Coffee and Dane-ish

By Bill Stebbins

Cycles of Quality

In every breed it is inevitable that the overall quality of the dogs will go through cycles. This could be overall quality or specific aspects of the breed. In the fifty plus years I have been involved with Great Danes I have seen this occur. Comparing the dogs in sixties and seventies. With those of today would draw some significant changes which have occurred. First, let us look at the Harlequins. When I first started showing there were few examples of fine quality Harlequins and few breeding programs where one could go to get a really good dog. The renaissance which this color has experienced is simply amazing. In today's show ring it is not uncommon to find the Harlequin and to be the best of the day. I am a Fawn and Brindle guy, and we used to hope for the Harlequin entries because it helped to build a major for the Fawns and Brindles. The Mantle was not approved for showing in those days. I believe, it took three attempts to get the parent club to approve the Mantle and on January 1 2019, there was the introduction of the Merle for showing. It is a bit premature to speculate on the success which will be seen by the Merles. However, it can be said that the Merle has been an integral part of the Harlequin breeding programs. The Black Great Danes are usually a highly competitive color. There are any number of successful of Black breeding programs. The Blue Great Dane has also gone through a dramatic improvement over the last several years.

But let's get on to structural issues rather than color. The front assembly is the single most important aspect of canine anatomy. Without proper fronts a dog simply is unable to do the work for which it was bred. I have written numerous articles on this subject, and it is a topic often discussed among judges. A breeding program may find it difficult to simply improve front assemblies by breeding to dogs with good fronts. This aspect of anatomy seems to be more reluctant to change.

The next topic is breed-type. The standard revision of January 1, 2019, was predominantly concerned with the approval of the Merle. However, there was one addition by the Standards Committee that was extremely important. The final statement in the General Appearance section of the Standard now reads "Lack of true Dane breed type, as defined in this Standard, is the most serious fault." As I use to tell attendees at Judges Education, The Great Dane was bred to hunt wild boar, not wild rabbit.

Proportions has been a problem for the entire time I have been in Danes. I used to tell judges education attendees that if you have a class of 6 Danes and one of them has correct proportions, it will not look like the other 5 entries. THIS IS A SQUARE BREED!!! The adage that bitches being slightly longer than dogs in order to hold a litter of puppies is simply not true. There are many breeds that are supposed to be square that are not.

I have often been asked what I look for when I judge Danes. I have my top 3 list of priorities that I would normally employ… Breed Type, Proportions and Temperament. Except for young puppies who might be experiencing their initial dog shows, our breed should never exhibit any signs of timidity. Approaching a Dane and seeing the wide-eyed look or even shrinking away from the judge is simply not acceptable. This is the Apollo of dogs, and they stand four-square.

I do believe that the overall quality of Danes is better than it was when I started in the breed. I would ask active breeders to consider whether their goal is to attain more awards or improve the breed.