



*Monsieur
Standard*

An interview with Dogue
de Bordeaux legend
Raymond Triquet



For those who truly know the Dogue de Bordeaux, Prof. Raymond Triquet needs no introduction. The world's foremost expert on this eye-catching French mastiff, he wrote the definitive book on the breed, "The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux," not to mention the modern French standard. A now retired professor who taught phonetics, grammar, scientific translation and lexicology at the University of Lille in France, Prof. Triquet was the president of the FCI standards committee for many years. And it is very possible that without him, the Dogue de Bordeaux would not have survived to see this century.

MODERN MOLOSSER is honored to publish this interview with the man fanciers unabashedly call "the father of the Dogue de Bordeaux."

>>>> *An Interview with a Legend*



Mowgli De La Masison Des Arbres

Credit: "The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux," Bas Bosch Press

You were instrumental in rebuilding the breed in the 1960s. How did this come about?

At the time, I was a teacher in a grammar school, and a pupil of mine came to me and said, "Oh, sir, I saw a dog. He is fantastic." So I went and faced my first Dogue de Bordeaux, a big, old one. He was like a lion. And I knew immediately it was my duty to help the breed revive.

It is said the breed was rebuilt with a handful of dogs. Where did you find them?

There were two breeders left. One bred regularly, the other more erratically, and they disliked each other. I bought a puppy bitch from one. I was very lucky to have her served by an old, beautiful dog from the other strain, who died soon after that. He was 7 or 8 years old, and had never served a bitch in his life, but he could do it.

At that time in France, generally the owner of the male chose a puppy from

the litter, what we call the first choice. The owner of this dog crossed France to reach me in the north of France, where I was living at the time, and he chose the best puppy, of course.

I said, "Look, you have a right to choose this best puppy, but are you going to keep it?" He said no, he was going to sell it. And I said, "I am trying to help the breed, and here you cut the grass under my feet."

He said, "OK, I will choose another one." He was a gentleman, marvelous. There are very few left like that in the world.

What happened to that puppy?

That puppy, Mowgli, became a champion. I started reviving the breed by showing this beautiful dog. People at dog shows, everyone, said, "What is this dog? Is this a breed or what?"

An old man came to me and said, "Thank you so much for preserving the Dogue de

Bordeaux.” He was a whipper-in in the forest, a man who was in charge of a hunting pack in old times. The owner of the forest and the hunt was an Englishman, and when the Germans came in 1940, he shot all his dogs and all his horses before leaving for England.

This whipper-in had hunted the deer and especially the wild boar with the Dogue de Bordeaux, and he was enchanted to see one again. “I thought the breed was completely dead,” he told me.

You have been quoted as saying the Dogue de Bordeaux must be a “superb athlete.” What part of the breed’s original function necessitated agility and maneuverability?

This term was used in the standard of 1924: “a redoubtable athlete.” It was so before the 1914 war, when the Dogue was pitted against the bear. It has also been used for hunting the wild boar, then as a watchdog.

You wrote the modern Dogue de Bordeaux standard in 1970. What was your biggest challenge in doing this?

To draft a scientific standard, free from idiotic expressions like “undershot condition = by 1 centimeter at least.”

When they said that the Dogue de Bordeaux should be undershot by at least one centimeter, I wrote an article and said, “Then one kilometer is OK.” It is dangerous to say silly things in standards.

Of course, there are people who never read standards, including some

judges. They don’t because they have a model in their brain, and judge after this model, which is very, very dangerous, because they create exaggeration. I call them crocodile judges, because if you give them crocodiles to judge, they will place first, second and third.

“One danger with the Americans, you know, is even if they don’t change standards, they change dogs.”

The standard was updated in 1995 and 1999. What were the reasons for this?

In 1995, it was to address the undershot condition and movement. In 1999, to stop monstrous exaggeration and to clarify coat color.

What is the drag of the breed – unwanted features from previous ancestors that come up from time to time and need to be bred away from?

Bulldog type and kinked tails, Bloodhound type and Mastiff type.

