive, and get out of the ring dogs that show any aggressiveness. Excessive aggressiveness is the worst advertisement for our breed. Because when a Neapolitan Mastiff is really aggressive, it is very difficult to control. I repeat this all over the world.

This is a dog that is to guard property and the people who are on the property. It is not a defense dog, not an attack dog. There are other dogs bred for those purposes. We should never get involved in Temperament tests because if you test a Neapolitan Mastiff, it must be at home, where the dog lives, because that's where he works, that is what he must be protecting.

Let me say a couple of things about judging. Here it becomes difficult. Because comparing a dog to the model we describe, in the ring you see a whole lot of dogs, each one different than the other. It is up to the judge to identify the qualities of the dog because it is very easy to recognize the faults. But the first job is to recognize the qualities, and you must point out the qualities, and then you can point out the faults. And when you see a typey mastiff, you must tolerate even small faults. I said it before, this is a very difficult breed to judge, because it is difficult to see dogs that are not well turned-out. It is hard to see a topline that is always a little bit not straight. It is difficult to see the typical movement. You have to think, when you are judging this breed, you have to think about how difficult it is to breed this dog as you are judging. No other breed must be judged with as much attention as the Neapolitan Mastiff. The one breed that comes closest is the English bulldog. But while the English Bulldog has been turned into a monster by man, the Neapolitan Mastiff has remained pretty much as it is after 40 centuries of history.

In judging a dog, ideally you would like the perfect dog. But since the perfect dog does not exist, first weigh the qualities of the dog, and then the faults. And you have to come up with a balance of what a large dog, such as the Neapolitan Mastiff should look like, keeping in mind a dog that weighs 80-90 kilograms is fundamentally different from a dog that weighs 20-30 kilograms. So, you must keep in mind, that once you think you know everything about the Neapolitan Mastiff, you still have a whole lot to learn. I've been judging mastiffs for 30 years. I wrote the last version of the standard. And every time I see a new mastiff, be he beautiful or ugly, it is always a discovery. And I am aware, that I still don't know the mastiff really well.

And one last recommendation to judges. You must have a lot of humility as you approach the Neapolitan Mastiff, because the Neapolitan Mastiff, in 40 centuries of history, has been to wars, and has been starved, but he doesn't take any bullshit!

## QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

**QUESTION:** Does any breeder in Italy breed or train the Mastino directed towards doing Schutzhund?

**ANSWER:** No.

**QUESTION:** With your experience in Neapolitan Mastiffs, how do you know when you pick a puppy what it's going to look like, what do you look for in that puppy so you get what you want

# Commentary

once it's grown to its full size.

**ANSWER:** I never bred Neapolitan Mastiffs. But I've seen a lot of puppies. And you have a lot of breeders here with a lot of experience. When you pick a puppy, you have to see that it is robust, healthy. Beyond that, there is nothing sure in the choice of any puppy. This is true in all breeds but particularly in a breed such as a Neapolitan Mastiff.

**QUESTION:** This is a very long question. AKC judges like a very flat topline, like the Doberman, the pointer, the rottweiler. But all these dogs are very light. When we look at large animals, like a horse, a cow, they usually have a slight dip in the topline. If a horse had a flat back it would look very strange to us. Contrariwise, even the larger animals, like a rhinoceros, or an elephant, have a humpback. But a humpback doesn't look good in a dog, and we don't want a weak topline, very swayed, but isn't a slight dip, more like a horse, normal for a Mastino or not?

**ANSWER:** I spoke about the ideal model. The standard says that the topline must be straight. I have seen only one with a very straight topline, that was Caligola. You must also be careful how you look at a dog. When the dog is relaxed, even if he has a perfect topline, it will be a little bit curved, the important thing is that it is not a lot. It should never be deeply curved. Particularly in the females, because when they get pregnant the condition becomes even worse.

**QUESTION:** How are mastiffs related, we talk about the Dogue de Bordeaux, the Neo, how are they related, like their temperament, and their basic backgrounds?

**ANSWER:** Obviously they all have the same origins. There were the large dogs by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, which developed along typical lines. One physically came up from Greece, Macedonia and Albania, the other from along the North African coast, the other the Middle East. And the Phoenicians were the ones that transported the dog over the whole world. These breeds are very similar among themselves.

We're talking about breeds that are all over the Mediterranean, and also Central and South America, which should be proof that the Phoenicians went all the way to South America with their dog. They all have the same origins.

Now let's talk about the mastiffs. When Julius went to England, now the United Kingdom, he found British war dogs, which must have been brought there by the Phoenicians. He brought these dogs to Rome. The Phoenicians also brought molossus-type dogs into Italy. Some of them were also brought by Romans who conducted war all over Italy. From all of these, we have all the large molossars. The Mastiff, the Bullmastiff, the Dogue de Bordeaux, and all the other big dogs that came afterwards such as the Bulldog, and a dog, which was the origin to the Boxer.

So, we know the origin of the main lines. But after that man took over and bred dogs to their different situations. There is no doubt that the one origin for all mastiffs, all mastiff-type dogs is the Tibetan Mastiff. The characteristics of each breed are different. The Dogue de Bordeaux is smaller, round head, the axes of the cranium are convergent, and it is undershot. The Bulldog is derived from a dog that was originally used to fight bulls. What we have now is an exasperation of the breed. We arrived at the current "look" at the beginning of the century. The bulldog at the end of the 1800's had longer legs and was much taller than it is now.

**QUESTION:** My question has a couple of parts. After defining the columns of the legs, the mass, the size, the type, the topline, the angulation, everything you are looking for in the type of the dog and the standard and what you want to see, as a judge, you might be in the ring looking at two dogs or two bitches with the same qualities, as a prestigious and renown judge, do you feel, after looking at these two dogs, and you find that the two dogs or two bitches have the same qualities but look totally different, do you find that it's an opinion and a preference as a judge to what you pick?

**ANSWER:** I pick as number two the dog that belongs to my friend! (Laughter) This is a very intelligent question. It deserves more than an answer with a joke. I train a lot of judges. And I always use the same joke. Your question deserves a broader answer. It is very difficult to find two Neapolitan Mastiffs who are really equal and very much alike. But if you do run into this situation, you must pick the dog that is a little bit larger, even if the topline is a little saggy, because it is carrying more weight, and that might cause the topline to sag.

# Commentary

When you weight the faults and qualities, between the two you must pick the one that has greater qualities. For example, you might have a dog with a beautiful head, and a great body, but when you put together the head and the body, the head is too small for the body. Even though the head itself is correct, when you put it together with the rest of the dog, it lacks harmony. So, in the moment of judgment, you must be guided by the principle of harmony.

Another thing you must keep in mind is that when judging there are two distinct moments. The first moment is when you see the individual dog, and you compare it with the ideal model, which is the standard. The second moment is after you judge individually each dog, you put him or her together to classify or compare him or her. In this second moment, the most important thing, having taken into consideration, the type, the most important thing is harmony.

When you are trying to judge a best in show and you have several dogs together, say a Chihuahua and a Neapolitan Mastiff. You have to pick a best in show. Again, in that case, you must pick for harmony.

**QUESTION:** I just bought a Neapolitan Mastiff. I bought it for a guard for my home and family. I understand when you say massive and power. But when you talk about massiveness, I can make my dog massive by feeding it and making it big, but then he has genetic muscle, with mass and power that he can use. When you look at two big dogs like this, with the loose skin, how do you judge for that power? For when you say the Neapolitan Mastiff doesn't take any bullshit. How do you judge that?

**ANSWER:** I talk about mass not fat. You do not obtain mass by just feeding the dog. Mass is a genetic feature. I was judging last year's Italian Specialty (I am the vice president of the club) This is also to give a little insight to the judges. I was looking at 17 or 18 males. And there were some excellent dogs. There was one dog which must have been about 100 kilos (220 pounds). But I picked as number one a dog which was just skin and bones but who had mass. The fact that he was skin and bones was not his own fault.

Mass is not just size, not a steroid-type of mass. It is the build of the chest, the power of the bones. Today, I saw some excellent judging by Michael Katz and I would like to pay him some compliments. I also saw some Mastiffs with bones too thin. It is a structural thing. A dog's bones are not going to get any bigger.

