

How to choose a cart and other questions **By Bobbie Mayer 2017**

First, some general questions:

When should I get a cart? This isn't the easiest question to answer. If your dog can no longer walk at all, it's time (or past time.) But if your dog is still walking and just getting slowly worse, when do you go to a cart? I recommend getting the cart before you really need it, and start acclimating your dog to it. Then you can start with a short time in the cart. I fed my dog in the cart for a few days. He learned to associate it with food (always a positive experience for a corgi!) and that he could stay on his feet in it. Then I began carrying it on walks and putting him in it when his feet started to drag or he started to tire. By the time he truly needed it, he was fairly comfortable in it, but it wasn't until I started using a clicker and treats that he really started enjoying walks in the cart. (Bribes did not work the same way.) On the other hand, my corgi Wes liked his cart as soon as we went to the beach- forget walks in the neighborhood but he wanted to go to the beach badly enough to start walking.

Getting a cart early also prevents your dog from developing funny gaits that may make using the cart difficult later.

What about rehab after a disk rupture? Some people are told their dog will be dependent on a cart and not want to walk. This is bunk. Corgis want to move. If they can't move without a cart they will eventually decide to move with one, and walking in a cart, rear legs free to move, is great rehab. Consider humans- are they told to drag themselves around the floor until their back heals enough to allow walking? NO!! They are given walkers. The cart is a walker for a corgi. If you don't think your dog will need one for long, go with a rental cart, but a cart is one of the best things you can do to rehab your dog after a spinal cord injury. Not only does it help his back by keeping it in alignment and supported, it will also save your back. Ask your veterinarian if your dog's back is stable enough for a cart, though, and don't overdo it before he is strong enough.

Can my dog pee and poop in the cart? Yes. It may be easier for him or her to do his business in the cart, even if he is still able to get about without it. Sometimes female dogs do get a bit of urine on the cart, and diarrhea can end up getting on the cart, but for the most part it is a clean, easy way for the dog to eliminate. It's also often easier, if you have to express your dog, to do it in the cart.

Can my dog use the cart indoors? Yes. Maybe. Some dogs use their carts all the time, or most of it, indoors and out. It depends in part on your house (is it easy to get around in) and on your dog (can he get around without the cart?) and in part on your preference. I don't like my dog seal-walking (pulling himself around like a seal) because I'm afraid he'll get scraped or otherwise hurt on the floor (which frankly is rarely that clean.) But other dogs happily scoot around all day.

Can my dog lie down in the cart? If your dog is a corgi, the answer is a resounding "yes!" Corgis often rest by lying down. Candy likes to lie with his upper body on a pillow, but Merlin used to lie down on the floor on his side. In fact, my able-bodied corgi Jack likes to assume the "cart-lying" position of chest down, tush up, no cart involved.

How long can I leave my dog in the cart? You shouldn't leave him in it when you aren't around. If he flipped the cart or got stuck somewhere he could be injured or panicky. My dog Candy was a pro in his cart but every so often he tried to do something like climb over the side of the ramp and did flip his cart.

You also have to be concerned about pressure sores. A dog can get pressure sores if he stays with pressure in one place for more than about two hours because circulation can get compromised where the cart, particularly the saddle, touches his skin. After Candy developed a pressure sore I was more careful about getting him out of the cart every few hours, even if just for a few minutes while I massaged his skin.

But Candy did spend most of his waking hours in the cart. He was either snuggling on the bed or couch, in the crate, or in the cart. On a typical weekend day he spent about 10 hours in his cart. Your dog would have to build gradually up to that kind of time, and he'd have to be happy enough in his cart to be willing to do it.

Is it hard to get a corgi to use a cart? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. The first few weeks or months can be frustrating while your dog just wants to stand there. We recommend doing things your dog enjoys in the cart, like going to the dog park or the beach or the pet store. If he forgets the cart is there, he will start to use it and get used to it. My Wesley wouldn't walk at all in his cart in Fresno, but when we went to the beach he was suddenly a Grand Prix contender. If your dog has competed in obedience or rally, going to a practice or match with the cart may be the incentive he needs to start moving.

Choosing a cart:

A number of considerations go into your choice of a cart. These may include your location, your budget, your dog's age and diagnosis, or other factors. I'll discuss these things in general and then give a basic review of the major carts that are currently available.

