



## **Great Dane Color Faults**

**By Nikki Riggsbee**

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People learning to judge Great Danes tend to focus on color and may obsess about color faults. This is understandable since over 20% of the standard is spent describing color. When presenting Great Dane breed seminars, I provide two seemingly contradictory concepts. Color is important; it can disqualify a dog if it is not one of the standard's colors and patterns. On the other hand, if it is acceptable, good or poor color should only be a tiebreaker between two approximately equal quality dogs.

The Great Dane standard describes six allowable colors: black, blue, brindle, fawn, harlequin, and mantle. Three of these are patterns as well as colors, but we refer to all six as "colors."

Further, the parent club specifies how the colors are to be bred to retain the predictable six. Fawns and brindles are bred together but not with any of the other colors. Blues are bred to blues or blacks without harlequins and mantles in their pedigrees. Blacks without harl or mantle in their pedigrees can be bred with blues. Blacks without blues in their pedigrees can be bred with harls or mantles. Harlequins and mantles can be bred to each other and to blacks with no blues in their pedigree.

I wondered if other Great Dane people felt the same as I do about color. So I conducted a survey of Great Dane show owners, breeders, and breeder-judges to see if others prioritized as I do. This survey was sent out to about 150 Great Dane breeders and breeder-judges. About one third responded. It was not an official survey of the parent club; it was done primarily to confirm or dispute an opinion that I had been expressing in seminars and as a breed mentor.

I sent a list of typical Great Dane color faults and asked how they would consider each:

- 1 don't notice, not important
- 2 tie breaker if two dogs are otherwise equal
- 3 may be considered in deciding between two dogs
- 4 important in deciding between two dogs
- 5 critical in deciding between two dogs

These are the faults I asked about on the survey. Note that these were taken from the Great Dane standard prior to the most recent change in 2011.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ white on the chest of fawn, brindle, black, or blue Danes
2. \_\_\_\_\_ white on the toes of black, blue, brindle, or blue Danes
3. \_\_\_\_\_ amount of mask on a fawn
4. \_\_\_\_\_ lack of black markings (cosmetics) around the eyes of a fawn or brindle
5. \_\_\_\_\_ soot on a fawn
6. \_\_\_\_\_ pale fawn color
7. \_\_\_\_\_ noticeably lightly brindled
8. \_\_\_\_\_ noticeably heavily brindled
9. \_\_\_\_\_ merle on a harl that is more than a few small spots
10. \_\_\_\_\_ noticeably heavily marked harls
11. \_\_\_\_\_ noticeably lightly marked harls
12. \_\_\_\_\_ pink nose on harls
13. \_\_\_\_\_ little or no black on a harl's face
14. \_\_\_\_\_ black hairs in the white portion on a harl
15. \_\_\_\_\_ a very large black patch on a harl
16. \_\_\_\_\_ a break in the mantle that is bigger than 'small'
17. \_\_\_\_\_ white on a mantle that extends up on the body behind the shoulders and above the elbows
18. \_\_\_\_\_ all feet not white on a mantle
19. \_\_\_\_\_ lacking white tail tip on a mantle
20. Are there any particular color faults that bother you more than others?

The overall average rank, including all faults and all respondents, was 2.7, between "tie breaker" and "may be considered." I tallied responses by colors of dogs bred, fawns and brindles in one group and aoc (any other color) colors in another. I also averaged responses separately for Great Dane breeder-judges, breeders who were not judges but who would qualify to judge, and breeders who are not judges and who wouldn't qualify.

Great Dane breeders who bred the solid colors and brindles were slightly harder on more of the color faults than those who bred harls and mantles. Harl and mantle patterns don't necessarily breed true and therefore have more opportunities for mismarks. This experience may contribute to their breeders' greater tolerance of color faults. The aoc colors group was more critical than the fawn/brindle group on three faults: white on chest, white toes, or lacking white tail tips on mantles.

The aoc colors group penalized the mantle faults (lacking white tail tip, all four feet not white, white up the body, break in mantle) more than other color faults. They were least critical of lacking black cosmetics on fawn/brindle, pale fawn, heavily brindled, ticking on harls, and pink noses on harls.

The fawn/brindle surveys agreed with the aoc group on mantle faults as the most serious. They were least concerned with white on toes, white on chest, and ticking on harls.