If you pick something just to guard your house, and you're not looking to show him, you can rest assured that the Neapolitan Mastiff is going to be a tremendous guard even if he doesn't have huge mass.

**QUESTION:** This is about pacing. The standard says the dog can walk, trot, or pace. Is it pretty or ugly for a dog to pace? Because here, the AKC does not like pacing, and they penalize a dog who paces.

**ANSWER:** Pacing is one of the typical movements of the Neapolitan Mastiff. All the large mammals pace when they travel large distances, especially the elephants when they walk miles and miles. You must judge the Neapolitan Mastiff to determine if the pacing comes from difficulty of other movement or if it is a temporary condition. That's why, when the judges judge the dogs, they also want you to make the dog trot, but that doesn't mean that you should penalize too much a dog which doesn't feel like trotting that day and just wants to pace

Speaking about movement, this is what the standard says: Movement it is one of the typical characteristics of the breed. It moves slowly and like a bear. In the trot it has a strong push from the posterior and a good drive from the legs. The preferred motion is the walk and the trot, the pace is tolerated. Sometimes they pace because of dysphasia, or because they have other health problems. In order to ascertain what the problem is, the judge often asks the dog to trot.

**QUESTION:** You are the vice president of the Italian Club, the president of the ATIMANA, and you get to see a lot of clubs. Do you feel this dog should be AKC or not?

**ANSWER:** On Tuesday I will go to the AKC with a letter from the Italian Kennel Club, as an ambassador of the Italian Kennel Club because the Italian Kennel Club wants the dog to be recognized. (Applause)

# Commentary

These are the reasons.

In a country as important as the United States, and in a country where if you were to count all of the Neapolitan Mastiff that are born, the United States has more dogs born here than in Italy. Yet there is a problem of quality. The Italian Kennel Club cannot conceive that two champions, Italian International and World champions come to the United States, they are bred, and they have puppies, and these puppies don't have an official pedigree. That's the number one reason.

The second reason is that given the development that the Neapolitan Mastiff has in the United States, the Italian Kennel Club wishes, hopes, that there will be a more severe control of registration. This is no censure of your club; I know that your club is an extremely serious club. And that is why your club, and not the other Neapolitan Mastiff clubs is part of the ATIMANA. I also know that in the United States some people make up pedigrees by just going to a typewriter. And when you're trying to protect the breed from an easy market, you must do that through a very serious control of registration certificates. Again, we're not talking about your club, but it is a problem throughout the United States.

And finally, I don't see why a breed that has 4000 years of history should be considered less than a breed that was created 20 years ago. (Applause)



# Commentary

## *Breed Commentary – Transcription of Lecture by Antonio Di Lorenzo*

*Antonio DiLorenzo, breeder, FCI judge, and author of the 1990 Italian book The Neapolitan Mastiff gave a commentary on the Standard for the Neapolitan Mastiff when judging at a show in California in 2002. This lecture was audio-taped for transcription so that the USNMC could publish it for everyone to benefit from this wonderful educational experience.*

I want to talk to you about our beautiful breed, the Neapolitan Mastiff.

We'll speak first of all about the head. You know that the standard says that the head must be 0.3 the length of the shoulder. This is not correct, but it's not a big problem because everybody knows that the head of our dog is 0.4 of the length of the shoulder. More important, very, very much more, is the proportion of the head and the type of the head.

As you know, the muzzle must be half of the skull. But where we lose the type in the head of the Neapolitan Mastiff is in the skeleton. That means that usually we have a dog with a lot of wrinkles that doesn't show us the right construction of the skull of the mastiff.

Because under the wrinkles are the muscles and under the muscles is the skeleton. And the skeleton is the most important step in the construction of the type of the head of the Neapolitan mastiff

So, what do we have to see in the heads of the Neapolitan mastiff to have excellent type?

The eyes, they can be wide as possible. Because if you have eyes as wide as possible, you have a perfect parallelism of the line right around the cranium.

You know, the Neapolitan mastiff, I say always, is a non-natural breed. What does this mean? If you try in a natural way to breed, they come back to the original dog, that is wolf-type.

So, if we don't be careful about this point of the eyes, we must continue to wolf-type.

And we want right type but not overtyping. If we go overtyping, we will have lots of problems, short legs, too short, the forearms will be too short, The dogs will be too undershot, the tails will become like English Bulldog tails. And so, we lose quality in the pursuit of quantity. Why must the eyes be so wide? Because if the eyes are wider, the bones of the skull are strong, and it is possible that the muscles will be larger. If the muscles are larger in the skull of the Neapolitan Mastiff you have the right type. If you have too much wrinkles on the top of the skull you have not enough muscle and the eyes will be a little bit closer and the jaw will be not strong enough. So, first of all eyes, second, jaw. The jaw must be as large as you can have. And the teeth must be all in a line, straight, This is very important. Third the depth of the muzzle. If you have these three points, eyes, jaw, depth, you will always improve on the head of the Neapolitan Mastiff. I hope that next time when I am in California to speak with you, how to choose the right figure, how to choose the best puppy in the litter, how to choose the best male for best quality of semen. Because it is important.

Now we will speak about the body.

For the body also, I think that the standard, the proportion in the standard is not correct. And I suggest to you to take two measurements. One the length of the body and the other the height of the shoulder.

The standard says that the proportion is 11 to 10. That means 10% of the length of the body more than the height of the shoulder. I don't agree with the length in the standard. I think we must have 15 or 18 percent more of the length in the body. In fact, if you see a Rottweiler, you have 15 percent, and the Rottweiler often looks shorter (in the back) than the Neapolitan Mastiff.

So, I think that in the future we have to change the standard, very few points, very few points, but we have to change.

I could make a few more comments and would like to go back to the head because I would like to speak also of the teeth. Everybody has a different idea. Many persons say the Mastino much have all the teeth, perfect teeth to survive.

I agree, I agree, I like the idea of type. But the idea of type is only a dream. We try to get closer to this dream. We try to achieve this dream. Personally, I don't care if a dog loses some teeth. Because for me it is more important if the dog is sounder, excellent type, excellent movement.

And I have a question for you. What do you prefer, a dog with all teeth limping, with problem on the back or a strong dog, sound, who loses some teeth? I think that your reply would be the same as

# Commentary

mine.

Also, the first standard, for me, was better than the current standard. Because the old standard said that if the dog was just a little bit undershot and you couldn't see the problem with the mouth closed, you don't disqualify the dog for this problem. And I agree and I do that. If I cannot see that the dog is undershot when the lips are closed, I do not penalize the dog.

Now we go once more to the body. What kind of problems do we have today? We have problems all related. What does this mean? I say always that if you have a quality, this quality can be positive or negative. If you can see this problem or this positive quality but you don't know what other qualities are related. And so, this is the way that you must be very careful about bloodlines. What am I saying?

I say that one of the most important problems is the forearm that in my opinion is too long. If we have a forearm that is too long, we lose 3 or 4 positive qualities in type of the Neapolitan Mastiff. Because please don't forget, never, that the type of the Neapolitan Mastiff is not only the head, but also the body. And you need to have a lion. You don't like, for me, a big head with a body that doesn't work. Not a body like a Rottweiler, or Doberman. We must have a big head with a great big body, big like a lion. So if we have a forearm that is too long, we lose the chest. Because it can't be deep. With the forearm long, the chest cannot be deep. Also there is another problem that is worse, the croup and the legs won't be right type. In all the breeds there are three kinds of dogs according to construction. The croup has a different angle for each, and I show it with my hand. Galloper, Trotter, then a Coursing breed like the whippet, the greyhound, etc. And when you have a forearm too long, you will never have the right angle for the croup. Because the Mastino is a trotter, it is a heavy trotter like a lion. Instead you will always have a croup like a whippet. And also the angulation of the legs will be very open. That is a problem you know, because all the legs and the bones do a lot of work. Because the Mastino is a heavy dog. And if they have not properly angulation, they have always too much pressure in the movement. And this causes a lot of problems. So, which kind of croup and legs must we have for the Neapolitan Mastiff. Like a Lion. Like a Lion I always say that the best body of a Neapolitan Mastiff is a marble monument I saw in south Naples. It is a statue showing a mythological story. Hunting men, were chasing Diana the goddess, the huntress when she took the form of a lion, and one time she knew she was close to being caught and she was very angry and so she gave them a deer and their dogs killed the deer. And one of their dogs, on the left side of the marble statue is a perfect body of the Neapolitan Mastiff. With strong bones, excellent croup, and legs like a lion. So now you know which type I like of the Neapolitan mastiff. But I think it is the same if we speak all together, the knowledge of everybody will become better. And this way we will try to improve the quality of the Neapolitan Mastiff in Italy, in the States, in France, and in all the world.