Your location: If you live close to one of the cart companies, this may outweigh other considerations. Living nearby, you can go for measurements, and then for a fitting (or some companies will do both the same day) and know you get a cart that should not need more than minor tweaking. If you have problems later, you can easily go back for more repairs or adjustments or updates.

Locations:

Note: links to the cart companies mentioned can be found at <http://corgiaid.org/cart/mfglink.php>

K-9 Carts West, Freeland, Washington (on Whidbey Island, near Seattle)

K-9 Cart Company East (east): Oxford, Maryland

Eddies Wheels: Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts

Doggon Wheels: Woodland, Washington

RuffRollin: Bozeman, Montana

Walkin Wheels: Amherst, New Hampshire

Deweys: Prineville, Oregon

If you are international, most companies will ship. Doggon Wheels does have representatives overseas, so that may also be a consideration for you. There are also several cart companies in England, and many in Japan.

Your Budget: At this writing in 2017, corgi carts from the top companies can cost from \$300 (shipped, new) to about \$650. Specialty carts, such as counterbalanced, front wheels, or quad carts can be more. Used carts are sometimes available, usually for about half to two-thirds of the new price. Loaner carts are often available from CorgiAid (see more below.) There are also homemade cart plans.

New carts: a new cart, custom-made to your corgi's measurements, and of the design you prefer, may be your best bet if you can afford it. You will get an unused cart, made to fit your dog, nothing worn or broken, in your choice of

brands. Hard to beat that! If your dog uses the cart for six months, you have paid \$50-\$65 a month for its use. Compared to those expensive vet bills, this is peanuts, and well worth it. When you are done with it you can donate it to CorgiAid (tax-deductible fair market value) or sell it for about half what you paid.

Rental carts: Currently K-9 Carts West has a rent-to-own program. With this program, you pay for the cart in three two-week periods (Minimum rental two weeks.)

Used carts: Sometimes manufacturers have a used cart available that might fit your corgi. You can ask them if used carts are not listed on their site. Make sure if you find a used cart that it IS the right size for your corgi; the company that makes it is usually able to make this evaluation for you if they know which dog the cart was made for. Private parties may list used carts for sale various sites. Ask for the name of the seller and their dog's name, then email the maker with your dog's measurements and ask if that cart will fit your dog.

CorgiAid carts: CorgiAid has a cart loan program which is open to all corgis and corgi mixes (though finding a cart to fit a mix is less likely.) You complete an online application with measurements of your dog, and if CorgiAid has a cart to fit, you sign a contract, send in a \$50 refundable deposit and \$35 (subject to change) for shipping, and a cart is loaned to you for as long as you need it. The advantage is low cost, the disadvantage is that you don't get a choice, you are getting a used cart, and it may not fit your dog as well as if it is made for your dog specifically (though often the carts are adjustable and do fit fine). See <http://www.corgiaid.org/cart>

Homemade Carts: There are several sources for plans for homemade carts. The Yahoo group Corgis on Wheels has links to some plan; others can often be found by doing a web search. Some people have done very well with dogs in homemade carts and are quite happy with them, so don't rule them out if your budget doesn't allow for a new or used cart.

Discount carts: There are a few companies which sell cheap carts (such as on ebay or Amazon). If I didn't list the cart company above, it is likely to be one of these. Please ask me about it before ordering one. The ones listed above are the only ones I've seen work well for corgis and some of these companies are completely lacking in customer support.

Your dog's age and diagnosis: For a young dog with IVDD or another non-degenerative disease, you will want to consider how long and how hard your dog

is likely to use the cart. The construction of the cart becomes a prime consideration. Look at the way the cart is made and look at the warranty given by the manufacturer. If you live on a ranch in the mountains with a two year old corgi, this will be much more important than if you live on a city street with a 15 year old corgi. Dogs do wear carts out. There are also a few carts that will grow with a growing young corgi which might be suitable for a disabled pup, although you might need to buy a larger cart at maturity.

For a dog with DM, you will want to consider whether the cart can be modified as your dog's needs change. Will it work now as a walking cart? Can stirrups be added? Can front wheels be added? Can it be counterbalanced? What is the cost to do these things? If your DM corgi is 14 years old, you may not need to worry about front wheels, but if he's 8-11, you likely will.

