

Ideal Cardigan Outline

by Jonathan Jeffrey Kimes

The Cardigan outline or silhouette is a critical feature in defining correct breed type. The key words which "say it all" are Long, Low and Level.

From the AKC standard, the first comments regarding outline come from the following section:

GENERAL APPEARANCE - Low set with moderately heavy bone and deep chest. Overall silhouette long in proportion to height, culminating in low tail set and fox-like brush. General impression: a handsome, powerful, small dog, capable of both speed and endurance, intelligent, sturdily built but not coarse.

The illustrated Standard amplifies on this requirement, "Long and low set describe necessary traits of this breed. Legginess in the Cardigan is incorrect. A short back, often combined with a short, stuffy neck, spoils the desired silhouette and destroys the elegance that a balanced, typey Cardigan possesses. Any tendency toward squareness or coarseness should be strongly penalized."

The AKC standard then specifies ideal length in the following section:

SIZE, PROPORTION, SUBSTANCE - Overall balance is more important than absolute size. Dogs and bitches should be from 10.5 to 12.5 inches at the withers when standing naturally. Ideal length/height ratio is 1.8:1 when measuring from the point of the breast bone (prosternum) to the rear of the thigh (ischial tuberosity) and measuring from the ground to the point of the withers. Lack of overall balance, oversized or undersized are serious faults.

The illustrated Standard states, "When the Cardigan is viewed from the side, the desired pants and fullness of tail will give the appearance of a dog that is approximately twice as long as it is tall."

Of critical importance to correct Cardigan outline is length of body and a low slung, deep-chested brisket.

Another set of important requirements which define outline are under the following section of the AKC standard:

NECK, TOPLINE, BODY - Neck moderately long and muscular without throatiness. Well developed, especially in males, and in proportion to the dog's build. Neck well set on; fits into strong, well-shaped shoulder. Topline level. Body long and strong.

The standard also states:

Deep brisket with well sprung ribs to allow for good lungs. Ribs extending well back. Loin short, strong, moderately tucked up. Waist well defined.

Shoulders slope downward and outward from the withers sufficiently to accommodate desired rib spring. Shoulder blade (scapula) long and well laid back, meeting upper arm (humerus) at close to a right angle. Humerus nearly as long as scapula.

From the historical point of view, Clifford Hubbard states in The Cardigan Corgi Handbook (1952):

“Neck - to be muscular, well developed and in proportion to the dog's build, fitting into well sloped shoulders.

“Body - chest to be moderately broad with prominent breastbone. To be fairly long and strong, with deep brisket, well sprung ribs and clearly defined waist.”

The Cardigan is a unique combination of short and long lines. The headpiece in silhouette has shorter planes; the muzzle being distinctly shorter than the backskull in the proportion of 3 to 5. The legs are also short, and in fact, because the dog is slung between his forelegs and the manner in which the medium length coat lies, they appear to be shorter than they actually are.

The longer lines include the neck line which should be fairly long and blend smoothly into the topline. A stuffy neck (very often associated to straight and/ or forward shoulders) is incorrect. The body line is notably long and the topline should appear very nearly level culminating in a slight fall to the moderately low tailset. The tail should be of good length and breeders never fault a tail for being too long.

These combinations of proportions make the Cardigan a distinct and elegant animal.

The underline of the Cardigan is also distinct. The prosternum should protrude noticeably and should have a gentle downward curve outlining the required depth of brisket. The forelegs should be placed well under the dog indicating a correct forehand which is comprised of a relatively long shoulder blade and upper arm which meet in a near 90 degree angle to one another. While correct shoulder layback is not a common attribute, the long and well angled upper arm is even a greater rarity. Forehand faults generally result in the forelegs being placed too far forward toward the prosternum. Shortened upper arms may also result in restricted front movement.

The deepest part of the brisket should be hidden by the foreleg in profile and should not continue downward behind the forelegs. The underline then runs nearly parallel to the ground until the last ribs at which point it should have a moderate, but noticeable, upward sweep at the undercarriage. Lack of the slight tuck up may indicate a slack, longish loin while a tuck up too far forward, sometimes called "fish gut" ribbing (ribs which are too short in length), is very undesirable.

