

Judging the Cardigan in the Ring

by Marieann Gladstone, USA

When the class is lined up before me, I stand well back to evaluate the silhouette. I look for a dog that is rather long, low set, with a graceful neck blending into a strong back and a level topline, with a soft sloping croup. Overall, I want to see soft curves flowing over a well-balanced dog.

After sending the class around, I get a general impression for soundness and easy flowing movement. Toplines should hold, with dogs moving with reach and drive, and showing as a show dog should with great attitude.

Giving the handler respectable time to set the dog on the table, I take in the silhouette once again then come to the front of the dog, head on. I don't consider expression; I will do that "on the floor".

The head should be good sized for a dwarf breed. We are seeing more Cardis with smaller heads in the ring. Ears are large, slightly rounded at the tip, moderately wide at the base, and carried erect. The tips are "slightly wide of an imaginary line drawn from the tip of nose through the center of the eye". I evaluate the head with respect to eyes (medium to large, not bulging and widely set, color blending with the coat) and skull. I look for a skull flat between the ears and moderately wide on top. A strong head defines breed type. There should be a slight dome above the eyes forming the eye sockets and adding to Cardigan expression, and defining a moderate stop. I check for bite and for a strong muzzle which is not snipey. I look for the parallel planes of the top skull and the top of the muzzle, with a muzzle length of three parts to five parts skull. Muzzle is well filled, rounded but not blunt; tapered but not pointed. Cardigans are losing a good under jaw and I am pleased to find an under jaw somewhat deep. Incorrect pigment is evident.

While still in front, I examine the forequarters. I want to feel a strong, prominent prosternum in the palm of my hand. My fist fits well in between the legs. I want to see short, powerful forelegs curving around an egg shaped chest, and moderate heavy bone. Feet are large and well-rounded, with tight toes, pointing slightly outward, balancing the width of the shoulders. Heavy round feet were needed to work rough Welsh terrain and to support the leg assembly which supports the deep chest. I will not reward knuckling over.

I want that deep chest with a prominent sternum, showing clearly in front of the legs when viewed in profile. A Cardigan that is overdone in the forequarters is just as faulty as one lacking in forequarters. The prosternum or point of chest

should be only slightly lower than a point mid-way between the throat and the lower part of the brisket.

The shoulder assembly should be set far enough back on the body. Finding laid back shoulders in most any breed today is hard. Unfortunately, we generally see shoulders that are set right under the neck, shoulders too far forward and straight. I check to see that elbows are close to the body.

Going to the midsection, my hand follows the topline which is strong and level, curving to a gradually sloping croup. The rib cage is long and extends well back. The ribs are well sprung, allowing adequate room for heart and lungs. Length should be coming from a long ribcage and a short loin, though we have many exhibits in the ring with length coming from a faulty long loin, and my hand gesture will indicate this to anyone who will take notice.

The coat should be of medium length and texture, with a correct weather resistant double coat, and color as accepted in the Standard.

I notice if the Cardigan is wider at shoulders and has the obvious waistline. Dogs lacking the waistline often lack spring of rib or are too fat. The definite waistline accents the deep brisket, and along with the sloping croup and level top line, gives the correct Cardigan silhouette.

There should be moderate angulation at stifle and hock and hocks are short and parallel to each other. The tail with its fox-like brush reaches to the hocks and is set low coming off smoothly from the gradual sloping croup.

After the exam on the table, I have the exhibitor gait the dog down and back to see how well the dog moves going away and coming towards me. Legs should move towards a center line, Cardigan legs are too short to single tract. Forelegs should reach well forward and hind legs should bend well at the hock, permitting the foot to come well under the body, and push back powerfully. We don't see enough of this in the ring. This is a herding dog and should be able to have endurance and stamina to drive cattle in rough terrain.

When they return to me I look for typical Cardi expression and showmanship. I then send them to the end of the line to observe side gait, and I warn them when gaiting too fast.

All throughout the short time I spend with each exhibit, I am observing their temperament. If I am lucky, we see the clown or impish nature of this breed, and we all get to smile.

Finally a decision must be made. The dogs are compared to the Standard and placed in order of merit with each other. If it warrants, awards should be withheld if there is no worthy exhibit to earn points towards a championship. The total package of breed type, balance, soundness, movement and showmanship all enter into the equation.

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