The only way we must improve the quality is the respect of the standard. I have told you sometimes, in my opinion, it is not correct. But the standard is the important measure. It is true it is real. What are we to do in the future, to have another Neapolitan mastiff? Or to have a Neapolitan Mastiff that reflects as the first time it when we had this feeling? I think that this dog that is only 2800 years old, that means the oldest in Europe and one of the oldest in the whole world is special because it is the same. During the Roman age it was in this way. During the Etruscan age, the Etruscans period. The Etruscans were people that lived in Italy before the Romans. And I found in a museum a little piece of Etruscan pottery and it was a perfect Neapolitan Mastiff, perfect Neapolitan Mastiff. Perfect even for Naples today. And it was dated with carbon and was dated to be 2800 years old. So we have proof that this dog is 3000 years old. How can we change it? It would be very bad. So I hope that in the future we can speak all together with everybody, and try to have an excellent dog, have a Neapolitan Mastiff of our dream and in respect of the standard. Now if anyone has any questions I would be glad to reply. Ok, Dr. Scalia asked me to repeat the problem of the forearm the croup and the legs. It is very difficult to try to explain better with my bad English. Anyway, when you have a forearm too long, the body will go in the square construction, like a Doberman, like Great Danes, like Boxers. When the forearm goes up, the body becomes square. And so we lose the most important type of the body. This must be a trotter, rectangular, like a lion. So we can have at a dog show, Mastino very elegant, with movement very badly for the nature of the Neapolitan Mastiff. But good for a dog show. But we don't care for the dog show. We care for the Neapolitan Mastiff. So be careful. The body of the Neapolitan Mastiff cannot be described in a square, but must be rectangular. And

# Commentary

also when the Neapolitan Mastiff move, the movement is first of all of the back. The back takes the ground. The forearm uses the movement, this power. The Neapolitan Mastiff must cover ground like the lion. A lot of ground. Every time he moves he takes 1 meter. Closer to the German Shepherd, not closer to the Doberman. So he must take much ground. And if the croup and the legs do not have a good angulation, they cannot take the ground. They can only do one movement. Jumping movement, not lion movement.

So you must also have proper type of the body. Forget the dog show. The Neapolitan Mastiff must not be elegant. Must not be elegant. What do you think, that the Roman Coliseum is elegant? No, he is ancient, he is proud, he is history. The Doberman is elegant. But the Neapolitan mastiff must not be elegant must be proud, like the Coliseum, like the Pieta of Michelangelo, like Leonardo. Because in action, the elegance was not the most important moment of the story. Any other questions? ok





# Commentary

## *Commentary on the revised Italian Standard by Judge Michele Palazzo*

*Mr. Palazzo is a respected and long-time breeder and judge of the Neapolitan Mastiff. Prompted by the FCI, the FCI standard for the Neapolitan Mastiff underwent some revisions to accommodate the new requirements which no longer allow docking or cropping. In addition, a few other refinements were made to the terminology. Mr. Palazzo judged the USNMC National Specialty in 2009 and most recently in 2018. In 2018 he provided this commentary to us on the FCI standard and the recent changes.*

**BACKGROUND:** The Neapolitan Mastiff is one of the oldest and most appreciated breeds in the world. The Sumerians, a people dating back to 4000 years a. c., brought and bred this race in Mesopotamia. As evidence of this there are several archaeological finds visible in several museums around the world that depict our molosser. Not being able to list them all, just mention the one that most impresses with the strong resemblance of the ancient molosser to our Neapolitan Mastiff, the bas-relief at the British museum in London depicting a molosser with an armed man. The resemblance of this dog with our Neapolitan Mastiff is amazing. The volume of the head, the wrinkles, the diameters of the thorax, the strong skeleton of the limbs, the length of the trunk, the muscular masses and finally the size, indicate that ours is the direct descendant of the molosser lived 4000 years ago.

**GENERAL APPEARANCE:** The conformation is that of a heavy mesomorph and not that of a brachimorph as it was mentioned in the old standard. In fact, referring to the body index in the Neapolitan Mastiff is about 77; remembering that the body index is the relationship between the length of the trunk and the perimeter of the chest multiplied by 100. The Neapolitan Mastiff, despite having a thorax with very developed transverse diameters, can not be considered a brachimorph because the length of its trunk, exceeding the height at the withers of 15%, causes the thoracic index to exceed 70. We know that the thoracic index in a brachimorph must be less than 70.

**CHARACTER:** History tells us that in ancient Rome the Neapolitan Mastiff, for its indomitable courage and its physical prowess, was used for hunting, fighting against lions in the arenas, and also in wars as a valid fighter. Today it is used as the guard of things and is considered the guardian par excellence.

**HEAD:** As far as the head is concerned, important changes have been made to the old standard. First of all its length which, from measurements taken, turns out to be 3.8 / 10 of the height at the withers and not 3/10 as the old standard stated. Another measure of the head is the width of the skull which is almost equal to its length. The old standard mentions that the bizygomatic width should be more than half the total length of the head. This assertion, very vague and imprecise, led to wrong assessments. To support this, the standard states that the head is brachycephalous with the cephalic index equal to 66, so that this occurs, the width of the skull must necessarily be equal to the length, an evaluation that has never been considered in the past.

**TRUNK:** Another modification concerns the length of the trunk which, from measurements taken, is 15% higher than the height of the withers and not 10% as the old standard stated. The thorax must be well descended to the elbow. Its height corresponds to half the height at the withers, while its width is about 35% of the height at the withers, and the depth is about 65% of the height. Its perimeter exceeds 40% of the height at the withers.

**SKIN:** The skin must be thick and not excessively abundant; when it is too loose it can create serious eye problems, such as the entropion that is strongly fought as a serious defect.

**MOVEMENT:** Movement is one of the typical characteristics of the breed. At step the pace is that of a feline, like that of the lion. The trot is characterized by a strong push of the rear and a good extension of the front. Preferred gait is the step and the trot; the amble is tolerated but not desired.

# Commentary

**SIZE AND WEIGHT:** The size has been preserved for males 65-75 cm and for females 60-68 cm. It should be considered that, for the ideal Neapolitan Mastiff, the size is close to 70-72 cm for males. Regarding the weight, the standard indicates 60-70 kg for males and 50-60 kg for females although it must be said that these weights deviate from the real weight of our Neapolitan Mastiff.



# Commentary

## *Breed Commentary by Dr. Massimo Inzoli*

*On June, 2, 2019, the following interview was held with Dr. Massimo Inzoli. The previous day he judged a USNMC (Regional) Specialty in Concord, NC as part of the Victory Lane Classic Cluster. Ms. Rachel Hosking, President of the USNMC and the Specialty Show Chair, Dr. Yves Belmont, collected questions from the USNMC members. Dr. Belmont presented the questions to Dr. Inzoli and then graciously transcribed the resulting interview for our club members.*

**Question:** What old school/traditional dogs or traits of dogs were present in the past do you miss today?

**Answer:** In my opinion we have lost size in the breed, and we should go back to less wrinkled dogs (overly excessive type). Nowadays we find sometimes maybe for a matter of fashion, sometimes dogs that are too full of wrinkles (overly excessive type) and that's not the right way to breed.

**Question:** What features and or characteristics of the Neapolitan Mastiff would you like to see today? I would like to see bigger dogs, with more massive bone. Even with more substance, should not have health issues and be a good family dog.