Consider your dog's build. A very front-heavy corgi may need a counterbalanced cart. This is true whether your dog is heavy due to a solid chest or a fat tummy!

Consider the terrain and your dog's activity level. A quiet old dog who is only going to use the cart to go out and pee a few times a day has different needs than a vigorous young dog that will be herding or hiking with you.

A special note about front-extensions and front wheels: The dogs most successful in using front wheels are those put in them BEFORE they are absolutely necessary, so keep this in mind. If your dog is weak in the front and has become used to giving up, it may not be possible to get him to move much in a front wheel cart. Merlin got into his quite early because of a brief illness, which proved to be a godsend for us as he was able to use it for many months. Just as getting a cart before your dog really needs it is a good idea, so is moving to the next level of support before your dog gets defeated by increasing weakness.

Specific cart designs and some advantages and disadvantages:

Eddie's Wheels: Eddie's Wheels carts are made to last and last and last. Some parts are welded together. Carts come with a lifetime warranty (lifetime of your dog, not the cart.) I used to say I'd never seen a broken part on an Eddie's cart, but now I have- my Oliver broke a used cart, and his pal Lucky broke one as well. Both of these dogs were young, highly active paraplegics who did not hesitate to take stairs or rocks in the carts. Your mileage will almost certainly vary! Oliver now has his own made-to-order Eddie's so it will be warranted for the rest of his life.

Eddie's are easy to use, too, and can be fitted with fairly large wheels (up to 12" for a big corgi like Oliver). A kit is available for counterbalancing, which means that the wheels can be moved forward so that the front of the cart is less heavy.

If you buy an Eddie's Wheels cart, rather than starting with the basic cart and upgrading later to counterbalanced, I highly recommend the variable axle, which will allow gradual counterbalancing as your dog loses or gains strength in its front end. It costs a bit more than a plain rear-wheel cart but makes the Eddie's cart especially useful for DM corgis or for aging corgis. Front wheels are available but are not full-function; they do not swivel, and will work best on smooth surfaces.

A disadvantage of Eddie's Wheels is that width and thigh size is not adjustable on these carts, so you need to measure very accurately. They may be slightly heavier than comparable carts from the other brands and in some sizes slightly more expensive. (Eddie's has a size range of 20-35 pounds which covers most, but not all, corgis, prices go up or down if your dog is under 20 or over 35 pounds.) A neutered male cart may work for a female and vice versa, but a cart built for an unneutered male will not work for a female. It's a good idea to submit profile and top pictures of your corgi along with your measurements so that the good folks at Eddie's can determine whether your measurements seem accurate or not.

Some people do not like the rigid leg rings, but several people reported that their dogs seemed to prefer that style of cart.

The stirrups on the Eddie's Wheels carts are my least favorite part- they are called "rolling stirrups" and are basically a bar for your dog's foot. They work great for dogs that do not kick, and are also great if you vary between grass, where your dog's feet can be in walking position, and pavement, where they need to be up. Some people have rigged hanging stirrups using the rolling ones as a base for dogs that kick their feet off the stirrups or have used Velcro or elastic to hold their dogs' feet to the stirrups.

You can get wheels up to about 12 inches on your Eddie's cart (8 inches are standard). These can be great for all-terrain use for a larger corgi. Specify that you want them when you order your cart. Ski attachments are available for the 12 inch wheels.

Doggon Wheels: This cart is made of lightweight aluminum tubing which is nice and shiny and quite strong. Adjustments are made by moving nuts and bolts from one predrilled hole to another (one of the weaknesses- adjustments are not

infinite.) The saddle (place the dog's legs fit) is a neoprene fabric which is soft and strong. It clips into metal or plastic clips on the frame. The dog also has a harness made of nylon and neoprene which clips into the frame. Tires are inflatable.

Advantages are that this cart adjusts for everything but width, and even width is more forgiving than on some other carts. The wheels can be adjusted forwards or backwards to help get a neutral balance, and the saddle can also be moved a little forwards or backwards. If the saddle doesn't fit it can be easily replaced, as can the harness and front arms. Another advantage is that you can leave the harness on all day and just clip the dog into the cart when you want to use it. Plus, the harness and saddle can be washed and dried. They don't really get wet (don't absorb water) but I suppose you could even buy a spare.

