

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

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THE NEAPOLITAN MASTIFF

Based on FCI standard No.197 (November 27, 1989)

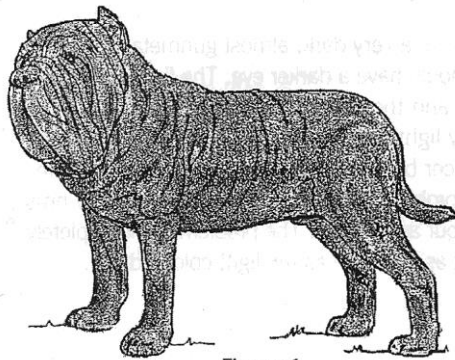


Figure 1

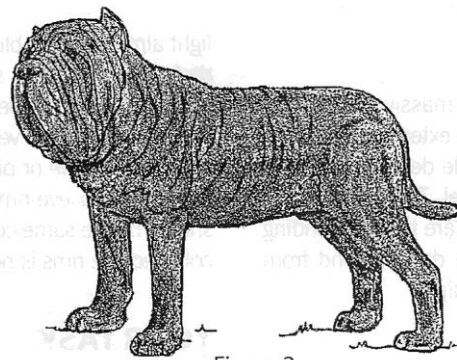


Figure 2

The Neapolitan Mastiff is a head breed. One of these two dogs (Figures 1 and 2) has the more desirable head. Which one? The head is astounding and large in comparison to the body. How large? The FCI standard says the head is 30 per cent of the dog's height at the withers. Which head size is more correct, Figure 1 or Figure 2?

Rediscovered in Italy in the 1940s, the Neapolitan Mastiff is a heavy boned, massive, awe inspiring dog bred for use as a guard and defender of owner and property. He is characterized by loose skin over his entire body, abundant hanging wrinkles and folds on the head, and a voluminous dewlap. The essence of Neapolitan is his bestial appearance, astounding head and imposing size and attitude. Due to his massive structure, his characteristic movement is rolling and lumbering, not elegant or showy. Figure 1 has the most desirable head.

The breed traces its roots to the dogs of war used by the Roman army. The breed then existed on estates and farms across Italy for the past two millennia, known as the "big dog of the little man" – the extraordinary dog of the ordinary man. After the devastation of World War II, the breed was recognized as an unquestionable treasure of Italy and consequently, has been refined to its present form over the last 60 years.

In 1989, a very comprehensive breed standard was adopted for the Neapolitan Mastiff, but as comprehensive as it is, this is an unorthodox breed and detailed commentary is required. Peggy Wolfe, currently president of the parent club, has provided this detail. Ms Wolfe's informative commentary has been relied on heavily in producing this illustrated study.

COMMENTARY

"The Mastino was created by Italians who wanted the viewer of the dog to undergo an emotional experience upon seeing this creature. All Italians who talk about the breed talk about the emotional impact that the proper Mastino must generate.

"Its face is formed by the wonderful wrinkles and folds (Figure 3). The eyes are deep set, and the dog when it looks directly at you has a piercing look. Actually, one could say that it's not so important what the emotion is (awe, disgust, amazement, incredulous wonder ...), just that you have one when you see the proper Mastino! You should never be bored, or left unmoved."

THE HEAD

The standard says that the head is short and massive, differentiated from that of other mastiff breeds by more extensive wrinkling and pendulous lips, which blend into an ample dewlap. The toplines of the cranium and muzzle must be parallel. The face is made up of heavy wrinkles and folds. Required folds are 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.

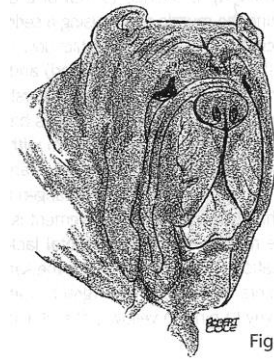


Figure 3

SIX HEADS

The Neapolitan Mastiff's flat skull should be parallel with the top of the muzzle, yet sometimes the muzzle takes off in another direction. The standard says that a skull not parallel with the top of the muzzle is severely faulty. Two of these six heads are not on parallel planes – one muzzle turning up and the other down. The one turning up is likened to that of a bulldog, the curve upward shortening the muzzle and causing a serious, undershot bite. The reverse occurs to the muzzle that tilts down; the muzzle is long (should be one-third the length of the head) and the head appears hound-like. This hound-like head is also overshot, a second severe fault.