**Answer:** Sure, bigger dogs, more substance (mass), more bone. Yes, but not overdone skin (excessive type), and keeping the right health.

**Question:** So health is important?

**Answer:** Yes, of course quite important.

**Question:** What is your opinion regarding the dogs that you've judged? What are you looking for and were you satisfied with the quality of the dogs you judged? What features are the dogs missing that can be improved?

**Answer:** There were not many dogs due to the entry size, it was not easy, some classes the dogs had more head, and other classes more substance. The things that were not correct were too many dogs were short/square in body length. The Neapolitan Mastiff is supposed to have the length in body like a feline, the correct length in body will display the feline like trait. What I saw missing were; some heads were ok, some of dogs had narrow underjaw. If you have a narrow underjaw, it means the jaw/muzzle is not that wide.

**Question:** To summarize some of the entry participants were a little short/square in body length, so you would like to see little bit more length in the body?

**Answer:** Yes, I would like to see more length in body.

**Question:** Thoughts on the muzzles?

**Answer:** I would have liked to see wider muzzles with wider underjaw (Mandible). The underjaw is very important as the Neapolitan Mastiff is bite dog, the more wider the muzzle the more powerful the bite. The muzzle is two things, (1) Muzzle and (2) Substance, of course if we have the correct muzzle and substance, then we go on to evaluate the type. If we have the right strong muzzle, substance, and type we will proceed to evaluate various other characteristics. In the Neapolitan Mastiff we the flat head, parallel plains of the head, longer body, angulation, the wrinkles.

**Question:** Yesterday you saw some good traits, but some room for improvement would be more length body, more square wider muzzles?

**Answer:** Yes, some of the bitches, dogs, Neapolitan Mastiff's entered yesterday did not have the correct planes of the head. The planes of the head between the skull and muzzle should be parallel, some of the dogs had diverging skulls, we call it down faced as the eyes start to be in lateral position which will impact the overall expression of the dog.

**Question:** Understood, and what are your thoughts on the overall substance of mass, and bone, what were your thoughts on the entry?

# Commentary

**Answer:** The entry was medium sized, to be honest with you I was expecting dogs with size.

**Question:** What are the final points of reference do you use to determine which dog/bitch you will select when there is a great entry of Neapolitan Mastiff's in the ring? What takes precedence?

**Answer:** When I have great entries I make the selection first based on the head; only when have great entries. As you know, when you have limited entry, some dogs have better heads, some dogs have more mass or substance, some dogs have better movement. When I have good entries I make first selections on substance (mass) and head, secondly the proportions of the dog (balanced) and third the movement of dog.

**Question:** What are your thoughts on the longevity of the breed and what do you think the next generation of breeders need to do based on what's been done so far, what need to be done for the next 100 years?

**Answer:** Well that is a very important question. First of all because the breeds popularity is declining compared to the past due to two main reasons; (1) There are many newer breeds available today to potential dog owners compared to the past, (2) the economic reasons, this is an expensive dog to raise, you need plenty of space for the dog, some countries you need a license to own such breeds and the food, feeding the dog. (3) Health, we need to really focus on the health of the dog, why, because as breeders you can breed all the dogs you may want to consider yourself a fantastic breeder, but in order to keep breeding you will need a market for your dogs to continue producing newer generations of your dog. You also will need a market profile that can afford to purchase and raise a Neapolitan Mastiff. Can you imagine you a sell a dog for \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 regardless of the price you sell a dog a family and the family loses the dog after 5 years, 6 years, after 7 years? Do you think they would purchase this breed again after investing this amount of money, I do not think so. If you want to keep this breed, this market alive who are part of our family members as breeders we need to focus on health and have the best interest of the breed. It's a dog that is not easy to maintain, very expensive to feed, beautiful as this was my first dog breed. I will show you a picture of my first Neapolitan Mastiff as a child in Sicily, it's on my mobile phone.

So, it will be very important to keep health interest of the breed alive as breeders to ensure the families will have the longest lasting family members when they purchase a Neapolitan Mastiff puppy from a breeder. If we as breeders want to maintain a market for the Neapolitan Mastiff, we need to give our families and dog that is sound and healthy.

**Question:** So, it sounds like there is a financial factor, a size factor due to the size of the dog and the other part is health reasons. You are a breeder, a world renowned judge, what advice and or best practices do you have for newer breeders and future breeders such as myself to incorporate into their breeding programs to produce healthy Neapolitan Mastiff's?

**Answer:** In my opinion, I am speaking to you as a breeder, if breeders see and realize there is no value or nothing positive from a particular bloodline to pass on to the next generation, the breeders should withdraw from the current breeding stock, and start over with newer stock that has the traits and characteristics a breeder would want to pass on to the next generation of Neapolitan Mastiff's. I've bred Dogo Argentino's for many years, and I've had to start over two to three times with newer breeding stock. I realized at a certain point the bloodlines I had did give me anything worth passing on to the next generation of dogs.

**Question: No added value?**

**Answer:** Yes, no added value, hence as breeder you will need to know when to have the courage to stop and replace your current breeding stock with a more correct breeding stock worth producing to create future generations of dogs with good qualities and traits, sound movement...I know breeding is difficult, breeding is an art, you need to be professional and it is an art.

**Question:** Art is also having heavy correlation to passion, correct?

**Answer:** Yes, art is passion, therefore also lots of knowledge is required and to educate prospective buyers. Many prospective buyers do not understand or know the amount of hard work that goes

# Commentary

into breeding and raising Neapolitan Mastiff's. The Neapolitan Mastiff is a very difficult breed to raise, so it's not automatic a breeder ends up with six to seven healthy puppies. Breeders must educate the clients on the breed to ensure they have all the knowledge to ensure a best dynamic and situation when making a Neapolitan Mastiff part of their family.

**Question:** Do you see a difference in Mastini in the American Kennel Club (AKC) the United States vs. Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)?

**Answer:** AKC has some differences from the same FCI breeds, such as Golden Retrievers, Doberman, etc. In my opinion the AKC Neapolitan Mastiff breeders fall into the same category of the FCI breeders, following similar standards. For example, I've officiated in the United States before in California a few years ago, the dogs that were awarded Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex could have easily competed and won in any FCI country around the world. The breeding standards are very similar.

**Question:** What characteristics do you believe define the Mastino, the Neapolitan Mastiff? Is it the head, the gait and movement?

**Answer:** We breeders should find the right balance between these two characteristics. The dog is not only head, there is nothing sadder than looking at an overall good looking dog, that was not able to move. The dog was limping or looked to be immobile when trying to move. The Neapolitan Mastiff is not a statue, it is a living creature, the movement is not the most important thing, good movement equally is not the main characteristic. We must find and breed soundness and well balanced dogs with all of these traits. Older school Judges would tend to only pick a specimen with good head, due to the era, now we have the type issue resolved for the most part and must focus on the complete package. Head and movement equally assessed.

**Question:** Regarding conformation, when the Neapolitan Mastiff is gating around the ring what is your expectation of the positioning of the head? Should it be the height of the withers or erect and above the shoulders when its gating in the conformation ring?

**Answer:** All the dogs that have an erect head when gating are not massive or long bodied dogs, not truly Molosser type dog. Being a massive, long bodied Molosser with feline like movement will enable the Neapolitan Mastiff to giant with the head at topline/shoulder length. The dog with an erect/high head catches the eyes of people and Judges, but we are not here to judge grace and elegance, we are judging Neapolitan Mastiff's which a breed of immense power, it's a Molosser with a long body, feline like movement drives and exudes power. The Neapolitan Mastiff is not a Great Dane, which has a different angulation in Thorax, it's a compact square dog, with a long neck. This is not the Neapolitan Mastiff, the first characteristic of the Neapolitan Mastiff should not be elegance, its ok to have elegance as trait in the Neapolitan Mastiff after the other Molossoid traits have been defined. The Neapolitan Mastiff should look imposing, there should be centuries from the Roman Empire that is present in the dog. The Neapolitan Mastiff has been preserved and bred in a section of Italy where it was more important to impress other breeders and people as a defense and guard dog.

