

Cardigan Type

My Views on Type in the Cardigan Welsh Corgi

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Many lament the passing of the benched shows, supposedly on the pretext that worthwhile discussions on dogs are no longer prevalent. I, however, have no such sorrows, and as I write this article on Cardigan type it is with no small glee that I realize I shall be able to complete a sentence without being interrupted and contradicted.

The Cardigan Welsh Corgi is one of the most misunderstood breeds, not only by judges, but equally, if not more so by its breeders. It is one of the most difficult breeds to understand because it is vastly complex, and there is nothing in the least that is common or natural about it. I consider the breed to be a "profile" breed, where many of the singularities may be judged from the profile. Indeed, a dog with a poor profile is not going to be of much value. There is a distinct mentality prevalent in this breed that if one wants a sound dog, one has no predisposition for type, and if one wants a typey dog, one wouldn't know a good mover if it ran him over. It should be categorically stated that a Cardigan can never be considered great if he is not a really good mover, but by the same token, a dog that does not impress standing is of no consequence in motion.

It is a great injustice that the Cardigan's head is judged on a negative basis, where one looks it over to see if there is anything that strikes as being particularly ugly. There are a multitude of Cardigan heads that are completely without merit; for this reason, one is hard pressed for an accurate description beyond, "Yep, it's a head all right." Of supreme importance is balance. By being compared to the Pembroke head as larger and blunter, the Cardigan ring is full of dogs with large, blunt heads. Some bloodlines have a dogged propensity for this. If you look at a man and woman standing side by side, you will undoubtedly notice the man has a larger head, but when comparing the difference in builds, the astute will also notice that the man's head is in proportion to his build, as the woman's is to her build. The Cardigan should not have a head that is in any way out of proportion to his build. Of next importance is cleanliness of backskull. The good head will not have prominent cheeks, and for clarity, let me say the cheeks will be so flat and smooth that one will not detect any notable bulging when running one's hand backward from the muzzle to the sides of the head. There must be enough stop to break up a streamlined appearance from the side, but it must be with smooth lines and not sharp jags or too much rounding. The head, in profile or full face, should be wedge shaped; the triangle formed from the width of backskull to the muzzle is approximately the same as that from profile, the triangle from the topline of the backskull in front of the ear to the deepest point of the lower jaw to the point of the nose. Rarely seen, and of infinite importance, is the three to five proportion of the muzzle to backskull. Dogs these days are often more near one to one which is quite incorrect.

The eyes are the window to the soul, and these should be nice sized, not too round, well set in with good chiseling underneath to give a warm, kind expression. The backskull between the ears should be absolutely flat with no rounding or doming. The muzzle should finish off smoothly, a slightly projected nose will help counteract a too rounded finish, while a strong underjaw will prevent the finish from being too fine. In total, we look for a top class, stylish head which possesses great beauty and quality, fitting the body in pleasing proportion. The ears should be set on the corners of the backskull and point out to such an angle that they balance the width of head; too upright makes the head look coarse, too low set gives a dull,

"dumbo" appearance. I look for big ears, with good rounded tips, which to the uninitiated, contradicts the insistence on proportion.

In man or beast, the singular asset that signifies quality and the look of "breeding" is a long neck with the ability to carry the head high, and in the Cardigan the strong, reachy neck aids in the long, sweeping profile that we strive for. Too many dogs in the ring either have necks lacking length, necks that are too thick and coarse, or both. The neck must blend smoothly into the body; from the front it should gradually widen to the shoulders, and in silhouette it should curve smoothly into the topline and not break where it joins the body, commonly known as a stove-pipe neck.

Probably the most difficult to understand, complex area of Cardigan type is in understanding the correct forehand. Taken piece by piece, I shall first describe what I look for in profile, and then from the front. The Cardigan is of the Teckel family, the family that claims the Dachshund, and there are certain similarities to the hound. The breastbone should be very prominent, the forechest should be sweeping, not angular, and should come nearly down to the top of the pastern joint, the deepest part of the forechest should be hidden by the foreleg when viewed from the side, and not continue downwards behind the foreleg, which gives the appearance of being broken down in front. A dog with the proper deep chest will look quite short-legged, but upon close inspection one will detect the elbow of the foreleg to be well up on the chest wall so that the dog is slung between his legs, and not just very short-legged, with the legs tacked on underneath like an afterthought. A properly constructed Cardigan can thus be low and still capable of taking good reaching strides. Of course, one looks for a well angulated shoulder, the upper arm and shoulder blade being nearly equal in length, thus the dog's forelegs should be well under the body, and not out front near the breastbone. I have noticed that some dogs that are proclaimed to have excellent shoulder angulation have low breastbones in profile, as the upper arm and shoulder join in the vicinity of the breastbone, thus increasing the angulation while decreasing the sweep of the forechest to the foreleg, or deepest part of the chest. I question the value of the heralded asset that dispenses with breed type as these exaggerated shoulders seem to do. At the risk of being hanged as un-American, I must proclaim that more is not synonymous with better. Believe it or not, in the world of straight shoulders and straight stifles, one can have too much angulation just as one can have too little.