The dog with the whitish-blue eyes has an otherwise good head. Neapolitan Mastiff puppies are born with very bright sky-blue eyes, but by three months they usually change to shades of amber or brown. If the eye colour has not changed by about a year, it is a fault.

The head with lack of nose pigment is obvious. The nose is large and the nostrils open, but the total lack of pigmentation is a disqualification. The nose should be the same colour as the coat. The coat colours are: black, blue (grey), mahogany (a reddish brown) and tawny (a pinkish yellow). The blue dogs can range from a very light almost silvery blue, to a very dark, almost gunmetal dark. The darker coloured dogs should have a darker eye. The lighter coloured dogs (the lighter blues and the tawnys) can tolerate a lighter coloured eye, some a very light yellowish colour.

A scissors bite or pincer bite is the norm. Dentition is complete.

A dog with eye-rim problems lacks pigmentation. The eye rims should be the same colour as the coat. The problem of incompletely coloured eye rims is not as common as the light coloured eye.

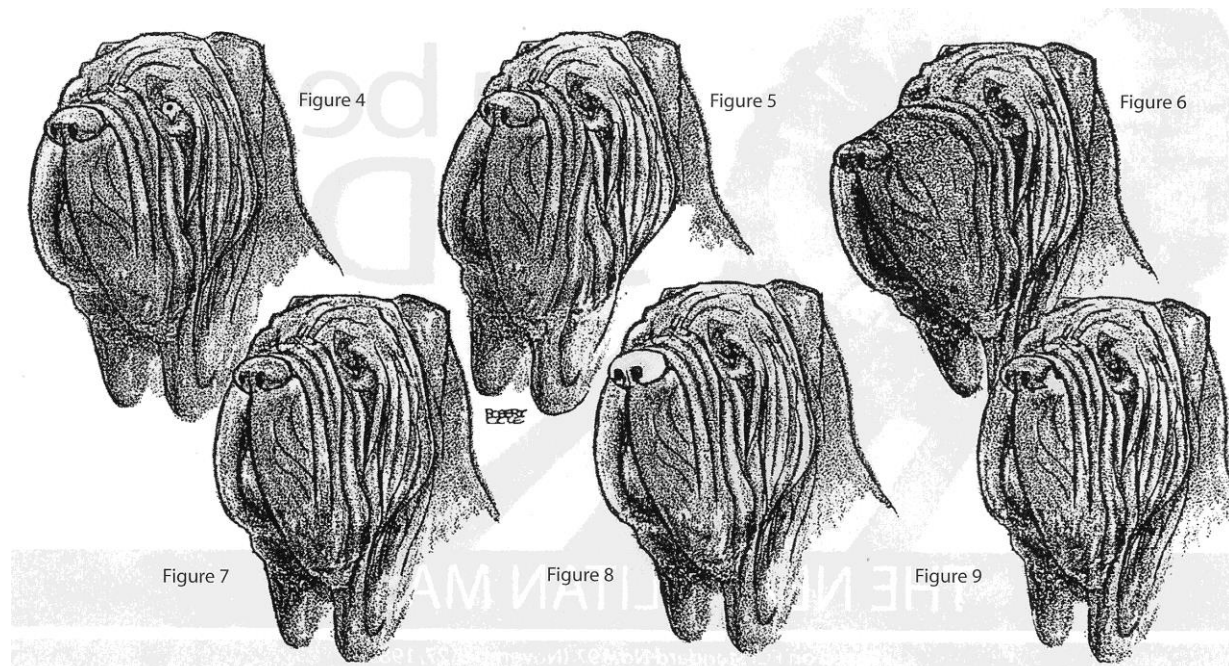


Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

YOUR TASK

Which four faults do you think are the most serious? The following are six faults mentioned in the standard: an overshot jaw; topline of the cranium and the muzzle not parallel; total depigmentation of the nose; total depigmentation of the eye rims; a pronounced undershot jaw that disrupts the outline of the front plane of the muzzle; more than two missing teeth.

ORDER OF SEVERITY

The standard calls all these six faults serious or disqualifying, but in fact breeders rank some as more serious than others. The order in which the faults are listed in the standard (see above) is roughly the order of seriousness ... from the most serious to the least serious from a breeder's point of view.