**Question:** So, elegance is not the forefront of the Neapolitan Mastiff?

**Answer:** No, elegance should not be the most important characteristic of the Neapolitan Mastiff.

# *Past Gazette Articles of Interest*

The following articles are re-printed from past AKC *Gazette* columns and are shared to further explore the nuances of the Neapolitan Mastiff.

# Preserving Uniqueness

## *Working Together to Preserve Breed Uniqueness*

*Guest columnist is Rhoda Winter Russell long-time judge of the Hound Group and many other breeds. As a club member and breed mentor she is a valued advisor to club members.*

Whether adjudicator, owner-exhibitor or handler, know that this breed does not resemble any other! It is not “showy” and never “asks for the win.” Initially you may think it is similar to “this-or-that” but the true Neapolitan Mastiff is singularly majestic. In its deep-set eyes one can perceive and appreciate its intrinsic wonderfulness and wondrous persona. As you judge, own, or handle, please start by taking a deep slow breath to acknowledge this spectacular Neapolitan Mastiff.

This is, in my opinion, an extremely tough breed to judge, perhaps one of the toughest. Judges, owners and handlers must work to “get it right.” Start by digesting the standard via seminars and other mentoring opportunities. Talk to parent club members who are invariably happy to answer questions. As regional supported shows become more prevalent these are excellent places to learn. USNMC President, Peggy Wolfe, delivers a fantastic educational experience, not one to miss whether you are a current or potential judge, breeder, owner or handler. The challenge for all is to continue promoting and maintaining the complicated structure of the breed along with both its movement style and unique type.

Since its induction into AKC, more professional and non-owner handlers are seen. It behooves everyone to be knowledgeable in both specifics and what I term the overall aura and natural demeanor of this breed so you display it correctly for itself instead of trying to push and shove the Mastino into the image of other dogs. If you come from other breeds, this one is so different, and may be different one from another, you may be disturbed or overwhelmed. This is as it should be. Remember the “look” of the Mastino must evoke “Awesomeness” in the beholder!

Some hints and suggestions for those involved. Judges, try to examine in as good a light as possible so a clear view of the critical (clearly defined in the standard) wrinkles and folds can be accurately and best assessed. Mastini should not be strung-up and will generally hold their heads lower than other ring-trained-breeds. Handlers may need to raise the dog’s head slightly showing the bite and dentition, both sides. To fully and accurately comprehend the critical head, the judge may need to move around the exhibit so that the famous WHaM (Wrinkles, Head and Mass) has its total impact.

Judges, try to do as much as possible on a quick yet thorough first assessment. The Mastino is not a breed which will be happy traveling around the ring many times. Handlers need to set-up the dog quickly and cleanly which probably means much practice prior to a show and not overdo while there. Do not fuss too much over your dog in the ring. Be conservative and quietly focused.

Judges must understand that the unique function and nature of this breed do differ from almost all other breeds. These special traits must be preserved, not squashed. Even as Mastino folk become familiar with AKC conformation protocols, it is important that the idiosyncrasies of the breed be recognized, respected and remain and not penalized. All breeders, owners, handlers and judges are important in this critical time of development of the breed’s future. We must work together to maintain the hallmark of the distinctive style and movement of the quietly spectacular Neapolitan Mastiff.

# Examining the Mastino

The Mastino is bred to guard home, and the show ring is not their territory, so you should not be afraid to examine the Mastino. If you want to touch the dog, the dog must allow it. Do approach the dog and handler calmly and confidently. A few youngsters may be alert but this is the exception, most will be standing rather indolently, some may even seem to have their eyes closed. Let the dog sniff your hand. Maybe say to the handler, "May I examine your dog?" This will also alert the dog that you have been given permission by the handler.

If you want to examine the bite yourself, the dog must allow you to do this. However, considering the length of the lips, the gooey slobber and general messiness of this breed we strongly recommend that the handler show you the bite and teeth. Otherwise, you will end up with drool marks up to your elbows and on the front of your suits or dresses. There is a reason every experienced Mastino handler carries towels!

Viewing the teeth on the side involves lifting the pendulous lips over the muzzle and then poking a finger (or asking the handler) to get the dog to move its tongue out from between its teeth so you can see premolars (or lack thereof) Please do not open the mouth and count all teeth. If there are missing teeth, they will be pre-molars.

Examine the body, as you want. You should distinctly feel muscle on the shoulder, on the neck, on the back. The dog should be sturdy in the rear. Please do not lift, pull or stretch the skin to see how loose it is. You should be able to see that the skin is loosely attached, especially when the dog moves. Oh, sure, you can move the skin a little when examining the dog, hey, we all do it. But to pull the skin, or the dewlap to see how stretchy it is, is both unnecessary and uncomfortable for the dog.

Do not expect the handler to keep the lead / collar tight behind the ears or to hold the head high. These are done to give a "clean neck" and elegant look but in the Mastino it destroys the essential line of the dewlap and changes the entire look of the head. Some Mastini may by their individual nature hold their heads up rather high but it is far more typical for the adult Mastino to stand with the head is held low-ish. The Mastino does not, and should not, hold its tail up much above the line of the back. The handler must not do this for them either.

Mastino handlers will often hold the head beneath the chin. This is because many Mastini will end up looking down and eventually decide that as nothing exciting is happening, it might be a good time to lie down!

In the last column, we talked about the typical movement of the breed so we won't address this here. Just remember that the dog should be shown on a loose lead.

The Neapolitan Mastiff is not a "showy" dog. A lot of show-ring presentation has evolved to give the dog elegance, grace, classiness. The Mastino is not elegant, but oh, what a magnificent sight it is indeed!



# Assessing Movement

Assessing the movement of the Neapolitan Mastiff causes grief for judges used to seeing “normal” dogs. This is big heavy, massive animal. If we compare the movement of most dogs to the splendid grace of an Arabian horse, we would have to compare the movement of a Mastino to the wonderful power of a Clydesdale, another animal that moves with awe-inspiring intensity.

The mastino moves like a lion. He slouches and lumbers. The head is naturally held lowered and forward. There should be strong extension of the front leg and power from the rear. When you recognize the slinking lion or think of a clumsy bear, you have absolutely typical mastino movement.

Because of the looseness of the skin you may see the body sway and the skin roll from side to side. All this is normal and typical. Remember, in most “regular” breeds this is considered excess and wasteful movement as it interferes with endurance. For the Mastino, this does not interfere with the function of the breed as while the dog certainly can and does work, it is not meant to run for hours at a time like sporting, hounds, terriers or herding dogs.

When you are judging the Neapolitan Mastiff, and you ask for the dog to move, if it paces by all means feel free to ask the handler if he or she can get the dog to trot since the pacing may simply be due to an inexperienced handler and the wrong speed. However, some dogs prefer the pace, and if the mastino does not trot you must not penalize the dog for it. Do not assume pacing in this breed is because of a construction flaw or laziness.

Remember that a judge doesn't say “trot the dog around the ring,” a judge says “move the dog around the ring.” You don't want to see if the dog can trot, you want to see if the dog has typical movement for the breed. The trot and the pace are both typical for the Mastino.

The dog should be shown on a loose lead. While handlers may indeed tighten up the collar for control, it is not important that the dog carry its head high in a flashy manner and it isn't important to “snug up” the lead behind the head in a way that will tighten the wonderful folds of the all-important dewlap. Unlike many other breeds, we do not show off a nice smooth neck line.

While well-ring-trained dogs perform as requested, in warmer weather, the owner-handled Neapolitan Mastiff may not (actually probably will not) gait ahead in the typical impressively flashy manner of a show dog. In fact, if the dog has run around the ring once already, it may move more slowly the second time. Again, do not assume that this is due to unsoundness. It is very typical for the Mastino to realize that it has been around the ring once already and there are no bad guys here, and nothing really interesting to see or do. So the dog cooperates but simply isn't interested. Ask it to go around a third time? Well, in really hot weather you may see some dogs refuse.

Always remember that the standard describes the Neapolitan Mastiff as not “showy.”

# Not Elegant, Cat-like

Recently I was reviewing several discourses on the Neapolitan Mastiff by Italian judges. I was struck by the similar concepts used when discussing Neapolitan Mastiff movement.