Disadvantages: adjustments are a pain because they require both a screwdriver and a wrench used simultaneously. Adjusting the cart initially is tricky and takes repeated tries unless you are luckier than I was. (It may come disassembled.) Some people find the cart complicated (though my experience was that as soon as you know what you are doing it is very easy.) Tires that go flat are lighter and better for road shock but can be a nuisance. Screws do loosen up and periodically need tightening; plastic clips can break (but are replaceable and some carts use metal clips.)

The Doggon cart can have front wheels added, but they are somewhat bulky. Also, you can have your dog start pulling before he needs to be supported by it, simply by leaving the saddle off, and this may help him adjust to it. One corgi owner reported that in the early stages of DM her dog walked better harnessed into the cart but supporting his own weight. In certain sizes it may be a less expensive cart.

K9 Cart Company East:

The carts are very adjustable, including width. The saddle is a compromise between the hard frame of the Eddies cart and the soft saddle of the Doggon cart, as it is padded wire cable, flexible but not fabric. The carts fit with a top and bottom yoke (padded straps) that fit just behind the dog's shoulder. This causes more side to side movement. This offers some freedom of movement but may also make it harder for some dogs to use or get used to the cart. Some dogs need a front strap on the cart to prevent them from stepping out of it (the other carts always have front straps.)

Front wheels can be added and Dr. Parkes has worked on finding the best design for corgi front wheels. The currently-available front wheels do swivel and are intended to allow your corgi full movement.

The wheels are rigid foam-filled plastic that come in various sizes; many corgi owners like the 10 inch or 12 inch sizes for off-road use, and the 8 inch size is the minimum I would consider. There is a cross bar under the front of the cart; if your dog is very deep-chested or short in length, this may be in your way for expressing. It can be left off in some cases though it will need to be there if front wheels are added.

K9 Carts sells a device called a "Catch-it-all" which attaches to the back of the cart to catch stealth poops and for females, with the addition of a pad, urine.

K9 Carts West):

The current design is adjustable in length, width, height, and leg ring size. This is a very nice advantage if you are concerned about the accuracy of your measurements. The cart is very nicely balanced. A bolted interlocking system in back gives a strong but easily adjusted width. The cart fits just behind the shoulders. Tires are solid and can be 5, 6, or 8 inches in diameter. Larger tires are not available for corgi carts. The carts come in colors; ask what is available when you order.

The latest cart design from K9 Carts West is made to accommodate the three stages of DM very well. Initially, the rear-wheel cart is used. When a front extension is added, the side rods are replaced with metal bars which clamp to the existing back; these attach to the front extension which is very usable and has swivel wheels. (I like hard front wheels such as Razor wheels so I'd specify those or make sure the swivel wheels can be switched to Razor wheels.) Later, when full front support is needed, slightly longer bars are substituted, the front extension is flipped around, and a front saddle is added. This can eventually have a head support as well.

K9 Carts West also has a rental/rent to own program. This is a nice option if you are not sure how long your dog will need a cart.

Disadvantages: Wheel size is limited. Make sure you ask for 8 inch wheels if you will use the cart anywhere besides inside and on a sidewalk. (They may not be available if your corgi is very small or very short in height.) We did fine with 8 inch but I had to change Candy's from six to eight inch wheels. There is no front

strap and some dogs do manage to walk out of the cart (particularly if their wheel gets stuck on something.) It's pretty easy to rig a front strap if needed, though.

The stirrup slings are padded with a slicker material than I'd like to see; my dog's feet slipped out of them unless I keep them very tight, and I ended up changing stirrup slings.

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Walkin Wheels: The regular cart is a nicely designed, easily adjusted cart but works well for taller corgis only- I'd suggest at least 13 inches tall and fairly strong. This is because the cart is the same weight regardless of your corgi's size (parts telescope), and because you can't use the 8 inch wheel if the dog is shorter than 13 inches (and the next size down is 4 inches.) The cart folds for travel, and adjusts in length, width, and height. It uses a saddle/harness. This cart may be a bit more expensive but should be easily re-sold as it adjusts to fit many breeds of dogs. The cart is one of the easiest to set up although once adjusted you need to insert set screws to keep it from being too loose. It is also fairly unstable at it's narrowest setting so for an active corgi I would probably suggest something with a wider wheelbase- my Cardi flipped it several times a day when he was using it.

