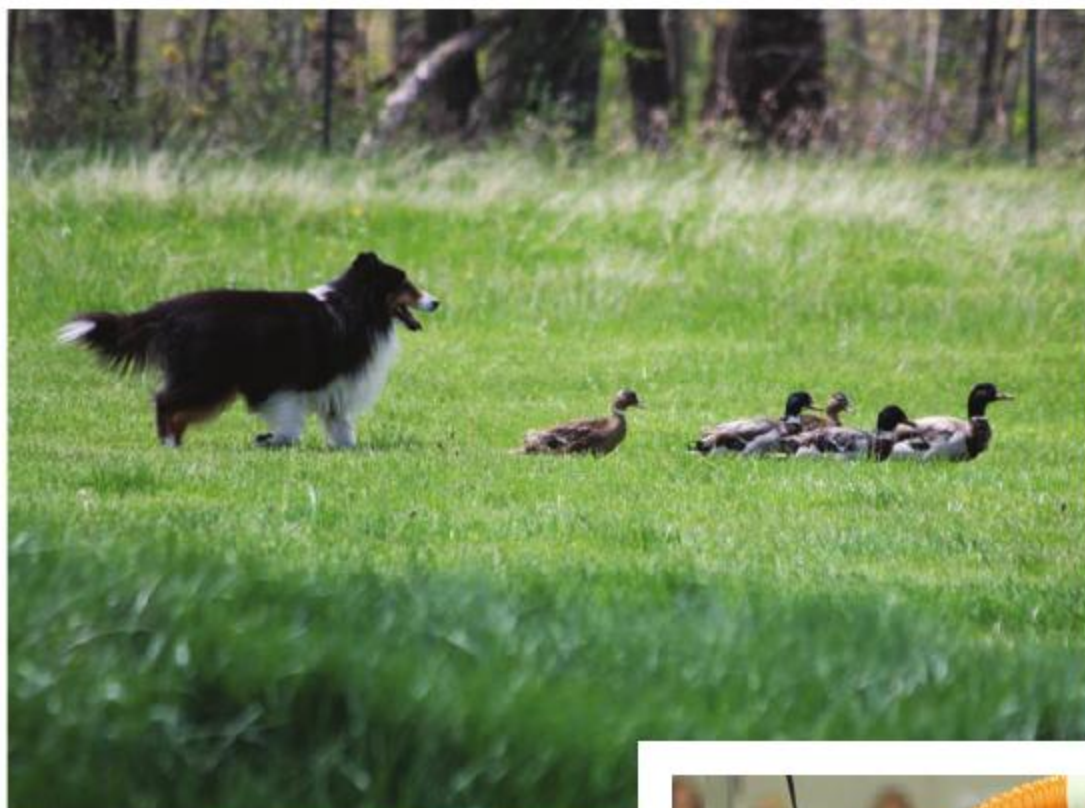


THE SHETLAND SHEEPDOG

Size Does Not Determine Talent, Toughness or Tenacity



Cooper (HC HTCh MACH PACH VTCh Prelude's Grand Slam UD VER RAE2 HXAsd HXBd MXB MXJS PAX2 MXPS MJPG CGC HTADIIIsd HRDIII s HTDIIId HTDII s ASCA UD ATDsd AFTDsd), Janice Miller's Shetland Sheepdog, has herding titles from the American Kennel Club, American Herding Breed Association and the Australian Shepherd Club of America including championships from the AKC and AHBA.



LIFE ON THE SHETLAND ISLANDS in the North Atlantic off the north coast of Scotland and just 400 miles south of the Arctic Circle is not easy. Exposed to the furies of both the North Atlantic and the North Sea as well as Arctic winds and weather, the islands are rugged and rocky with only a few stunted trees and plants that tend to grow low and close to the ground to survive the nearly constant winds that buffet the islands. The people who live on these islands also tend to be as tough and rugged as the islands themselves and they have demanded the same sort of toughness in the Shetland Pony and the Shetland Sheepdog. Like the plants that survive on these craggy islands, both the ponies and the dogs are small and close to the ground.

