

## SELECTING AND RAISING A CARDIGAN WELSH CORGI FOR AGILITY COMPETITION

**STRUCTURE AND TEMPERAMENT:** There are two essential ingredients for the performance Cardigan: structure and drive. The structure of the agility prospect should not be too different from the structure of a conformation prospect. Many breeders are reluctant to let puppies go to performance homes that have the correct structure for conformation showing (and therefore agility competition) but it is possible to find a Cardigan puppy (with a fault such as mismark, fluffy coat, bite that has gone off or cryptorchid) with excellent structure that may be available to you. Otherwise, you can possibly obtain the puppy you need by committing to finish his/her championship title. Let me stress that your puppy should NOT be a conformation reject, but should fit the standard of the breed as closely as possible, with the possible exception of size, as explained later, and the cosmetic features already described. To view the US Cardigan Welsh Corgi standard, check out [www.cardigancorgis.com](http://www.cardigancorgis.com) or the UK standard at <http://www.cardiganwelshcorgiassoc.co.uk/>, or visit the kennel club website in your country to view the current Cardigan standard.

The puppy that I like to see for agility is bold, outgoing and active, and usually the first one out of the whelping box. The perfect agility prospect is slightly different than the ideal obedience prospect. A puppy that is too oriented towards the owner may not be willing to work at the distance. One that is too independent may be difficult to keep “on course”. It is always a balance, because, as everyone who runs agility dogs knows, the fast dog is not always steady and the steady dog is not always fast. Finding a puppy with the perfect balance for performance at a young age may not be possible, but either personality type can be successfully trained.

It is a good idea to perform the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test:

<http://www.volhard.com/puppy/pat.htm> on puppies that may be agility prospects at close to 7 weeks of age. I like a middle of the road puppy slanting a bit more toward a hard temperament than may be ideal for a pet, testing mostly 2's and 3's, with strong retrieving and prey drives. Puppies that display strong herding drive may be the best agility prospects, as herding dogs seem to take to agility courses like “a duck to water”. Your breeder should be familiar with performance or actively participating in agility or herding competition. You should look for a breeder who performs health testing for eyes, hips and elbows and has a good idea about the incidence of intervertebral disc disease in his or her line.

The structure that is needed for an agility prospect is structure that is correct according to the Cardigan Welsh Corgi standard. There is one exception and that is that the pup that will mature out on the low end of the standard, or under standard for weight, would be preferable, as a lower height to weight ratio is advantageous to the longevity of your dog's performance career (with 1:2 or less most favorable, up to 1:3 favorable and over 1:3.5 height:weight being dangerous for the dog). This may be difficult to predict in a young puppy, as puppy size rarely determines adult size; but a larger Cardigan can run agility if the owner is careful and aware of the special demands placed on such a dog.

An agility prospect puppy should have good musculature even as a small puppy. Next, look at angulation. If the puppy has too much rear angulation (figure 1), he or she may develop cruciate ligament tears. However, too little angulation (as shown in figure 2) is not desirable, as the dog when mature will not have the ability to lift himself over the jumps efficiently. This type of rear angulation goes with too open an angle in the front, usually, which will cause the breakdown of the shoulder over time when asking the dog to jump repetitively. The other shoulder type that is not advantageous for the agility dog is the too upright shoulder. In this type of conformation, the shoulder blade runs directly up into the neck rather than laying along the back line of the dog (what breeders refer to as “layback”). Correct conformation is seen in figure 3 – neither too much nor too little rear angulation, and good shoulder layback, as well as good balance front to rear. The puppies illustrated are 8 weeks old in the photos. Your breeder should be able to assess for you whether or not the prospective puppy has balanced angulation front to rear, or you can use a piece of string to determine this for yourself.



Figure 1



figure 2



figure3

Your prospective puppy should have a correct front. A puppy that toes in or has too much turnout will break down after years of agility competition. Figure 4 shows a puppy with too much turnout. Cardigan puppies should have fronts that almost look straight, with only a slight crook at 8 weeks of age, such as in Figure 5.



figure 4



figure 5

The front leg placement of an agility prospect should be correct according to the breed standard. If the front legs are set on too far forward, as in figure 6, the puppy does not have correct structure for the long haul. Correct front leg placement is shown in figure 7. If the puppy has correct front leg placement, he or she will have a prominent prosternum (chest) and the front legs are well under the body. Dogs with front legs set on too far forward are not structurally correct. Check the ratio of upper arm length (leg from the point of elbow to point of shoulder) to shoulder blade. They should be close to equal in length BUT the bones should not be too short, which will cause the dog to be too straight angled in the front by having too open an angle of the shoulder assembly. To assess shoulder layback, check the angle of layback along the middle ridge of the shoulder blade. Also, there should be very little space between the tops of the two shoulder blades, about the width of a person's finger is ideal. The shoulders should feel tight to the body.