This is one of the carts for which skis are available. They can be simply subbed out for the wheel struts. Oliver has a borrowed Walkin Wheels cart which we use in the snow when we get the chance. However, these only work if your dog is tall as well as they are not available with the shortest wheel struts.

One disadvantage besides weight in older Walkin Wheels carts is that the side bars have to fit into little loops on the front harness, which adds a step to getting your dog into the cart. However, this design has now been improved to the point that it is much easier to do.

The Walkin Wheels cart cannot be counterbalanced but front wheels are easily added. Merlin, who was about 32 lbs and 13 1/2 at his prime, walked just fine in this cart but it dwarfed Candy, who was a more petite 22 lbs.

Walkin Wheels also has the mini, which is a smaller version. This cart does fit small corgis (I would say possibly 25 pounds and under.) The limit is the length of the back of the cart, which does not extend very far behind the saddle, so a larger corgi tends to get poop on the back, and the length of the side-arms. The

harness has more of the issue of loops as they are smaller and trickier to fit the arms into, and the harness does not adjust as well as it could for corgis. (To be fair this cart was NOT designed for corgis but the company provided us one to try.)

Eight-inch wheels are available for the Mini on request. We had some trouble eliminating wobble in the wheels. The wheels are very lightweight and do not add a lot of weight to the cart, which may be good for a smaller corgi. An advantage is that a corgi owner can purchase a used Walkin Wheels Mini made for a different breed and easily get parts to allow it to adjust to corgi size. (This is also true for the regular Walkin Wheels cart.) Likewise the resale market is larger since any dog of the appropriate size can use the cart.

RuffRollin: A newer company, RuffRollin has established a good track record in recent years. Like Doggon and Walkin Wheels, it features a harness design. RuffRollin has a special "corgi harness" which eliminates the issue of the front strap falling too low on a corgi. The cart is very sturdy and adjusts in length and height, and front wheels are available. CorgiAid has only two of these carts so I know a little bit less about them, but I would not hesitate to recommend one.

Dewey's Wheels: Dewey's Wheelchairs for Dogs are similar to Doggon, but without as much adjustability. They are in Oregon so that may be a plus for some people. I'd have no problem with the cart if fitted personally since then the lack of adjustment would not be an issue. The cart is made of lightweight aluminum. No front wheels are available. While this cart won't take a dog all the way through DM, it is very lightweight and has been used successfully by many corgis, especially in the earlier stages of DM.

Some other makers: Dogstogo makes an inexpensive PVC cart which some corgi folk have used successfully. It is heavy and bulky. It is NOT a walking cart so should not be used for dogs with DM who can still use their legs, or for rehab. We do not accept donations of PVC carts to CorgiAid's loan program because plastic does age and joints break in shipping.

There are also some "knock-offs"- carts made to sell cheaply that are rough copies of other carts, such as Eddies or K9. Most of the time, you get what you pay for. That may mean a poor fitting cart, lack of customer service, or poor quality, or all three. If unsure about something and I haven't mentioned it here, feel free to contact me to ask.

A note about returns and guarantees: Check the return policies. How long do you have to evaluate the cart, and do you get part, all, or none of your money back if you return it? Is the cart guaranteed? For how long? Make sure you communicate any problems with the cart maker; some will extend the trial period while trying to help you get the cart adjusted correctly. Make sure you get good measurements; you can find hints on measuring a corgi at <http://www.corgiaid.org/cart>

The bottom line: All carts work for some dogs. No one cart is the best in all possible areas- every cart works, every cart is a compromise. The top brands are tried and true with corgis. You won't go wrong if you do your measurements carefully and work with the company to get your adjustments and fit right. (This means sending photos to them of your dog in the cart, making adjustments, taking new photos or video, and sending them again until it is right.)

Corgis on Wheels: This article was originally written for the files of the Corgis on Wheels Yahoo group which can be found at <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/wheelcorgis/>

The list, which can be read on the web or as an email list, currently has almost five hundred members who either have a cart corgi or have had one in the past, and is an excellent resource for information and support on IVDD, DM, and corgi carts.

More information on carts for corgis can be found in the book "*Corgis on Wheels*", which is available at <http://www.corgiaid.org/cart/corgisonwheels> or from Amazon.