What do you think are the breed’s greatest strengths right now?

Its striking appearance and power, with a wonderful temperament.



Prof Triquet, with puppies in 1968.
Photo Credit: “The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux,” Bas Bosch Press

Where do you think there is most room for improvement?

In the movement – thrust from behind, long reach in front and no cow hocks.

What is the biggest mistake the generalist judge makes in judging the Dogue de Bordeaux?

No mistake if he knows the breed (and the standard!) A terrible mistake if he judges dogs he doesn’t know.

For example, in the U.S. while I was visiting, an overshot Dogue placed first. Afterward, there was a panel of judges listening to me, and I was asked what I thought. I said I would take that pedigree and tear it to pieces, which in France we can do: If a dog does not conform to the standard, we are obliged to send a report to the kennel club to have the pedigree revoked.

The reaction from the judge was very good. He said, “Next time, I will know.” He was not upset at all.



Prof. Triquet and friend.
Photo Credit: "The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux," Bas Bosch Press

What are the most significant differences between the French standard and the American one?

The American standard was made from the French one. I collaborated. See for yourself! (Ed: And see story on page 21.)

The American standard is not very different. One danger with the Americans, you know, is even if they don't change standards, they change dogs. I tell you frankly that when you give the Americans a dog, they turn it into another breed in 10 years' time.

But so far, that has not been the case with the Dogue de Bordeaux. The parent club has brought in judges from France and Spain, real connoisseurs of the breed. Up to now, American breeders have worked very well with the Dogue de Bordeaux. I went there three times, and what I saw was *our* Dogue de Bordeaux.

Are there any areas where American breeders are moving away from true Dogue de Bordeaux type?

Americans like big dogs. They like big men, too, like Rambo and Arnold Schwarzenegger. And some Americans like huge Dogue de Bordeaux with plenty of wrinkles and sometimes strange, illegal colors like chocolate, which is an eliminating fault.

The Dogue de Bordeaux is not really huge, 68 centimeters (26.8 inches) high, not more; it doesn't weigh as much as a hippo.

This is a very important point: Some so-called Dogue de Bordeaux breeders have sent dogs to America with the chocolate color. Chocolate has never appeared in the Dogue de Bordeaux – never. If it appears, it should be totally rejected. Please tell American judges when they see a real chocolate Dogue de Bordeaux – like a chocolate Labrador retriever, that deep color – then dismiss them. Out. Never breed from such a dog.

What about black-masked dogs?

It has always been said that it is more difficult to breed a good black mask than a brown mask. Some people say black masks appeared with the first mastiffs and bullmastiffs coming to France in the 19th Century.

It is true that black masks in the Dogue de Bordeaux tend to look a

little bit like bullmastiffs. Very seldom do they have the trapezium head, with eyes well apart, giving the sphinx expression of the Dogue de Bordeaux. But nowadays we have in France some very good black masks – not many, but some. Tell Americans not to discard the black mask, because it is dominant to the brown, and once the black mask disappears, it will never return again. Two black masks bred together can give some brown masks, but two brown masks give nothing but brown masks.

Are there areas where American breeders are excelling?

The movement of dogs in America as a whole is much better than in Europe. No doubt about that. The danger is to have all dogs moving like Afghan hounds, which is not natural at all. Americans train their dogs very early and quickly. And so the dogs generally have a very good action, but sometimes much too supple, flowing, light, because the Dogue de Bordeaux cannot be light.

What parts of the Dogue de Bordeaux standard do you feel are most often misunderstood?

The shape of the head, the wrinkles and the description of the back.

The head is trapezium-shaped, wider at the occiput than at the level of the eyes, which is wider than at the muzzle. If there is no trapezium shape,

then there is the head of the mastiff, which is rounder. Many have that fault.

“The movement of dogs in America as a whole is much better than in Europe. No doubt about that.”

