

# GREAT DANE

# MOVEMENT

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From the Great Dane standard:

“...shall move with a long reach and powerful drive.”

And

“The gait denotes strength and power with long, easy strides resulting in no tossing, rolling or bouncing of the topline or body. The backline shall appear level and parallel to the ground. The long reach should strike the ground below the nose while the head is carried forward. The powerful rear drive should be balanced to the reach. As speed increases, there is a natural tendency for the legs to converge toward the centerline of balance beneath the body. There should be no twisting in or out at the elbow or hock joints.”

The standard is clear on the correct movement. But many Great Danes don't move entirely as they should. Which characteristics of movement should be accorded more value when evaluating a dog's gait?

The standard spends more words describing side gait, or at least characteristics that one sees when viewing the moving dog in profile. Does that mean side gait is more important?

I invited Great Dane breeder-judges to complete a survey to see if there is general agreement on how to value components of movement. Twenty-four returned the surveys. They averaged over thirty-seven years in the breed and nearly ten years in judging it. Those who have been in the breed for at least thirty years averaged more than forty years in Great Danes and more than twenty-one years judging them. Half of the breeder-judges were also approved to judge other breeds and so have evaluated movement in the other breeds as well.

## Movement Virtues

The Great Dane breeder-judges were asked to rank ten movement virtues. Here is the list in sequence from the most important to the least important based on the average ranks of all the participants.

1. Balance in side gait between front and rear extension
2. Reach/extension in the front as viewed from the side



3. Strength and level stability of the topline when moving



4. Extension and follow through in the rear as viewed from the side.

5. Clean and true coming at you
6. Clean and true going away
7. Legs converging towards the centerline beneath the body as speed increases



8. Strength of hock and power of kick viewed both from the side and going away
9. Correct foot timing
10. Correct foot placement



First place “Balance in side gait between front and rear extension” was noticeably ahead of all the other items. Two of the next three items, “Reach extension in front” (2nd) and “Extension and follow through in the rear” (4th) are components of the first place virtue. Third place “Strength and level stability of topline” completes the picture in profile.

In the middle of the list was good movement coming and going, valued lower than side gait.

The last four virtues had averages close to each other

and more than two points lower than clean and true coming and going in the middle. The only one I’d like more information on would be foot timing, which movement experts place great store in, but is not mentioned in our standard. This group of Great Dane experts placed it much below other parts of movement.

I also averaged the input using only those breeder-judges who have at least thirty years in the breed. The results were very similar. “Topline” and “Rear extension” swapped places. So did “Converging” and “Hock strength.” “Foot placement” and “Foot timing” were tied and more strongly at the bottom.

The averages of the more experienced judges, those who have been judging at least fifteen years, placed the first six features the same as those with at least thirty years in the breed: “Balance front/rear; front reach/extension;” “Rear extension;” “Level topline moving;” “Coming at you;” and “Going away.” The only difference between these two groups is that the more experienced judges valued “Convergence” ahead of “Hock strength.”

The averages of the breeder-judges who also judge other breeds were similar. “Balanced reach and drive” was first and two-and-a-half points ahead of second place “Front reach/extension.” “Topline” and “Rear extension” were tied for third, followed by the middle valued “Coming at you” and “Going away.” The last four were placed differently, though. “Foot timing” was seventh, “Foot placement” eighth, “Hock strength” ninth, and “Converging” last.

## Movement Faults

The Great Dane experts were also asked to rank a list of movement faults, from most serious to the least serious. Here is the list in sequence based on the average ranks of all the surveys.

1. Lacking reach and/or drive
2. Topline not level when moving



6. Tossing or rolling of body
7. Rear moving too close or crossing



3. Cowhocks (going away)
4. Paddling (loose pastern movement)



8. Toeing in (coming towards you)



5. Out at elbows when moving



9. Moving wide in rear going away





## 10. Moving wide in front coming at you

The averages of the faults were more spread out than those of the virtues. “Out at the elbows” (4th) and “Paddling” (5th) were close, and additional input could change their rankings. “Tossing/rolling” (6th) was also close with “Close/crossing in the rear” (7th) as were the last two “Moving wide” in the rear or the front.