From Arch. Giuseppe Alessandra, long-time FCI judge and breed doyen who has judged our National 4 times between 1996 and 2015:

...the length of the body, the angle of the shoulder and the type of angle of the posterior which gives, in the Neapolitan Mastiff, the typical movement, motion, which is a step that is sort of a glide, that makes it very similar to the motion of a lion. Recently I was pleased to see a video that compared the movement of the Neapolitan Mastiff to the motion of the large mammals. It's the best video I've seen in my life about the movement of the Neapolitan Mastiff because it is incredible to see how when he paces, he moves like a bear. And when he trots, he moves like a lion, even down to the movement of the shoulders, and a little pigeon-toed. The dog does not gallop very often, but when he does, he looks like one of the large felines. This movement is another of the very important characteristics of the breed.

Excerpted from breeder / judge Antonio di Lorenzo's presentation after judging in California in 2002.

So we can have at a dog show, Mastino very elegant, with movement very badly for the nature of the Neapolitan Mastiff. But good for a dog show. But we don't care for the dog show. We care for the Neapolitan Mastiff. So be careful. When the Neapolitan Mastiff move, the movement is first of all of the back. The back takes the ground. The forearm uses the movement, this power. The Neapolitan Mastiff must cover a lot of ground like the lion.

So you must also have proper type of the body. Forget the dog show. The Neapolitan Mastiff must not be elegant. Must not be elegant. What do you think, that the Roman Coliseum is elegant? No, he is ancient, he is proud, he is history. The Doberman is elegant. But the Neapolitan mastiff must not be elegant must be proud, like the Coliseum, like the Pieta of Michelangelo, like Leonardo. Because in action, the elegance was not the most important moment of the story. From Dr. Mario Perricone, 1993 commentary

If the dog is walking at its slow and shuffling gait, it appears indolent and lazy, incapable of the explosive power needed for a guard dog, which must be able to chase and bring down an intruder. As a breed, the Neapolitan Mastiff often paces, and this bear-like gait does not constitute a defect.

At the trot, especially in action such as patrolling the boundaries of its territory, the Neapolitan Mastiff becomes a different, more determined and agile dog. The hindquarters have ample power to propel its considerable weight and the forelimbs stretch well forward. The Mastino movement is fluid and flat, and the bones of articulating joints may be seen to undulate beneath the thick skin. It is more feline than canine. It seems to be a panther, capable of overcoming impossible obstacles to bear down its prey.

Dr. Massimo Inzoli judged in NC in 2019. He comments on movement.

The dog is not only head, there is nothing sadder then to looking a good looking dog, that is limping or looked to be immobile when trying to move. The Neapolitan Mastiff is not a statue, it is a living creature. We must find and breed soundness and well balanced dogs with all of these traits. In older eras judges

would tend to pick a specimen with good head, but now we have the type issue resolved for the most part head and movement equally assessed.

Being a massive, long bodied Molosser with feline like movement will enable the Neapolitan Mastiff to giant with the head at topline/shoulder length. The dog with an erect/high head catches the eyes of people and Judges, but we are not here to judge grace and elegance, we are judging Neapolitan Mastiff's which is a breed of immense power, it's a Molosser with a long body, feline like movement drives and exudes power. The Neapolitan Mastiff should look imposing, there should be centuries from the Roman Empire that is present in the dog.

Elegance should not be the most important characteristic of the Neapolitan Mastiff.

# Muzzle, Lips and Bite

The Neapolitan Mastiff is a brachycephalic breed. short-nosed. The muzzle is 1/3 the whole head. The head and muzzle should both be squares and the muzzle itself should also be as deep as the length. The lips, of course, extend a considerable distance below the muzzle so be sure you are assessing the muzzle, not the lips.

We don't want a Bulldog appearance, nor a Hound appearance. We do see both faults in the show ring and it is very unhappy-making to us when a judge puts a dog up with one of these problems.

The top of the muzzle should be straight and parallel to the top of the skull. You should be seeing heavy wrinkles and folds on the muzzle, which will give it a ridged appearance.

The long lips of the Mastino are part of the distinct look of the dog. When viewed from the front, the lips must join beneath the muzzle and then separate below the jaw as an up-side-down "V". The lips themselves drop down, and the corners turn outward to reveal the flews. The revealed flew is in line with the outside of the eye.

The preferred bite is a scissors bite, or a pincer bite, but an undershot bite is also acceptable as long as the undershot jaw is not so extensive that it is visible through the upper lips. If the undershot jaw turns the up-side-down "V" into an up-side-down "U" this is too much undershot.

One or more missing pre-molars is a pretty common problem for this breed, indeed for any brachycephalic breed. For a long time the Italians actually didn't pay much attention to missing teeth. Then in the eighties, the Germans and other Europeans began producing wonderful dogs too and their judges, having been trained on German Shepherds and Rottweilers, avidly count teeth. Suddenly teeth became more important.

Of course, we all know that if we ignore it in breeding programs, soon the problem WILL be a big problem so we don't want to ignore it. At the same time, if missing teeth is the biggest problem a breeder has in his or her breeding program, they've solved a lot of other problems that the breed is facing.

We would appreciate it if judges would check, and note missing teeth. However, please do NOT do the old-alligator-open-mouth routine. Just check the bites and the pre-molars. If you want to examine the bite of the dog yourself, the dog and the handler must be prepared to allow you to do this. However, considering the length of the lips and general messiness of the whole process we strongly recommend that you allow the handler to show you the bite. If you insist on examining bites yourself be prepared to end up with drool and slobber marks up to your elbows and on the front of your suits or dresses. There is a reason every experienced Mastino handler carries towels.

Viewing the teeth on the side involves lifting the pendulous lips over the muzzle and then poking a finger (or asking the handler) to get the dog to move its tongue out from between its teeth so you can see pre-molars (or lack thereof) If there are any missing teeth, it is nearly always pre-molars.

# Judging: Traffic Cop Gestalt

The job of a “traffic cop” is to uphold the written traffic laws. Still, no one expects or wants to be stopped for going one mile over the documented speed limit because we don’t really think of it as a limit, it’s sort of, kind of, more or less an approximation of what is wanted, ummm, most of the time. Still we do want strict enforcement of other traffic laws, such as those interdicting running red lights in the city or weaving recklessly in and out of traffic lanes at high speeds.

Yet there is nothing written telling officers which law to enforce strictly and which not. We depend on the good traffic cop knowing that the real job is keeping traffic moving and moving safely and that in achieving this larger goal they know how to walk the delicate line between being picayune about some but not all laws. Being successful in this requires a thorough understanding of the “gestalt” of traffic for that place and time.

I believe the dog show judge has a similar task. Yes, we must judge “by the standard” which documents requirements for the breed but unfortunately, aside from disqualifications, instructions on how strictly or loosely to enforce each attribute are often not included in the standard itself.

So the first task is not to learn the words of the standards, but to learn the gestalt of the breed: that is, what makes up most critical aspects for that breed. The second task is to learn from breeders and other judges how the words in the standard give “boundaries” to other aspects so that we all know what is required, what is tolerable and what is preferred for that breed.

This is not an easy task because most standards use the same basic words and as each breed is different, most breeds apply them differently. 85% of the breeds in the Working group use the term “Moderate Angulation” and all but 1 of them says “level topline”

When trying to learn many breeds at once many judges start by memorizing the words of a standard and then trying to relate everything that they learn about that breed back to those written words. To my way of thinking, this can be not only backwards but dangerous.

An understanding of the standard should naturally fit your understanding of the breed, not be the memorized law that you make sure is rigidly upheld by everything you subsequently learn.

Knowing a breed is more than memorizing the standard. Successfully judging the breed is more than quoting phrases from the standard to justify a selection.

Seminars, hands-on, seeing hundreds and hundreds of dogs, talking to numerous people, history, background, understanding progress. All are critical to

understanding how to apply the standard in judging a breed. I’m also willing to say that seeing dogs of other breeds, discussing differences in the breeds, in histories and in breed development are also critical to thoroughly understanding any breed.