figure 6



figure 7

**RAISING THE PERFORMANCE CARDIGAN:** Canine growth plates generally are thought to close completely between 9 and 14 months. Because of its dwarfed frame, the Cardigan Corgi puppy may be particularly susceptible to damage to the growth plates as the puppy matures. To be on the safe side, it is best to wait until your Cardigan is between 1 year of age and 14 months before starting his or her performance career in earnest. This does not mean you can't train and imprint your Cardigan puppy, and puppies do need a challenge to the growth plates. It is generally recommended that until growth plates are closed, the puppy should jump **NO MORE** than knee height (of the dog). Of course, for a Cardigan puppy this is ridiculously low, and it may be difficult to ask your agility instructor to accommodate your pup when many others will not be challenged by that height, and there may be time constraints to adjusting the jumps. Never subject your puppy to **ANY** training procedure that is not in his or her best interest just to please instructor! Sideline yourself if accommodations cannot be made for your pup until the next exercise is in place. Growth plates are not restricted to the legs, and your puppy should **NEVER** do in-line weaving until his/her growth plates are closed! It is thought that in-line weaving may be even more damaging to growing dogs than too high/too much jumping. Your puppy can do offset weaving, which is where the weave poles are separated and the puppy essentially walks between them.

Be sure to keep your puppy lean if you plan to participate in performance activities. For some time, the prevailing thought amongst performance people has been that performance animals should be kept completely stripped down to the bone. This is a recipe for disaster if your animal becomes ill, as it has nothing to fall back on, so now many people are keeping a little extra cushion on weight on their performance dogs. But do keep your puppy as lean as you can while still maintaining good health. Don't forget that the more favorable the weight to height ratio, the less wear and tear on your dog. A dog weighing 38 lbs and measuring 12 inches in height is outside the optimal range, whereas one weighing 36 lbs and measuring 12 inches in height is within that range (albeit at the top...).

Your performance Cardigan can train mostly on lower height equipment, especially jumps. Puppies can also be taught targeting and some basics of distance work can be laid down indoors using equipment at hand, such as the dining room chairs. Keep sessions short and fun! The better the foundation, and the better the physical condition, the safer your puppy will be on the full size equipment.

It is **VERY** important with the agility Cardigan **NEVER** to run your dog on a wet or unstable surface. This is an invitation to serious injury and may end your dog's performance career. Cardigans are dwarfed dogs, and therefore possess a more brittle cartilage than most other breeds. This predisposes the Cardigan to back injury because the disc covering is much easier to damage. Always pay attention to your dog's refusal to perform an exercise. Never assume that the dog is "blowing you off". Your dog may require medical attention. Disc injuries usually do not occur overnight, even those that seem acute. You need to be vigilant to changes in your dog's gait, jumping habits, etc. If your dog is roaching or arching his or her topline, this could mean that he or she is experiencing disc pain. Regular chiropractic, acupuncture and/or massage is very

beneficial to the performance Cardigan and can head these injuries off or maintain your dog if he or she experiences minor disc pain. You should investigate articles easily searchable on the internet for information about recognizing and treating disc disease, in case your dog is ever afflicted. One excellent source is the Dachshund Club of America's health pages.

Your dog should be kept in peak physical condition if you plan to compete in agility competition. Don't make your Cardigan a "weekend warrior". Regular exercise, including leash walks, ball play, running free over uneven terrain and regular practice on your agility equipment at home all need to be a part of your dog's conditioning regime. Variation in the type of exercise is important. About 2 to 3 miles of walking/running per day and at least 15 minutes of exercise such as ball playing or running up and down hills would be ideal. You may want to walk the dog for 10 to 15 minutes, then run, and finish with a 10 to 15 minute cool down. Dogs can be exercised for 20 to 30 minutes from a bicycle to give them extra hard condition. Warm ups and cool downs are very important, particularly in cold climates. You may want to end your dog's exercise session with a calming massage. Conditioning, warm up and cool down are very important to the welfare of your agility Cardigan, and will prevent injuries in the long run. I should also emphasize that puppies younger than one year should never be forced to exercise, as permanent damage to the growth plates could result.

When I train my Cardigans for agility, my plan is to run them in Preferred (4" lower jump height) if my venue is AKC, as the lower jump heights are not as demanding on their bodies. Some venues allow for a lower jump height in dogs with a less advantageous height to weight ratio. You would be wise to take full advantage of the lower heights. I plan my course to minimize such things as slanting across a jump, especially a double or triple, and not asking them to make sharp turns that could injure their backs. Likewise, I don't ask my Cardigan to stop with "two on, two off" (front feet on the ground and back feet on the obstacle), as this is more demanding on the back – rather, consider running obstacles instead. Always be aware of your dog's special needs in order to maximize your time with your Cardigan in his or her performance career, and don't let your own ego and goals cloud your judgment when it comes to your dog's best interests.

Cardigan Welsh Corgis are an active breed that loves to work and loves agility training and competition with their owner. With care and training, agility can strengthen your bond with your Cardigan and you can enjoy a long performance career together.

Nancy Willoughby, Columbus, OH  
December 2007