

Popular Dogs: Welsh Corgis

The two Corgi breeds may share a name, but the Pembroke's and Cardigan's temperaments are their own.

By Audrey Pavia

Every morning, when I stagger out of bed, I get the same greeting. Nigel, my Pembroke Welsh Corgi, steps out of his crate, stretches, kisses my face and bolts for the back door at 900 miles an hour. His mission: to chase crows. Once out the door, he races toward the neighbor's persimmon tree in full voice, startling the horde of crows feasting on the tasty fruit or perched on the branches that hang into our yard. And although the crows fly away at Nigel's sudden attack, he knows in his heart that the next morning, they will return. That's okay. He'll wait.

Life with a Corgi is a truly wonderful, hilarious and fulfilling experience. Whether your Welsh clown is a Pembroke or Cardigan, you can be sure you'll get years of laughter and joy from these amazing dogs.

Though the two breeds have considerable similarities, both physical and historical, each has its own distinct temperament and personality traits. Which Corgi breed you choose will ultimately depend on your lifestyle, what you plan to do with your dog, and which personality type appeals to you the most.

The Persistent Pembroke

Happy, energetic and full of life: These are terms that consistently come up when breeders talk about the personality of the Pembroke Welsh Corgi. "The Pembroke is an outgoing, highly intelligent, cheerful, impish dog," says Kathleen Mallery of Castell Pembroke Welsh Corgis and Cardigan Welsh Corgis in Parma, Idaho. "They are inquisitive, bold, quietly dominant and independent. Pembrokes tend to stay one step ahead of you, which can be a bit disconcerting if you're not expecting it. They only allow you to think you're smarter than they are!"

Pamela Lane of Foxy Lane Corgis in Citra, Florida, describes Pembrokes in a way that undoubtedly sounds familiar to anyone who lives with these dogs. "How do you explain to someone that having a Pembroke Welsh Corgi is like having another person in the house?" she says. "I explain to prospective buyers that this is not a dog, but a new member of their family and it expects to be treated as such. Pembrokes are big dogs in small packages. No one is a stranger, and they can wrap anyone around their paws. They are the world's best con artists, especially when it comes to food. People that don't even like dogs seem to fall under their spell. They are funny little imps that wake each day expecting everything is going to go their way. They want to be part of every aspect of your life; I call them 'Velcro dogs,'" says Lane.

When pressed, some Pembroke breeders have a hard time pinpointing one favorite aspect of the breed's personality. Instead, they cite the entire package. "To pick one aspect of the Pembroke personality and call it my favorite would be impossible for me to do," says Cathy Donovan of Northrun Pembroke Welsh Corgis in Sullivan, Maine. "The games they invent to amuse themselves and you; the loyalty and protectiveness they show their people; the way they actually smile; their sensitivity; their energy; their ability to solve problems; their bunny butt; and of course, the way they share their hair. It just wouldn't be a Pembroke without all these aspects," says Donovan.

Other breeders know specifically what they love most about these dogs. "I think I love the impish tricks and con games they play to let you know you aren't totally in control," says Lane. "Pembrokes are extremely intelligent and live to please you, but they just can't help themselves when it comes to letting everyone know who is in control. For example, one of my 6-month-old females, Foxy, decided to start playing 'roll over and scratch my belly' in the conformation ring when it was our turn to stack for the judge. Talk about embarrassing," she says. "And PJ, a 4-year-old female we bred, really tested us when we went for her herding instinct testing. PJ's owner and I drove 200 miles. After seeing the wonderful Border Collies work flawlessly, it was our turn to look at the sheep up close for the first time. PJ, an obedience dog and squirrel hunter in her own backyard, seemed totally confused about what to do with these fuzzy things. Diane, PJ's owner, unsuccessfully tried to get PJ to respond to the command 'get the sheep.' PJ was busy trying to find shade and was rapidly becoming disinterested in the whole situation. Meanwhile, a sheep relieved itself on Diane's tennis shoe. After a few minutes, I yelled to Diane, 'Tell her to get the squirrels.' That was all PJ needed to hear. She was off like a flash after the sheep, working them in a circle and bringing the sheep to Diane! PJ passed her herding instinct test that day," Lane recalls.

Trainability is one of the Pembroke's most prized features for many owners, including Donna Francis, who owns Elfwish Pembroke Welsh Corgis with Sandy Wolfskill in Chardon, Ohio. "Our favorite aspect of the Pembroke personality is that

they are highly intelligent and easy to train,” says Francis. “Pembroke seem to know what you want them to do before you ask. However, if you are not consistent when training a Pembroke, the dog is like an elephant: It never forgets. We have one dog that remembers that I once forgot to latch a kennel run gate; now, every time she is out in the exercise yard, she checks every gate latch, just to see if she can let any other dogs out to play.”

One significant aspect of the Pembroke breed is its high energy level and penchant for activity. Pembrokes need something to do to occupy their intelligent minds and their active bodies. “On a scale of one to 10, I would say the Pembroke is a seven in activity level,” says Mallery. “Although they are not busy, they are constantly moving. The Pembroke is a very active dog, but it is not hyper. If it is not doing something with you, it can be found entertaining itself. Occasionally, you will find a Velcro dog, but generally speaking, the Pembroke is not a needy breed,” says Mallery.

Sue Klepp of St. Ives Pembroke Welsh Corgis in Yorba Linda, California, points out that although Pembrokes are generally active dogs, some have more energy than others. “Depending on the age and the individual dog, you may have a happy, active dog that is constantly needing a job to do,” says Klepp. “On the other hand, you may have a much more mellow dog that is content to be a couch potato, but will always be ready for that walk outside with its people. Naturally, puppies have a lot more energy than older dogs, but never underestimate your senior friend’s willingness to accompany you on most any outdoor activity.”

Donovan also believes activity level is unique to each particular Pembroke. “It really depends on the individual dog,” she says. “Most of the time, I think they’re like kids. They get up in the morning full of energy that needs to be channeled somewhere. Usually a good run in the yard or a brisk walk on a leash for half an hour twice a day is all our guys require before returning to a leisurely pace. Most Corgis are not obnoxiously overactive, and even active ones will mellow with age,” explains Donovan. “Lots of Corgis hike for hours with their people, others run beside bicycles, and fetch and Frisbee Corgis abound. Some even follow owners who cross-country ski. If you’re looking for a real couch potato, a Corgi may not be the dog for you, but if you want a companion to go hiking and climbing with, then conditioning is paramount to having your Corgi keep up.”