The body line should not appear out of balance or too long. Such an appearance tends to indicate a long loin. Rarely will specimens with the correct long ribcage and short loin appear too long bodied.

In describing the rear structure, the AKC standard states:

HINDQUARTERS - Well muscled and strong. Hipbone (pelvis) slopes downward with the croup, forming a right angle with femur at the hip socket. There should be moderate angulation at stifle and hock. Hocks well let down. Metatarsi perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other.

CROUP - slight downward slope to the tail set.

The rearhand is comprised of a longish pelvic bone, longish upper and lower thighs, and well let down hocks. "Well let down hocks" means the rear pastern is relatively short, as the "hock" is the joint between the tibia/fibula and the rear pastern. Proper angulation of rear will result in the moderate downward slope to the tail, full well-arc'd thighs (stifles moderately bent) and well let down hocks.

For all intents and purposes, the topline is level. Like most breeds, a very slight arch in the short loin is recognized as structural soundness, however, this should be only barely perceptible in the properly coated specimen. Specimens who are low behind the shoulders, too arched in topline, steep in croup or high in the rear should be faulted to the degree they deviate from the desired level outline. A slight word of caution, some Cardis carry especially thick, longer hair over their croup, so if you question a dog's top line, inspect the coat to ensure a false impression is not being given from coat thickness. The Illustrated Standard states, "The Cardigan's topline often gives the misleading appearance of a slight rise over the loin due to heavy muscling and extra thickness of coat in this area. True topline problems are very often associated to incorrect forehead/rearhand construction, even if moderate in degree."

The ability to properly evaluate outline requires an in-depth understanding of the breed. Correct make and shape are prerequisites to a correct outline. Correct length of body (long ribbing and short loin) is a highly desired breed attribute. A short body is neither correct nor desired and is often a difficult fault to breed out.

As with any breed, the ability to perceive balance is it very helpful talent in evaluating outline. The dog should not appear disproportionate or "dwarfy", the body parts should blend harmoniously together to give the dog the desired features of elegance with soundness and substance. "Elegance" refers to the flow of lines and does not infer overrefinement or lack of substance or bone.

The tail is the culmination of the quintessential Cardigan outline. The AKC standard describes the tail as follows:

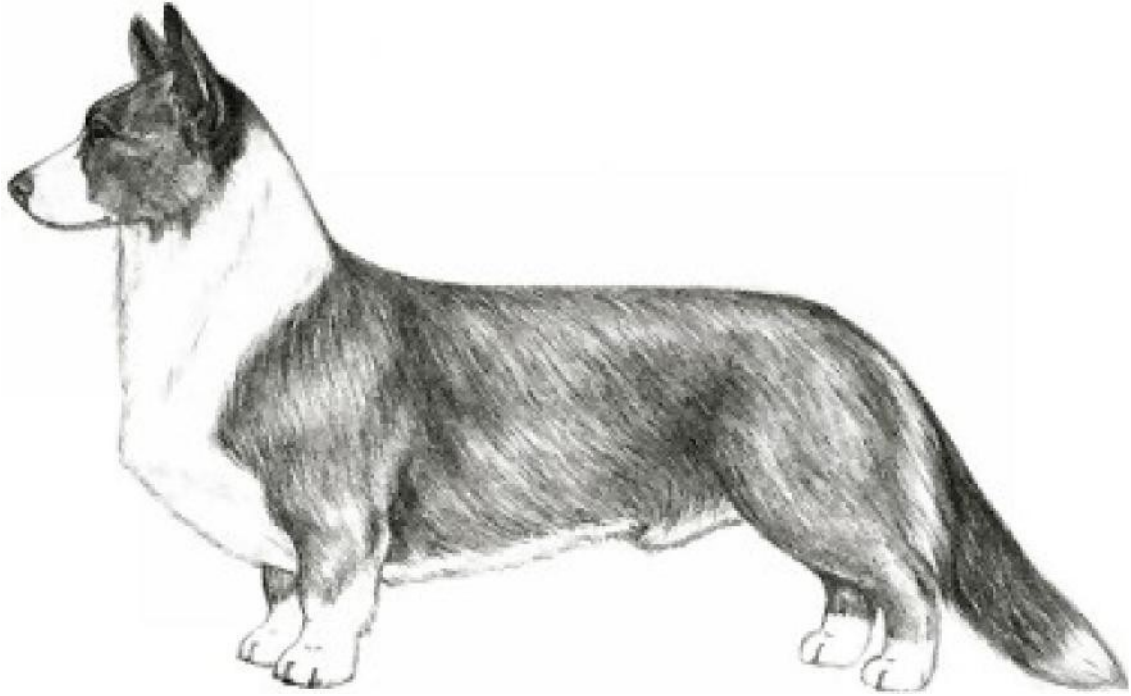
TAIL - set fairly low on body line and reaching well below hock. Carried low when standing or moving slowly, streaming out parallel to ground when at a dead run, lifted when excited, but never curled over the back. High tail set is a serious fault.