There was some consistency between the two lists, especially in valuing reach and drive. “Topline not level” (2nd) was more serious as a fault. While “Converging” was below average as a virtue, “Moving wide” (e.g. not converging) front and rear were the least serious faults.

When comparing the total group sequence with the subset with thirty or more years in Danes, several faults changed places. “Cowhocks” was more serious than “Topline not level.” “Paddling” was more serious than “Out at the elbows.” And “Close/crossing in rear” was more serious than “Toss/rolling body.”

The more experienced judges (fifteen years or more) varied somewhat from the more experienced Great Dane group. The first four placed the same as did the last two. But the sequence of the middle faults were “Close/crossing in rear” (5th), “Out at the elbows” (6th), “Toeing in” (7th), and “Toss/roll body” (8th).

Those who are approved to judge more than one breed also had small variations from the other experienced judges. Again, “Lacking reach and drive” was most serious. And they agreed on the bottom four faults. But “Topline not level” was now second, “Paddling” third, “Cowhocks” fourth, “Out at elbows” fifth, and “Close/crossing in the rear” sixth.

### Other Considerations

The group was asked their opinions on several questions relating to movement.

How much is structure related to good movement? The responses varied from “some” to “completely.” Most felt correct structure and good movement were highly correlated. Several mentioned that a faulty

front assembly would especially impact movement.

Another expert mentioned that it doesn’t always correspond, that there are well structured Danes who move poorly and less well built ones who move well. Some other factors that can affect movement include conditioning, balance, attitude, and the athleticism of the dog.

Which Great Dane structural fault(s) have the most negative effects on movement? Most often named on the surveys was straight shoulders closely followed by poor angulation. Balance was also mentioned as well as poor rears.

Can the handler affect or improve a Great Dane’s movement? If so, what can the handler do, and what is the result? A substantial majority felt that the handler can indeed affect a Dane’s movement, usually negatively. The bad handling listed most often was moving too fast or too slow for the dog. Some thought it might be done to hide poor movement. Tight lead or stringing a dog up also can produce faulty movement.

Even before the show, the breeder-judges recommended that the dog be conditioned and show trained. A conditioned dog can move with more strength and authority. Training will let the dog move on a loose lead, in a straight line, and at a good speed for the dog – all of which make his movement look as good as possible.

A few surveys mentioned that some Danes might be too big or too much dog for a particular handler to manage. Further, if the handler can’t or doesn’t move at a good speed for the dog, the dog won’t look as good moving as he otherwise could.

Also, the more forward and lower a dog’s head is carried (down to level with the back), the lower the front of the dog is since at that position the dog’s front reach and follow through can be the greatest. A dog moving with the neck and head level with the back can result in a dog’s topline looking like he is moving down hill, since his front is lower and then his rear may be higher. Keeping the Dane’s neck and head at a forty-five degree angle can produce a better topline than one with the head carried lower.

Which moves better, a square Great Dane, a Dane that is slightly longer than square, or a Dane that is slightly taller than long (everything else being equal)?

Over half the group said slightly longer would move better. But almost as many said that a square dog would move better if it were balanced and correctly built.

Our standard says square, although it used to say as square as possible. Our standard calls for a well angulated front and rear. A dog has to be very well balanced and moved at just the right speed to move correctly when both square and well angulated.

How much can condition impact a Great Dane's movement? What conditioning can improve a Dane's movement, and how? All agreed that a well conditioned dog would move better than the same dog not in condition. Better muscling provides more power and more effortless movement. How important is a dog's movement when you are evaluating the overall quality of a Great Dane? What, if anything, is of equal or greater importance?

The majority felt that breed type and balance were

more important than movement alone. Several felt that breed type and movement were equally important. Others felt that movement was a component of breed type. All felt that correct movement in Great Danes was very important.

Any other comments on Great Dane movement

Many of the survey participants felt that too many Great Danes don't move as well as they should. Lacking reach and drive was mentioned, as was side-winding. Some experts felt that watching a Dane moving showed the real dog more accurately, less enhanced or handicapped by good or bad handling.

Thanks so much to the Great Dane breeder-judges for taking the time so share their opinions and expertise.

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