The Dogue de Bordeaux is wrinkled, no problem. But we do not want “dead” folds like those of bulldogs. The wrinkles of the Dogue de Bordeaux are living – that is, when the dog is attentive, there are more wrinkles, and when it is not attentive, they are fewer and not so deep. And we don’t want that ugly, swollen fold, which we compare to a water pipe, crossing the cheek; this is not normal, and it is due to crossing to Mastini Napoletani and Shar-pei. Cheeks are big, muscled, fleshy, but they should be clean. If there is a fold, it remains discreet, not swollen.

We try to have a topline that is as straight as possible, which means the perfect topline is impossible – it is not normal in the Dogue de Bordeaux because normally the Dogue de

Bordeaux is concave. But we don’t want a bulldog, we don’t want a dip. We try to have it as straight as possible for the health of the Dogue de Bordeaux and for its movement, too.

You have cautioned against exaggeration in the breed, against an appearance that suggests monstrosity. Where is there the greatest danger of this occurring?

In head type, with too big a head with too short a muzzle and too many folds. Breeders guard against this by being intelligent and honest and humble.

What sets the French mastiff apart from all the other mastiffs in the world?

His trapezium-shaped head, his dissuasive look, together with his tender-hearted personality. But I am no chauvinist.

What is ideal Dogue de Bordeaux temperament?

The Dogue de Bordeaux’s face frightens people. But the heart is golden – very, very tender. They love

their masters, and they love their mistresses more. Many males are in love with their mistresses to the point of repelling the husband.

The Dogue de Bordeaux we have nowadays is a very nice dog, tender hearted. Some of them are still very good guards, but if the master has many friends and he greets all his friends, the Dogue



*Prof Triquet, third from left, at the Société des Amateurs de Dogues de Bordeaux French National show in September 2008.
Photo Courtesy of Mark McElderry*

de Bordeaux does the same. On the contrary, if the master is what we in French call a bear, if he has no friends and turns everyone out, the Dogue de Bordeaux will do the same. He imitates his master.

Have you bred any other breeds?

I had boxers first. I had one litter, kept one male, who was charming, but not good for shows. I showed him once and I was sacked. He lived to be 12 years old.

Other than the Dogue de Bordeaux, I had bulldogs, but never had puppies. I bought a champion bulldog in England. He cost me a fortune, but he was unable to serve a bitch. The male lived to be ten. At that time, we were just beginning to use artificial insemination, and we tried, but there was no result at all. I was cured. I never tried again.

By comparison, the Dogue de Bordeaux must be far easier to breed.

I am astonished to hear, especially from America, about Dogue de Bordeaux that have C sections. I never had a C section with a Dogue de Bordeaux bitch. Now breeders everywhere do simply because they don't want to get up at night.

If you could give only one piece of advice to Dogue de Bordeaux breeders, what would it be?

Breed sound Dogues, not caricatures. It's very easy to change this breed into a huge bulldog. But very bad for the breed.

If you could give only one piece of advice to Dogue de Bordeaux judges, what would it be?

Study the breed standard. ■



Belmondo the Red Powerpack

While Prof. Triquet will not name his favorite Dogue de Bordeaux, some good ones come to mind, including Belmondo the Red Powerpack:

"I made Belmondo a world champion. I judged the World Championship in Switzerland, and I had 70 to 75 Dogues de Bordeaux, and my best was Belmondo. Beautiful dog. Not exaggerated all, a really a good specimen. And a Russian lady came to me and she said, 'Is this one really the best?' I said, 'Well, according to me.' She went to the owner and said, 'I'll buy your dog.' She offered a huge amount of money and the dog was for sale." He went to Russia and was very, very successful."

Photo Credit: "The Saga of the Dogue de Bordeaux," Bas Bosch Press

THE DDB BIBLE

"The Saga of The Dogue de Bordeaux: From the Antique Molossus to the Modern Dogue," by Professor Raymond Triquet. Published by Bas Bosch Press.

"According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a 'saga' is a medieval story of heroic deeds and a long narrative about a family," explains Prof. Triquet. "Isn't this what I narrated [in the book], from the Middle Ages to modern times?"

The book is currently out of print, but a revised edition will be published in the fall. For more information, visit www.bbpress.nl.