

## ASSESSING THE CANE CORSO PUPPY FOR WORKING POTENTIAL

Stacey Young, Crusade Cane Corso

This is all geared toward a potential personal protection or IPO candidate done by the breeder who has enough time to fully evaluate the puppy.

The first thing I do is the early neurological stimulation as introduced by Dr. Carmen Battaglia [http://breedingbetterdogs.com/pdfFiles/articles/early\\_neurological\\_stimulation\\_en.pdf](http://breedingbetterdogs.com/pdfFiles/articles/early_neurological_stimulation_en.pdf). I have bred litters using this method and not using it and I have found it does make a difference.

Once the puppies are moving about and have their ears open, I look for the alpha puppies. I also take note of the secondary puppies (those puppies that can take a beating and still keep trying); I have found these puppies do very well once they are no longer under the shadow of their stronger littermate. At this time, I start playing various sound tapes. I play every type of music and sound. I have found that the puppies really dislike Whale sounds. Your goal is to desensitize puppies from loud, jarring sounds. In protection sports, you have all kinds of sounds that startle a dog that they need to be comfortable with – gun fire, yelling, slapping of various items to startle the dog. Eliminate the puppies that run from it. You want them to learn that sounds don't hurt them and you want them to learn it in a safe place – the whelping box.

Once they are running around, start looking for the puppy that is independent. You want the puppy that goes off on his own exploring. This is important factor since a Corso is guardian breed vs. a herding breed. A guardian breed will chase the bad guy and once the bad guy is sufficiently far enough away, they return to guard their person/place/thing – they don't care what happens to the bad guy – their job is done. A herding dog will chase the bad guy until they catch them (which leaves whatever they were guarding vulnerable). A herding dog thinks....I'm going to catch it and kill it. This translates into finding a puppy that will grow into a dog that is willing to leave your side when you send it away (i.e. long bites, building searches, wood searches etc.).

At this time you will want to further evaluate the litter by dropping loud items near the litter. Pots and pans are what I use. The entire litter should startle, but you are looking for the puppy or puppies that recover first and then go to investigate the strange item. You will want to eliminate the puppies that run for cover.

You are also looking for a puppy with good prey drive. You assess this with a flirt pole. You need the puppy that doesn't give up. Use Jut Rag on the flirt pole as this is the same or similar material used on sleeves. Corsos have very sensitive mouths and some do not like the feel of the material in the mouth. So although some will chase it, some don't like keeping it. As with all training, make sure you keep the lessons short and leave the puppy or puppies in a winning situation.

So now you've picked out a few puppies that have confidence, are sound desensitized, are independent and have good prey drive. Next is structure. You cannot work a dog that isn't built to withstand distance, jumps and physical stress. This is why size is a factor and why you see most working people have the smaller, more compact dogs. If you have a 140 pound Corso and an 85 pound Corso, which one do you think is going to tire out after the long send? You also have to consider jumping through windows, getting on top of cars if necessary or going over the A frame. Size contributes to endurance and ability. That is not to say a larger dog cannot do it, but you will have to invest more time

conditioning your dog with a larger one compared to a smaller one. Also, you are looking for good knees, shoulders, elbows and hips. If a dog cannot move, jump or run long distances, it doesn't matter what their temperament is like it's not going to be very successful.

That is the basics for evaluating a Corso litter for potential working pup. Other important factors that cannot be reliably evaluated at this time are balanced drives. It has been my experience that the earliest of American bloodlines have more defensive drives. A dog needs a clear head when working. This can most easily be understood if you compare it to professional boxers. If a professional fighter lost his temper while in a boxing match and then started street fighting - that wouldn't work. Same with a working dog. The working dog has to have a clear mind so when he is engaged in the "fight" he is able to be called off successfully. This isn't something that can be evaluated in a puppy, nor should a dog be placed in this drive until he has matured.

Something to keep in mind when a buyer wants a "working" potential for a sport such as IPO is to find out if they have any experience with a Cane Corso. This is important because Corsos are more difficult to train due to their independent thinking. When a Corso is introduced to the blind search, they quickly figure out that the bad guy is behind the last blind, so why should they waste time looking at the other blinds when they can go straight to the bad guy? A herder will do whatever they have been taught. Same with building prey drive. A herder will enjoy playing fetch. Your typical Corso will have retrieve the ball once or twice and then will not retrieve it again because if you wanted the ball then why did you throw it away? So if a buyer wants a working potential and has not been exposed to a Corso, then it is important that you explain their training as a handler will require some adjustment.

Lastly, make certain you are aware of your litter's fear stages and DO NOT apply any emotional or physical pressure on a puppy during this time.