Clifford Hubbard's book states:

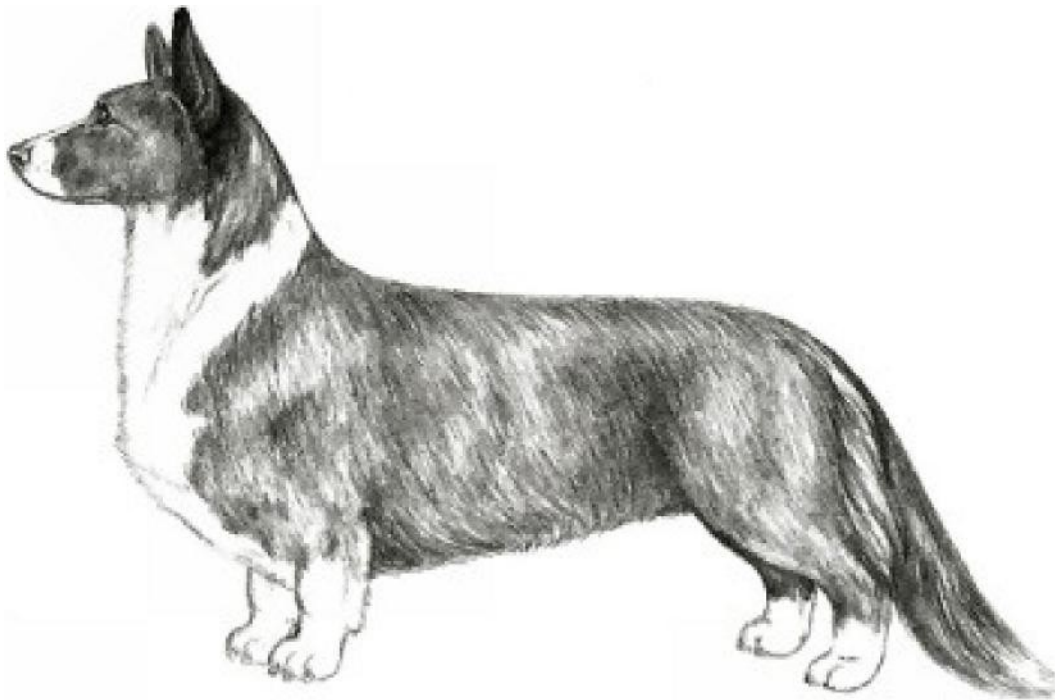
Tail to be moderately long and set in line with the body (not curled over the back) and resembling that of a fox.

The tail should be examined for kinks or knots. While such problems are not specifically listed in the standard as faults, these are deviations from the standard and as any other fault should be faulted to the degree of the deviation.

While outline in movement has been addressed in the movement articles, we can reiterate that the topline should remain level and the overall appearance should retain its integrity indicating balance and correct structure. While ideally, a low or slightly raised tail carriage is preferred, slightly higher tail carriage is not considered a critical shortcoming. Breed authorities make a distinction between a correctly set tail carried a bit too happily and a high tail set which is faulted much more severely. Tail carriage is easily "modified" either through training or illegal surgical procedures and as such, one must not put undue focus on it.



Correct dog showing desired neck extension and good body length and shape with a proper level topline



The ideal Cardigan Welsh Corgi (female)