From the front, again we want smoothness, not bumps and bulges. The Cardigan possesses a good deal of substance, in both bone and rib spring, and thus the chest must be moderately wide. The chest should fairly well fill the crook in the leg, and not dangle above exposing bandy legs. It should taper some as it comes down; we have seen many either too narrow and V-shaped or too round. The very round front will cause the dog to move in a rolling, sailor-like motion. Proper movement in front can depend in large part on the shape of the forelegs. The legs must curve smoothly around the deep chest, the pasterns are short and parallel and the front feet turn out to a small degree. That simple sentence describes a most troublesome and very rarely seen factor in the breed. It must appear neat, extremely attractive and sound. Since the legs curve, the pasterns are noticeably CLOSER together than the elbows, but please, these should not be CLOSE. Quality bone goes a long way toward making a Cardigan appear top class. My rather lame definition of quality is something that looks like it was made out of expensive parts, and this is most important in the quality of bone the Cardigan possesses. It should be roundish, not flat and angular, very smooth, good looking. Proper heavy quality bone is important in producing the correct feet which must be round, nice sized but not humongous, very well arched and tight. The Cardigan is unfortunately subject to fantastic exaggeration, so I must interject that huge, round clubs are not what we are after. My

last note on the forehand must be that shoulders that are well angulated, well laid back, and flat will not be loaded, but remember, a dog with the substance and bone of the proper Cardigan will not possess the super flat and smooth shoulder of a dog with less power and muscle.

As noted previously, the ribs should be well sprung and carried well back. The length of body must come from the long ribcage, and not a long loin. The underline of the Cardigan is as distinctive as the topline. The underline should begin behind the foreleg where it runs under the ribcage, rising smoothly to the shorter ribs and up slightly to a tuckup at the undercarriage. The tuckup must be slight, but noticeable, so the underline is a long smooth line that curves upward towards the belly. A proper underline is more rare than a good topline in this breed, as many dogs have an underline that runs almost parallel to the ground, giving the dog a shapeless, unbecoming figure. The topline must be level. No dips, valleys or hills to climb. The tail is set on slightly low so there must be a small slope of the croup. From above, looking down on the dog, the ribs should spring out, and then there should be a slight waist and a corresponding widening at the flanks. A variation on this theme is the rib spring, waist, and tiny, little flanks stuck on the back. Indeed, some dogs begin with large heads and progressively taper to their tail tips, which is quite unique and utterly wrong. Dogs with narrow flanks and big heads disgust me.

Discussing the all important rearhand, we want good angulation, long leg bones and short, well let down hocks. The powerful rear is not just a product of angulation, but also of length of leg bones. It should be quite obvious to the common man that someone with long legs can take longer strides than someone with short legs. When stacked, the hock should be behind the buttocks, or furthest protuberance of the pelvis bone. The hind feet should point forward and the hocks are parallel from the rear.

The final structure under discussion is the tail. Fortunes have been made and lost on this subject. It is indeed true that the Cardigan should have a detectable tail, it must reach at least to the hock joint, but we have a tendency to attach far too much significance to this appendage, undoubtedly due to the fact that it is so well exposed that everyone and their grandmother can judge a tail. A low tailset does not insure low tail carriage; the main reason we look for a low tail carriage is that a high one spoils the long, low look. To my knowledge, low tails make no significant contribution towards working ability, and a dog that walked with a low tail would undoubtedly find it full of mud and muck by the end of the day. I do not mean to belittle the tail, nothing is more beautiful than an extremely long tail with the proper fox brush carried down to enhance the profile standing and in motion, but we must realize that poor tail carriage is a superficial fault, and there are many more important features to be concerned with. Of course, ring tails or overly gay tails are displeasing, but the dog should not be blessed or cursed because of his tail.

As with all the features of the Cardigan, there is infinite variety in coats. The coat must be double, with good undercoat, and the outercoat must be protective against rain, mud and all sundry. It should be neither harsh nor soft, and fairly straight, although a slight wave here and there is not criminal. A coat that is too short is quite ugly and does not offer proper protection, while a longish coat is not neat and encourages the collection of mud, briars, etc. The standard adeptly describes color, I only wish to intimate that markings are of the least importance, other than obvious whielies.

In motion, the Cardigan must move strongly and soundly. I have read as many descriptions of good movement as there are writers. I look for a true rear with no coming in of the hind feet.

The front must also move true, although the curving forelegs insist that the footfall is slightly closer than the footfall of the hind legs. Forelegs that straighten out in movement are not correct, and often cause the dog to roll in front, as a narrow rear will have the tendency to aggravate a roll. The side view is most important, for the dogs move to go somewhere, thus a true mover with no drive or freedom of movement is not very efficient. The legs must reach well forward in front and rear, and the rear arc must be complete, the hock and stifle flexing out at the furthest rearward extension. This again must not be exaggerated, and too high a rear extension gives flashy, inefficient movement often seen in Poodles, Lhasa Apsos and Kerry Blue Terriers. I like dogs to be moved at a steady, workmanlike trot, the speed a dog would use on a workday in the field. (Depending on my frame of mind, the breakneck speed at which many handlers exhibit their dogs, trotting as fast as possible just before breaking into a gallop, is either funny when I'm in a good mood, or quite asinine when I'm not.) The head is carried up, but off the vertical, and the topline remains level.

My vision of the ideal Cardigan is still just that - a vision. I have yet to see a dog that was really pleasing both standing and in motion, the breed simply has not progressed that far. But I hope, in describing my ideal, that we will be able to appreciate those specimens that bring to us much needed excellence, and not unnecessarily condemn such dogs for the faults which they will invariably possess.

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