

The Ideal Cardigan Head

Norma Chandler, 1995

The ideal Cardigan Welsh Corgi head, with its large ears and gentle, alert expression, has won many a heart and drawn more than one convert to this little Welsh dog. In my 30 plus years of enchantment with this breed, I have seen many head styles come and go, but once you have owned a Cardigan with that very special look - big, rounded ears, sweetness of expression (with more than a touch of humor at times), balanced and chiseled, you will look for it in every Cardigan you own and every one you meet. The following is my meager attempt to help you "see" the correct Cardigan head, using the illustrated and written standards as a guide, and quoting other sources at times.

HEAD - the head should be refined in accordance with the sex and substance of the dog. It should never appear so large and heavy nor so small and fine as to be out of balance with the rest of the dog.

This is self-explanatory. If you look at a bitch you should not think dog, and vice versa. Even a big bitch should be feminine in head and expression, a small dog masculine, and the head and body should show a pleasing balance.

SKULL - top moderately wide and flat between the ears, showing no prominence of occiput, tapering towards the eyes. Slight depression between the eyes.

"Moderately wide." Webster's Dictionary defines wide as "not narrow; broad," and moderate as "avoiding extremes". Thus, moderately wide would indicate a trend towards wideness without being extreme.

Flat between the ears means **BETWEEN THE EARS ONLY!** The occiput (that little boney knob at the back of the skull) should be barely perceptible, if at all. A high peaked occiput is houndy and atypical.

The head itself should never be flat for that would cause a low forehead and lack of stop - most unattractive! The head should, instead, taper softly (my term) towards the eyes. I say "softly" because these lines are not hard and flat, neither are they rounded or domed. This is a living animal and there is, necessarily, slight padding between skin and bone, preventing an angular, harsh look. This is a head you will want to touch, to pet, and look at.

The depression between the eyes is slight, but a necessary part of the "work" in this area.

CHEEKS - flat with some chiseling where the cheek meets the foreface and under the eye. There should be no prominence of cheekbone.

Looking at or down on the Cardigan head, nothing stands out as bulging or boney, but rather as smooth and fairly flat. Chiseling, defined in Canine Terminology (Harold R Spira, author) as "a request for clean-cut lines and contours," is called for where the cheek meets the foreface and under the eye. If one were a sculptor working with clay, one could use his thumbs to clean out the area under the eye, just leaving the slight outermost protrusion of bone that is part of the lower orbital arch. There should be no "fill" in this area, nor to the sides of the head where the cheek meets the foreface. Bulging cheeks, prominent cheekbones, lack of chiseling contribute to coarseness. Slight padding is, of course, natural but this padding should not be so evident as to disturb the overall flatness of the cheek.

MUZZLE - from the tip of the nose to the base of the stop should be shorter than the length of the skull from the base of the stop to the high point of the occiput, the proportion being about 3 parts muzzle to 5 parts skull; rounded but not blunt; tapered but not pointed. In profile the plane of the muzzle should parallel that of the skull, but on a lower level due to a definite but moderate stop.

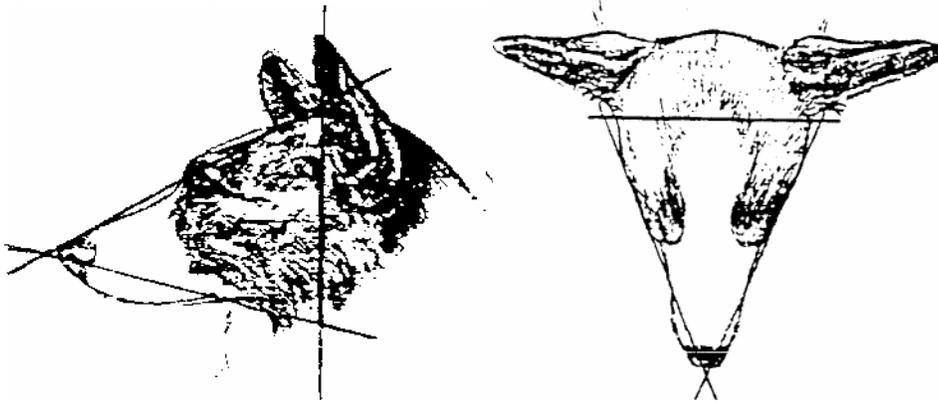
The muzzle must be shorter than the skull, rounded and tapered. It should never be "squared off" or blunt, nor pointed and "snipey". It should never approach the length of the skull - a current problem. As stated in the Illustrated Standard, The proportions of about 3 parts muzzle to 5 parts skull and the overall balance of the head are most important." The true Cardigan head must meet this criterion!

The plane of the muzzle should parallel that of the skull. Again, I say softly – not absolutely flat as if drawn with a ruler, just as the skull is not absolutely hard and flat in profile; definitely not dished or roman or down-faced. There must be a definite stop (the area where the forehead "steps down" to the muzzle) or the whole look is wrong. Remember, however, the definition of "moderate" as relates to the stop - "avoiding extremes".

While discussing profile and muzzle to skull ratio, it is well to note that the Cardigan head is composed of triangles. Viewing the head from above, you should see a triangle of nearly equal proportions. The same is true of profile. Under EARS we will discuss the most perfect of the three - the equilateral triangle. Examples follow, using the Illustrated Standard.