The original purpose of the Sheltie was as an all-around farm dog. They were expected to assist the crofters, tenant farmers or sharecroppers on the islands, doing whatever was needed keeping livestock out of gardens, helping with the twice yearly sheep roundup and serving as a family companion providing a warning when intruders or visitors to the croft approached. This tendency to bark was definitely an asset to the crofters although some consider it a drawback for the breed in the modern era. The early Shelties had to earn their keep because the islands' residents could ill afford to keep a dog purely as a pet. What eventually evolved from the needs and demands of the crofters on the breed was a dog that thrived on multiple activities doing many dog sports at the same time.

"Shelties are very biddable and they are so talented that all their skills should be showcased," said Cheryl Sacerich, who owns Clipz (WTCH HTCh ATCH TC Moonglow Chosen Bi Eclipse VCX CD rE MXG MJG HSAAs HIAAs HXA DSM HXBdM MXF MXP AAD ASA AG AS AJ ATDdsc OTDdsc JS-E-OP RS-E-OP HTADIIIsd HRDIII s), the breed's second, after his grandfather, triple champion as he has an AKC conformation championship, a herding championship and a MACH2 among his many titles. "Herding dogs are known to work well as team members and my dog wants to do whatever sport I have planned for any given day."

"If you look at the standard, you'll see the words 'the Shetland Sheepdog is intensely loyal, affectionate and responsive to his owner.' Other advantages the breed brings to the partnership include their moderate size, lightness of gait and body flexibility. Their coats are not only beautiful but weather protective and the smooth coat on their faces, ears and feet stays cleaner and is less likely to attract mud, burrs and weeds," said Janice Miller, who owns HC HTCh MACH PACH

VTCh Prelude's Grand Slam UD VER RAE2 HXAsd HXBd MXB MXJS PAX2 MXPS MJPG CGC HTADIIIsd HRDIII s HTDIIId HTDII s ASCA UD ATDsd AFTDsd ("Cooper"), which was the number one Sheltie in AKC herding in 2009 and had
CONTINUED ON PAGE 158

Cooper also has a pair of agility championships from AKC and a versatility championship from the Association of Working Shetland Sheepdogs.

THE SHETLAND SHEEPDOG

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 96

several other placements in the herding ranks through the years.

Despite the fact that Shelties are herding dogs and both owners have earned herding championships on their dogs, Sacerich and Miller agreed that herding was the most difficult sport for them to master. "Herding is the most difficult by far because of the amount of teamwork required," said Sacerich. "I had to acknowledge that the dog had instinct that made him better equipped to read the stock. Then, he had to relinquish some control so that I could tell him where we were going to take the stock. You also have the addition of a third party in the equation, the livestock. We had to do a LOT of training and going to seminars. We finally got better once we started raising ducks ourselves. The process of putting the ducks away at night made both of us better at reading and working stock."

"I'm a city person who has never been around livestock," said Miller. "Even the vocabulary is different from anything I'd ever experienced. Fortunately my first Sheltie had tremendous herding talent. It was her special gift. She was in charge and I was just tried to stay out of her way. Cooper, though, had trouble herding ducks at first. Even though they're smaller than sheep, they are harder to herd. They demand more concentration and smaller movements. But, after he gained more experience with sheep, Cooper was able to work the ducks just as well. Our biggest problem with herding is that we don't live on a farm. This means we have to go to a farm with good livestock that is set up for herding and that means anywhere from one hour to three and a half hours on the road one way. While my Shelties have all had herding talent, I had to learn about livestock in order to show them what to do with it. Of course, this also increased the amount of time we had to spend training. One of the real issues in herding with a Sheltie is that you have to find a teacher who is experienced with 'loose-eyed' upright working dogs. They must appreciate the working style of the breed and be able to use the style to give the best results. Also, the teacher should have livestock that are accustomed to being worked by many different breeds. I was very fortunate to have expert teachers who were Sheltie-friendly and had Sheltie-friendly livestock. My herding teachers expected my Shelties to do the same exercises as the other breeds but they knew how to train us using the Shelties' style, strengths and weaknesses. I also had to find farms for trials that had livestock accustomed to being worked by many different breeds."