Great Dane breeder-judges gave less importance to every color fault, with an average rating of a little above 2 (tiebreaker). The more experienced the breeder-judge, the less they penalized color faults. The Great Dane breeders who do not judge, and who would not qualify to judge, penalized color faults the most highly.

Breeders who don't judge, but who would qualify to do so if they applied, considered color faults midway between the two. I expect that experienced breeder-judges are more tolerant of color faults because it is hard enough to find a typey, structurally sound, good moving dog without giving color a high priority. Less experienced folks are less tolerant, perhaps because color faults are easier to see.

The color faults most highly penalized by all groups were those of the mantle: not having all four white feet; lacking a white tail tip; white on the body above the elbows and behind the shoulders; and a bigger-than-small break in the mantle. Mantle is the most recently allowed color (approved in 1999). Part of the reason for the greater faulting of mantle deviations may be because, while there was strong support for approving the mantle, there was less unanimity on the precise description. In several comments, people expressed their concern about what they consider mismarked harls and blacks being shown as mantles.

After mantle, the next most heavily penalized in the survey were harlequin color faults: more than a few small merle spots or very heavily and very lightly marked harls. With the recent standard change, merle patches are normal, although how many merle patches there could be before it might be faulty isn't addressed.

Pink noses and little or no black on the face (although the latter not mentioned in the standard) bothered some when it affected expression. The fault of black hairs in the white base coat (ticking) was rated as the least serious fault on overall average, yet many comments expressly said that excessive ticking on a harl is offensive. It is likely a matter of degree, therefore: some ticking is not preferred, but accepted; too much ticking is more faulty.

Several other color faults were listed as more bothersome than others. Sooty fawns, where black hairs on fawn gives a dirty look, was the highest ranking fawn or brindle fault. Onyx brindles have the black predominating with less of the fawn base coat, a reverse brindle. The black brindle, acceptable in some breeds like Boxers, is not acceptable in Danes. I'm not sure there is agreement, though, on when a heavily marked brindle (lightly faulted) becomes an onyx brindle. Great Dane breeders have a smaller range of acceptable brindling than many other breeds, before it is too little or too much.

Many color faults were ranked minor, in addition to the one of some ticking on a harl. Among them were white on the chest or toes (on solid color and brindle dogs);

lighter or heavier marked brindles; and the amount of masking and cosmetics on fawns and brindles. By the way, the mask is only “preferred” on a brindle; it is acceptable for a brindle to have no mask.

The following is the list of color faults in sequence from the least important to the most serious based on the averages of all the surveys.

1. black hairs in the white portion on a harl
2. white on the chest of fawn, brindle, black, or blue Danes
2. (tie) white on the toes of black, blue, brindle, or blue Danes
4. noticeably lightly brindled
5. noticeably heavily brindled
6. lack of black markings (cosmetics) around the eyes of a fawn or brindle
7. amount of mask on a fawn
8. pale fawn color
9. pink nose on harls
10. little or no black on a harl’s face
11. a very large black patch on a harl
12. noticeably lightly marked harls
13. soot on a fawn
14. noticeably heavily marked harls
15. merle on a harl that is more than a few small spots
16. a break in the mantle that is bigger than ‘small’
17. white on a mantle that extends up on the body behind the shoulders and above the elbows
18. lacking white tail tip on a mantle
19. all feet not white on a mantle

The following were the color faults that bothered two or more of the surveyed breeder-judges more than other faults. The first listed faults were most commonly listed. The later listed faults listed by few.

None – the most common reply; they considered color faults least important

Heavy ticking (harl)

Very sooty fawns

Black chests (fawn)

Very “pink” looking harl

Heavily marked harl

Pale, washed out color (fawn, brindle, blue)

Large breaks in the mantle

Several conclusions can be drawn from the survey. Great Dane breeders appreciate good color and consider it when breeding. But most Great Dane people, especially the more experienced breeders and breeder-judges, value type, structure, and soundness more highly than color.

In the Great Dane standard, there is no preference among the colors. The same standard applies to all the colors. The best overall Great Danes should win regardless of

color, the ones that best fit the standard, so long as it is one of the colors/patterns in our standard. The breed ring is no place for affirmative action.