If you lose the essence of the breed in trying to uphold the details of the standard you have not judged the breed at all.

But when a judge says to me “if you didn’t want me to pick a level topline you should take that out of the standard” I know that this is someone who has memorized the words of the standard and is now applying those words in a rather pedantic manner. They are like the traffic cop who gives everyone going over 55 mph a ticket because that’s the law and then says “If you don’t want a ticket, get the speed limit raised to 56 mph.” This judge has yet to see the gestalt of the Mastino.

# Same Words, Different Language

Which Working Group breed would this be?

Proportion: Rectangular

Bite: Scissors

Eye Color: Dark eye preferred

Eye Rim Pigment: Eye rim should be completely pigmented

Topline: Straight

Neck: Strong, arched

Chest: Chest deep

Front Leg: Front leg bones straight

Feet: Described as round or cat feet

Dewclaws: May be left on in front; usually removed on rear

Hindquarters: Straight and parallel when viewed from the rear

Gait: Powerful, with feet tending to converge to the center when moved at faster speeds

Answer: 15 of the 30 breeds in the Working Group fit that description. And 14 more differ in only one of these characteristics.

How the breeds be so different? The answer: we are all using the same words, but we're not always speaking the same language.

I submit that thinking that "judging by the standard" means that the written standard is the whole, the every and the only thing is sort of like saying governing a club by the bylaws means there are no meaningful rules outside of the bylaws.

Therefore, I submit that you've got to know the breed first, not just the words of the standard.

An example:

Did you know that the Great Dane Standard doesn't say that the front legs have to be straight? Does that mean that a judge, can interpret the standard to allow crooked legs? Obviously not!

The fact is that the Great Dane people don't have to say the front legs have to be straight any more than they have to say the dog must have four legs...or two nostrils. You don't have to state things everyone knows!

A second example:

Did you know that the Doberman Pinscher Standard describes the dog as having heavy bone? The Neapolitan Mastiff Standard also says heavy bone. Does this mean the Mastino should have bone like a Doberman (or vice versa)?

Obviously the answer is no.

One danger in trying to learn a breed by memorizing the words of the standard while clinging to the mantra that "I am allowed to interpret the standard any way I want" is the tendency to interpret the words according to something you learned in another breed.

Another is that many words have multiple meanings, and the authors of the standard may mean one aspect, not the other. For example, the Neapolitan Mastiff Standard says the breed is stocky intending the meaning of thickset. But stocky can also imply short. In the Neapolitan Mastiff standard stocky was used not to imply anything about height, but to describe an essential aspect of appearance: that this is indeed a burly hefty dog.

So, in order to understand the standard, you have to know the breed itself first. Of course, this makes a sort of Gordian knot doesn't it? (Greek Mythology, a puzzle where the beginning is hidden in the middle.) How can you learn the breed without memorizing the standard, how can you understand the standard without knowing the breed to begin with?

Well, that's where Judges Ed comes in! Judges Education is so much more than reading the standard and giving pictures. Ask and learn the "why" of the breed. Why is it described that way? Why is it different than another breed? Why was that word used vs another? Or why is the same word used but for a different meaning?

Just like a little kid, you can never ask too many whys!

## New but Common Misconceptions

### *Two new but now-common misconceptions in judging the Neapolitan Mastiff*

The first and best way to learn about a breed is, of course, to see and study many dogs of the breed with a mentor. The next best is to attend good seminars. And another time-honored excellent way is what I call “grass-roots” learning which is simply having in-depth conversations with others.

These off-the-cuff exchanges are fun and fruitful. We all trade not just facts but tricks and clues we’ve discovered that help judge a particular breed. People will provide interesting and seemingly sensible justifications to explain a breed or standard.

I think we all like these casual facts even better than the formal explanations as this sort of learning provides a wonderfully rich “flavor” and depth to a breed.

The problem is some of these things Morph into misleading misconceptions. Here are two that are currently extant in the Neapolitan Mastiff community.

Misconception #1: There should be three wrinkles on the muzzle.

It has become common to talk about the “typical three wrinkles on the muzzle.” And wouldn’t it be nice if you could easily put a dog at the front or to the back of the line based on such a simple measurable trait? Well you can’t! This is wrong! The standard states that the “The top plane of the muzzle from stop to tip of nose is straight, but is ridged due to heavy folds of skin covering it.”

But do not count either the indentations or the ridges. We don’t care how many there are on the muzzle.

In general, yes, the standard says while the dog “...is characterized by loose skin, over his entire body, abundant, hanging wrinkles and folds on the head and a voluminous dewlap.” But the standard does not require anyone to count wrinkles or folds anywhere except for the single required wrinkle being the one “... those extending from the outside margin of the eyelids to the dewlap, and from under the lower lids to the outer edges of the lips.”

Misconception #2: The tail should touch the point of hock.

This misconception might have developed because in Italy it is now against the law to dock or crop at all, and the Italians were forced to change their standard. The Italian standard now says in regards to the undocked tail that “In length it reaches the articulation of the hock.” But that makes sense because the Italian standard is describing the undocked tail.

We still allow docking in this country. And over time, the trend here has been that the tail is docked a bit longer than it used to be. But this is simply a fashion trend. As long as the tail is not too short, it’s ok. A too-short tail is a DQ and clearly defined in the standard as Disqualification: Lack of tail or short tail, which is less than 1/3 the length from point of insertion of the tail to the hock – joint.

So when you’re looking at your line-up of Neapolitan Mastiffs, if one has a tail distinctly shorter than the others, do not automatically assume it is too short and a reason to not consider that dog. Bottom line is we care about tail carriage more than length and we don’t care about the length as long as it’s not too short (and remember: less than 1/3 from rump to hock joint would be a very short tail indeed.)

*A Few  
Common  
Questions  
about the  
Neapolitan  
Mastiff*

The following pages share a few common questions about the Neapolitan Mastiff.

# Common Questions

**Question: Is there such a thing as “too much” skin? If so, what is it?**

**Answer:** The short answer is yes. The long answer is how much is too much depends on functionality and type.

In regards to the skin there are two equally important aspects:

- 1) the skin is supposed to be thick and loosely attached.
- 2) the dog must be functional.

Properly thick skin feels thick. When you touch the dog, for example feeling behind the shoulders, you should feel heavy skin. The bloodhound also has loose skin but it is a thinner skin. The mastino skin must not be thin like a bloodhound. The mastino wrinkles are thick folds of skin. If you see a crepe-y surface it is because the skin is too thin.

Typically the skin moves and is loose over the whole dog, head and body. It may form folds on the torso, for example wrinkles may appear behind the withers (formed by the dog lifting its head) and there may be a fold over the shoulder or across the front or along the flank. You should see some hanging skin below the abdomen. But if the skin is correctly thick, you typically won't see little crepe-y wrinkles all the way down the leg below the elbow.

The dog must be functional. It has to be able to move and to see. The standard says the eyes are “almost hidden beneath drooping upper lids.” Almost hidden, not completely hidden. And of course the eye itself, although almost hidden, must be normal, not scratched or cloudy even though the standard doesn't but certainly this must also be true for the Mastino, just as it is automatically true for all healthy dogs.

Even the skin across the muzzle forms thick wrinkles. Following the leadership of the Italian Mastinari, (true breed fans) we don't count how many wrinkles on the muzzle, nor do we count the wrinkles over the body, nor do we feel “the more the better.” We do expect the wrinkles but they appear naturally but we don't reward quantity or require any specific measurement.

What is important is that the skin be thick and loosely attached, not thin or unattached!

**Question: How much is too much dewlap?**

**Answer:** Lots of breeds have dewlaps, but other breeds have much less of a dewlap than the neapolitan mastiff's which is described as being “a voluminous dewlap” and as such is surely a feature of the breed.

If the skin is correctly thick and correctly attached to the dog, the length of the dewlap isn't particularly an issue. We don't really measure it although it must be attached at the muzzle and the chest.