Despite the breed's reputation as being willing to do almost anything, Sacerich said that her Shelties do not like being drilled. "If they are doing something correctly, they want to move on so we only train for short periods of time although I do tend to focus on only one activity before an event. I also do a lot of clicker



Clipz' three AKC championships making him a TC are in conformation, agility and herding.

training and I give the dogs some breaks to keep them fresh."

"My first Sheltie had an issue with the utility scent discrimination exercise for awhile. When we learned the exercise, the AKC regulations gave us two options. The handler could turn and send the dog to the pile during the turn or the handler could turn, sit the dog and then send to the pile. Then, the AKC changed the regulation so everyone had to sit the dog before sending. Abbie was very upset, thinking that she was doing something wrong. She expressed this by walking instead of trotting to and from the article pile. I had to work on encouraging her to speed up and assure her that she was doing it correctly. Later, she changed the regulation again and returned to allowing both methods of sending to the pile. While Abbie did earn her OTCH, the lesson here is to teach the exercise correctly the first time and hope that the regulations don't change. Retraining an exercise is very difficult," said Miller.

A problem for Sheltie people who are involved in a number of dog sports is that they can have a difficult time showing in conformation. According to the breed standard, the Sheltie's coat gives protection to the working dog. "But," said Miller, "When they are groomed for the show ring, a Sheltie's coat would not always be appropriate for the work that the breed is supposed to do. Yet a Sheltie that is not groomed according to popular style has difficulty winning in the show ring. There is no good solution to this as there are only two options—hire a professional handler to show your dog or concentrate on the show ring to the detriment of other events. But, this doesn't always work to your advantage either because a Sheltie that is accustomed to doing many activities may become bored as a show dog. The conformation handler, whether it's a pro or the dog's owner, has to be on their toes and entertaining to keep these Shelties alert and interested in being a show dog."

Clipz (WTCH HTCH ATCH TC Moonglow Chosen BI Eclipse VCX CD rE MXG MJG HSAds HIAds HXA DSM HXBdM MXF MXP AAD ASA AG AS AJ ATDdsc OTDdsc JS-E-OP RS-E-OP HTADIIIIsd HRDIIIIs), Cheryl Sacerich's Shetland Sheepdog, is the breed's second triple champion following in the pawprints of his grandfather who was the breed's first TC.

Although the breed is highly trainable, there are some issues that responsible breeders face which stem from the Shetland Sheepdog's popularity. One significant issue is unstable temperaments. Way too many Shelties are being bred by people who have no idea what is involved in breeding good tempered dogs and as a result, obedience trainers are saying they are seeing more and more Shelties that are high strung, skittish or yap incessantly. In addition, the breed faces a depressingly long list of serious health concerns including epilepsy, bleeding disorders, heart disease, joint problems, endocrine system disorders, skin problems and other issues. The American Shetland Sheepdog Association provides support for research into these health problems and is actively encouraging breeders to test for those issues where a reliable test exists as well as refrain from breeding dogs which exhibit many clearly genetic disorders where no test is available.

"We're also dealing with a split in the breed between working dogs and show dogs," said Sacerich. "It's not easy to get the whole package in one dog. For that reason, multi-titled dogs in the breed are important to the future of the breed. While a dog needs to be pretty and put together well enough to float around the ring, you also need a brain and personality to go with that prettiness."

Miller agreed. "The multi-titled dogs we have in the breed are a model of success for everyone who loves this breed whether they be breeders, dog show participants or trainers/handlers in performance events. There must be a blend of the temperament, intelligence, desire to please, good structure, endurance and ability to move well for success in all activities. The multi-titled dogs represent the best in the breed as they have to possess all of these traits in order to be successful. Breeders must realize that not all of their puppies will be conformation champions and be supportive of those puppy buyers who do many activities with their Shelties."