

## ***Agility in general***

By Johanna Flinck, Finland

Agility is a fast and furious dog sport open to every breed, offering great pleasure to both dog and handler. Agility was invented in the 80's in Great Britain and it has gained popularity all over the world as a hobby and sports.

Agility improves the communication between dog and handler. Quickly changing events demand obedience from the dog and the handler's ability to anticipate the dog's intentions. A top performance requires close co-operation, almost as if dog and handler were reading each other's minds. There's real magic to it.

In agility competitions the unleashed dog has to perform a course with about 20 obstacles. These include jumps or hurdles, contact area obstacles, tunnels and weave poles. For each course a standard course time is established, and exceeding it leads to a time penalty. Missed contact areas, knocked off bars, refusals, run outs and touching the dog also count as faults. Taking a wrong course leads to disqualification.

In competitions, the participating dogs are divided in classes by size and previous success. In FCI-countries Cardigans compete in the mini-class for dogs measuring less than 35 cm at the withers. There are three levels. Everyone starts in level one and proceeds, by success, to levels two and three. Rules vary from country to country and more precise information is available from each country's kennel club, so please contact your own club.

## ***Cardigan Welsh Corgis and agility***

If you wish to belong to the elite in agility, a Cardigan may not be your number one choice. This does not mean that it is impossible; when the right dog meets the right handler anything can happen. Top agility dogs need a structure that may not meet the trends of dog shows but this does not mean that agility dogs are not healthy in structure. On the contrary, agility requires anatomical balance, good temperament and general health! Going for the top requires good physical condition, speed, agility and demands great concentration from both dog and handler. Agility is not the place for counting the hours used for training; working out takes time.

As a simple hobby agility suits every one regardless of the dog's or the handler's age. Every one can adjust the course and the speed to suit themselves and their dog.

Competing should not be the only motive for this hobby. If you feel agility could simply be nice to try you have the right attitude. If competing starts to intrigue you Cardigans are not really that rare a sight in trials.

## ***Training***

Agility training should always take place under licensed trainers' observation (depending on the country in which you live, for example, in the US there are no licensed trainers, but look for someone with experience who has titled many different dogs). The easiest way to do this is to participate in basic lessons arranged by local agility training associations.

Cardigans develop their skeletal and muscular system very slowly. Therefore high jumps and repeated exercises with contact area obstacles should be avoided until the dog is about 18 to 24 months old. Agility has nothing to do with high-jump competition and it is too easy to over-train a young dog and cause serious damage. So be patient!

In my experience Cardigans are terrible pupils in basic lessons and I mean this in a positive way. Cardigans learn extremely fast and they have no fear for the unknown. The dog walk, A-frame and tunnels are usually easy for Cardigans the first time they see these obstacles. Time saved in exploring the new obstacles should be used to teach the precise and proper way to perform the obstacles. Class mates may think that the Cardigan handler is a liar. It seems that they have tried the obstacles before even when they are first-timers.

### ***Keep fit, both of you!***

It is obvious that the majority of Cardigans are longer than high. This does not mean that they are unable to work, after all they had to cope with physical stress and perform rapid dives and turns when working cattle. When the Cardigan still was a working dog he was used to moving all day long. Some of the exercise was done when moving from one place to another on the grounds of the farm and some was done when working the cattle. Versatile workout ensured that the Cardigan had good muscles and this was the dog's ultimate protection from all kinds of injuries.

An agility dog needs muscles and suppleness! The best way to make sure your dog is fit is to offer versatile workout: walking and running, leashed and unleashed, swimming and so on. Proper flex training before and after performance is necessary for both dog and handler. Too many people often forget this, but have you ever seen a sportsman or -woman performing straight from the locker room without any warming up and going to sleep immediately after the performance? I bet you haven't.

Cardigans are bound to have weight problems, so be very strict with your dog's diet and never train an overweight dog!

There are excellent specialists in active dogs' muscle care. It is very wise to use the services of a masseur or physiotherapist.

### ***Some thoughts about agility and Cardigans***

In agility no one can ever be perfect, and that's a fact. You can always learn and do more, improve your handling, the overall development is continuous. Training once a week provides little challenge to the learning capacity of a Cardigan and the biggest hindrance in your career is you, the handler. The sport demands a great deal of self-contemplation, self-criticism and planning how to tackle the course. The dog makes very few mistakes, you are the "problem". You were not logical, you were too slow in a situation or you did not know enough in theory to make a smooth run.

It is often said that Cardigans cannot train agility because of their structure. If the dog is unbalanced in his anatomy, has a wrong conformation or is not fit, he is not suitable for any kinds of sports. This applies to every single breed, not just the Cardigan.

I strongly believe that the physical and mental challenges in agility indicate whether the dog would have been able to work in the harsh and rocky conditions of Wales. The Cardigan displays the same characteristics in agility as he did when helping to move cattle on the drovers' roads and avoiding the kicks of cattle. Body control and balanced structure were

crucial for the working dog. I sincerely hope that the modern Cardigan never loses his qualities as a swift, robust and mentally strong dog.

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*Johanna Flinck was introduced to agility in the late 80's and has been acting as Finnish Kennel Club licensed agility trainer since 1990. She has competed with Cardigan Welsh Corgis since 1993 and continues to do so successfully.*

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