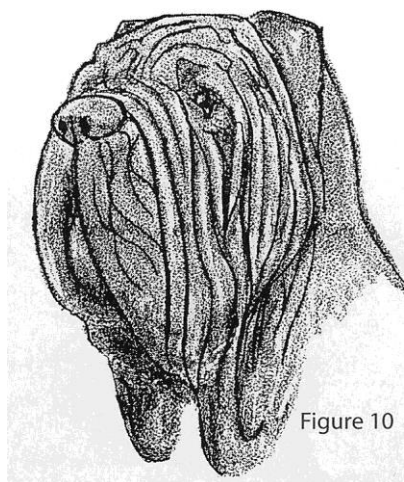


Figure 10

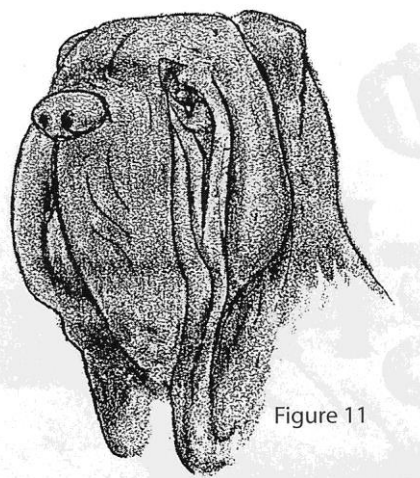


Figure 11

WRINKLES

These two heads (Figures 10 and 11) are identical except for the amount of wrinkle. At a minimum, all Neapolitan Mastiffs must have a significant fold made up of two wrinkles running from the eyes down to join the lip. One wrinkle runs from the outer edge of the eye, one from the inner edge of the eye. The fold is deep, and almost looks as if it were cut into a piece of clay by a knife.

COMMENTARY

“The whole head should be covered with folds and wrinkles. The skin is loose on the head and body, not tight and rigid, like the folds of a Bulldog. At the same time, the skin must be heavy and thick, not thin; it moves about easily, but must not look like water moving over the dog. It is not a case of “the more the better”, and we don't count how many wrinkles appear on a dog. It is more a ‘look’. The dog must look correct. It must look as if the wrinkles and folds are an integral part of the dog, not something placed on the dog.”

A PROBLEM

One of the biggest problems in this breed is that type characteristics – e.g., the giant size, the wrinkle, the extreme head – are very hard to maintain. It is very easy to lose the skin, to lose the mass. And if one takes any two Mastini and breeds them and takes any of the offspring and breeds them ... one very quickly ends up with a large, tight-skinned dog (Figure 12) with one or two wrinkles, a longer muzzle and less wrinkle and lip.

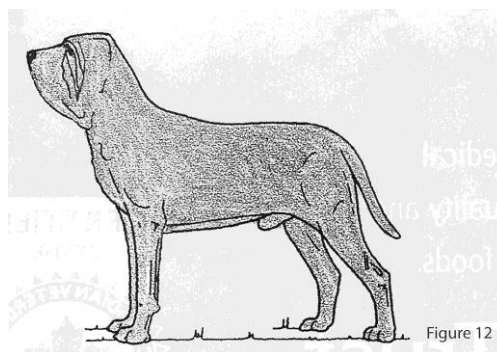


Figure 12

A CONCERN

There is a breeder concern that the average judge, unaware of the importance of breed type (the turned out feet on Figure 14 is a breed characteristic), will select dogs that are of a 'normal' construction with minimal type (Figure 13). That judges will pick the dogs with good toplines, straight fronts and graceful movement, and will justify their selection by pointing to the two or three wrinkles that the dog has, or by commenting that the mass on the dog is "adequate".

Adequate or barely adequate isn't enough. A Neapolitan Mastiff must have wrinkles and mass. Absence of massiveness and absence of wrinkles and folds are disqualifications in this breed.

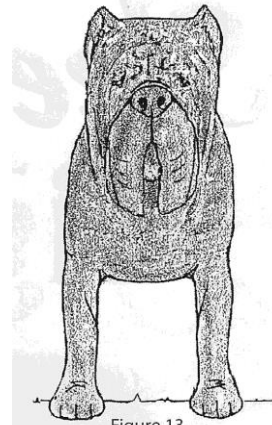


Figure 13

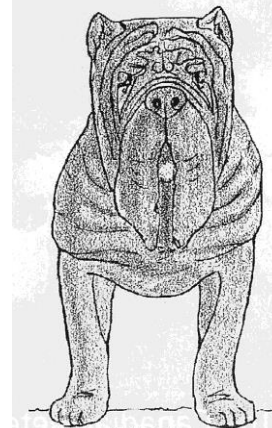


Figure 14