The dewlap is correct when it is “divided” which will happen quite naturally when it correctly attached from the lower jaw to the lower neck. Divided references the two parallel sides to the dewlap, coming from each side of the muzzle. They hang down next to each other and then blend into the neck

In some dogs, especially if the skin is thin and overall too loosely attached, you might see the dewlap hanging more straight down under the jaw, instead of from both sides. If it's not correctly attached to the neck, the dewlap hangs as a flat “flap” in front of the chest, often swinking widely back and forth in front of the dog's chest as the dog moves. The problem in such a case is that the skin is thin and the dewlap isn't correctly attached not that the dewlap is too long.

**Question: In regards to the eyes, why do you want the haw to show?**

**Answer:** It's not a case that we want the haw to show, rather we want loose skin and because of that, the eyelid ends up a little loose and the haw is typically exposed. We will tolerate that, as long as it's not too much, because of the importance to us of the loose skin, one of the keys to Neapolitan Mastiff breed type.



# Common Questions

**Question:** In regards to the front, why do you want a slight turn-out of the front feet?

**Answer:** Again, it's not that we want the front feet turned out, it's that we must have heavy bone and an appearance of massiveness. It is quite natural for a big heavy dog to stand with its front feet turned out. We're not talking piano-legs, we're not talking crooked legs, or deformed ankles. We're talking a slight turn-out of the feet when the dog is casually standing. Most good handlers will be able to stack the dog to correct this slight turn-out and a well-trained dog, accustomed to what is needed in the ring, will tolerate this.

But we have many inexperienced owner / handlers with untrained dogs who are all just doing their best. Do not penalize a slightly turned-out foot in a dog that is heavy-boned and heavily built. You may want to ask the handler to re-stack the dog, or you may, in looking at the dog, realize that the dog is standing casually, and, for balance, has slightly turned its front feet out.

Note that a more lightly built dog should not have this slight turn-out. So if you see it, and it is a heavily built dog, you can certainly ask the owner to re-stack the dog, but if it is a heavily-built dog, heavy bone, wide thick body, and so forth, don't penalize.

**Question:** In regards to the movement, why do you want the dog to pace?

**Answer:** And again, it's not that we want the dog to pace, it's that they often will pace. Sometimes it's because the inexperienced handler is moving the dog at the wrong speed for that dog. Sometimes it's because the dog doesn't know what is wanted and is moving at a pace because it's easiest for it to do at the moment.

Judges are often told that pacing is a sign of unsoundness because it's an "easy gait" and a dog that paces is, for some reason, not feeling well enough to want to go to the energy of trotting. So judges often automatically think something's wrong with a dog that paces, so it's an automatic reason to move the dog to the back of the line.

In the Neapolitan Mastiff, the pacing may just as easily be because the dog doesn't feel like trotting that day, not that something is wrong structurally or physically.

By all means, ask the owner / handler to see if he or she can get the dog to trot not pace. But if the dog continues to pace, you must not penalize the dog for pacing. Remember, judges ask exhibitors to "move the dog around the ring" (not "trot around the ring") because we want to see movement typical of the breed. Well, the pace is a typical movement for the neapolitan mastiff and must not be penalized.

**Question:** In regards to movement, why do you say the dog isn't bred for endurance? Aren't you just rewarding unsound dogs? Shouldn't every dog be able to run around the ring a couple of times?

**Answer:** Every dog should be able to run around the ring several times. And we don't want to reward unsound dogs. But what does this mean for the mastino?

Dogs in the Sporting, Terrier, Hound, and Herding groups are bred to do their job all day long. They have to be able to work the field, kill those vermin, hunt, and herd all day long and be willing to do so. The ability to do their job for long periods of time, is a core part of their function, and thus of their breed type.

The Neapolitan Mastiff must be sound, must be able to "move" and do its job. It must be able to work for as long as necessary.

But the Neapolitan Mastiff's job is to protect its territory and to recognize bad guys and to repel those bad guys. And that's an all-day job of being ready to spring into action when necessary, but otherwise biding your time.

And also remember, the show ring is not the dog's territory. No need to protect or to really be on extreme alert at a dog show. Certainly, younger dogs or a dog at its first show might be more alerted to the unexpected kerfluffle at a dog-show and be more watchful or "on its toes" but many older dogs, recognizing that there are no bad guys here, will seem lazy. That's not unfitness and note that I use the word seem. When it comes time to do their job they will not be lazy, I assure you!

You must also remember most of our exhibitors are not professionals, and most of the dogs are not

## Common Questions

particularly well-trained in show etiquette. When you have a line-up of dogs in front of you, you will be able to easily tell those handlers who know what they're doing and which dogs are accustomed to being in a show ring. These pairs will easily present themselves in the same fashion as other show ring breeds. Do not interpret this as soundness, although it is tempting to think so when all the dogs but one plod clumsily around and that one moves happily and willingly alongside its handler. After that time or two around the ring, the typical Mastino might begin to lag. Again, this is not necessarily due to unfitness. It's very likely that the dog simply doesn't see the reason for all this running around and it's not interesting to the dog.

I assure you, do something like swing your arms around in a startling manner and you will see even the most lazy-looking Neapolitan Mastiff suddenly alert and stand on its toes and stare at you and you will see the promise (threat) of power that exists in the most indolent-looking mastino. Even on a hot day, even after running (trotting, lagging) around the ring several times...the transformation from lazy-lug to alert and imposing guard dog is instantaneous and amazing.

Actually, do not, I repeat, do not do this. The mastino, once alerted, will stay alerted. When the Mastino gives you "the look" you may be in trouble indeed.

Remember, in the first paragraph of the standard, it says that the Neapolitan Mastiff is not a showy dog. You must not interpret a lack of showiness as lack of soundness.



# Don't Fear Correct Temperament

## *The Neapolitan Mastiff: Assimilation Is Not Done Quickly*

As we approach our third anniversary in the AKC I am troubled that some people still fear the Neapolitan Mastiff temperament.

The Neapolitan Mastiff is bred to guard its home. The standard states that the breed is not aggressive. When calmly standing beside its master, if a non-threatening stranger approaches and is given permission by the master to touch the dog, the dog must allow it . Period. End of Story. Anything else is not correct.

If you witness aggressive behavior by a Mastino, and that dog is not guarding its home from danger, you are witnessing incorrect temperament for the breed and if this is in the Dog Show context, it is unacceptable behavior by any standard for any breed. As a judge, throw that specimen out of the ring. As a member of a show committee, excuse that person and dog from the show site. But as a Fancier of the Sport please don't throw the breed out!

The good news is our Mastino Fanciers do want to participate in the grand traditions of this grand sport. The bad new is that we are aware of a couple of regrettable incidents caused by the unfortunate decisions of eager but inexperienced owners to bring their unprepared dogs to a dog show. Surely there have been no more episodes with the Mastino than with other breeds but sadly, due to the nature of the beast (sorry) we are far more visible.

For over 10 years the parent club for the Neapolitan Mastiff has been preaching the importance of going to handling classes and matches, of getting involved in AKC clubs, of finding mentors for help and advice. Our people are learning, albeit slowly.

Please remember that apparent sluggishness in the learning process is normal as exhibitors do not leap fully-armed from the foreheads of the gods of the sport. Matches are fewer and further between than ever before. Many Kennel Clubs are difficult to join for someone completely new to the sport.

Meanwhile, while it is frustrating for experienced show-folk to watch under-experienced fanciers, this is only one aspect of a naturally slow assimilation. Not only are our exhibitors still just learning the ropes, but the judging community is still just learning our breed. To my knowledge, nearly three years later, fewer than 15% of the Working Group judges approved for the Neapolitan Mastiff on July 1, 2004 have been to any educational event about the breed!

Bottom line is that assimilation is not quickly done. And clearly it is far easier to become comfortable with a new breed when it is "like" another that you already know. Thus the strange-looking, odd-moving giant of a Mastino has a far more difficult variation of the challenge than the merry little Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever.

If you notice someone with a Neapolitan Mastiff who looks like they need help or advice, I hope that you freely offer a friendly hand and a kind word.

And I hope that you are able to watch the oh-so-many-cases of the splendid Neapolitan Mastiffs being shown correctly and behaving wonderfully. As time goes on, more familiar with proper and correct Mastini, you too should be able to marvel at the beauty in these ponderous creatures as I do.