The Equilateral Triangle



Triangles of nearly equal proportions

JAWS - strong and clean. Underjaw moderately deep and well formed, reaching to the base of the nose and rounded at the chin.

Look at your dog. You should see a bit of the underjaw from the front and from the side. (Not as in undershot!) Lack of underjaw does not impart the look of strength one would expect in a herding dog and is sometimes the result of over-refinement or a faulty, overshot mouth.

NOSE - black, except in blue merles where black noses are preferred but butterfly noses are tolerated. A nose other than solid black in any other color is a disqualification.

Blue merles often have butterfly (spotted) noses, which are the result of the merle gene diluting areas of pigment on the nose as it does on the body. All other noses must be black, but do remember there are several different shades of black which seem to be influenced by coat color and range from nearly blue-black to dull black. Liverish or slate blue noses are to be avoided.

LIPS - fit cleanly and evenly together all around.

Not loose. Not lippy. Not pendulous. Clean, smooth, no excesses!

EYES - medium to large, not bulging, with dark rims and distinct corners. Widely set. Clear and dark in harmony with coat color. Blue eyes (including partially blue eyes), or one dark and one blue eye permissible in blue merles; in any other coat color than blue merle are a disqualification.

To this writer (M.P.), this Cardigan has the most beautiful eyes of any dog breed, perhaps because they are large for the size of the head, and are widely spaced." Thus speaks Michael Pym of Brymore Kennels fame in her co-authored book, How to Raise and Train a Cardigan Welsh Corgi (by Mrs. Henning Nelms and Mrs. Michael Pym). Who could not agree, and how is this accomplished?

Remember the whole structure of the head. The skull must house these wonderful, expressive eyes and carry the big ears we seek, yet have the lovely chiseling to define it all and protect it from coarseness. Correct width allows the widely set eyes. Chiseling prevents too much fill, which can result in a sunken or piggish look. Chances are, if the shape of the head is correct, you will have a pretty good eye, for it is this very structure that helps create the whole look. Then the finer points can be assessed - distinct corners, which prevent the eye from being round; dark rims, which outline and emphasize shape; the large or at least medium size of the eye itself.

I can't stress enough that the Cardis eyes must be so expressive as to "talk" to you. They look right into his heart - and yours. They show love, intelligence, friendliness, anticipation, concern. They are ever watchful. They sometimes sparkle with good humor

when they have bested you at a favorite game. Many "communicate" their thoughts with an intent stare which can be quite magnetizing. Clearness of the eye is important since it gives a kind eye and expression is more apparent than the opaque eye. Light, or "bird of prey" eyes, are wild looking. Very black, opaque eyes are more devilish and hard to read. Eye color should blend with the coat, even to being a less dark, warm brown, but it must be clear.

Having never lived with a blue merle, I do not attempt to describe the merle eye, leaving it instead to the very knowledgeable ladies of Brymore as told in the book, "...in blue merles, the darker eye is more desirable, although blue eyes, or one blue and one dark eye are permissible. Even in the case of blue eyes, which can be very beautiful, depth of color is preferred."

TEETH - strong and regular. Scissors bite preferred; i.e. inner side of upper incisors fitting closely over outer side of lower incisors. Overshot, undershot, or wry bite are serious faults.

While a scissors bite is preferred, a strong, level bite is not faulted. The important thing to remember is that the Cardigan needs good dentition to be an effective herding dog. Wry (twisted or skewed) or over or undershot mouth cause the teeth to be out of alignment and are not useful for the task of herding.

EARS - large and prominent in proportion to size of dog. Slightly rounded at the tip, and of good strong leather. Moderately wide at the base, carried erect and sloping slightly forward when alert. When erect, tips are slightly wide of a straight line drawn from the tip of the nose through the center of the eye. Small and/or pointed ears are serious faults. Drop ears are a disqualification.

The ears of the Cardigan are unique - big for his size and set out at just the right angle. It is here you understand the necessity for correct width of skull, ear set, and ear carriage, for all work together to create the desired look.

Viewing the Cardigan head from the front, draw a line from ear tip to ear tip, then bring these lines down to converge at the tip of the nose. If the ear set is correct, these lines will fall just outside the center of the eye, and the lines will form an equilateral triangle (see illustration). If set too close, they will fall inside the center of the eye; if too wide the lines will be wide of the outside center of the eye.

The tips of the ears are rather rounded, and the leather is strong, not waving or dipping or bouncing. Heavy, thick leather is not necessarily strong leather. The requirement here is for good firm leather without regard to thickness.

Moderately wide at the base - as defined earlier, leaning towards wideness without being extreme. Narrow ears, small ears, pointy ears all spoil the balance of an otherwise lovely head.

Ears are a most important feature - one of the first things people unacquainted with the breed notice - vital to true Cardigan type. They should be bred for!

Summing up the Cardigan head, it should be both strong and delicately chiseled. The areas described as flat should have a certain softness, never being harsh or angular. While the Cardigan puppy is often described as "cute," with his oversized ears not quite fully erect, the adult is handsome and charming. Ears and eyes are of major importance - if these are correct, other faults will most likely be minor and easily forgiven. Expression must be absolutely captivating - gentle, alert, intelligent. Then you will have a treasure, a paragon for years to come.