

Sixty Years With Working Dogs

by Ernest W. Maxson

I was six years of age when I first came in contact with farm working dogs and, as you would expect of the 'back woods boy', the hound came into the picture a few years later..but this is about farm working dogs.

First was the Scotch Collie, spoken of at the time as a yellow dog..about 20-22 inches, heavy, on strong legs and carrying his tail low with a curve. His color was from yellow to Autumn brown with white markings. A boy and a pup. Me, boy of less than eight years and a pup of less than eight months. He was too willing and I nearly ruined him as a working dog. Lesson number one..never crowd a dog of any age too much.

Next, I will mention the other Scotch Collie. He came to us as an overgrown clumsy puppy, and his greatest interest was just to 'tag along'. When I took the milking herd to pasture there was one cow that always lagged behind. It took lots of energy and stick to

keep her with the others. One morning I noticed that my dog was interested so, boy fashion, I decided to see what could be done. The cow dropped back and I grabbed her by the hind leg; she kicked and caught up with the herd. She dropped back again and I followed the same procedure and away went the cow. By this time the dog was very interested and when the cow dropped back once more I told the dog to 'get her'. He nipped her leg and dropped so that she kicked over his back. From then on he wanted to be a cattle dog and was ready to listen for commands and obey them. He became an out-standing working dog. Lesson number two..observe your dog and come to understand him. Each dog is an individual. The opportunity will come to teach them what you want them to do.

It has been years since I have seen one of the old Scotch Collies. I have worked the old type English Shepherd whose body conformation was about the same as the Scotch Collie but with markings the same as the tri-colored Beardie.

About 1924 I saw a blue dog called an Australian Shepherd. It was a female. When crossed with a Collie she produced some outstanding cattle dogs.

I later raised, trained and worked Border Collies and had outstanding dogs of that breed.

In all breeds of working dogs some worked like veterans at eight months of age while some were two years before they came into their own.

When I saw my first Beardie, all of these dogs of the past came to my mind. The Beardie must have been the fore-runner of them all.

My first Beardie: I was looking for a dog to do some of the walking and all the running that is required in handling beef cattle. I saw an ad for Bearded Collies and , never hearing of them before, thought it was a misprint and called. I went to look at what, to me, was a new breed. May 26th of 1979 I returned home with a four and one-half year old male who had been a pet in the city. The next morning "Turk" went with me (on a long

lead) to move cattle. We hadn't gone far before I realized I had a potential 'working dog'. He used the half circle from one side behind to the other side; the movement of a drover. That afternoon I took him to a fifty acre pasture where I had young stock. He gathered, or as some would say 'herded' the cattle and then went to driving. I knew then that I had a working dog. After the first day Turk was put to work under the most difficult conditions (in my opinion) a livestock working dog will ever meet; that of handling beef cows with young calves by their side.

June 3rd I bought "Blue" a seven month old female. She has been given the freedom of the farm and taught a few basic commands. At less than eight months of age she took it on herself to put a limit on where the chickens could go, they are not allowed on the lawn or around the cattle feeder.

Both Turk and Blue have come to the point where they require very few commands. In the

Autumn I take hay to the pasture for the cattle. Turk, without a command, has collected cattle from three different pastures, brought them through the barn yard and to the pasture where the hay was being fed. Blue, at ten or eleven months, was gathering cattle into a group and then, working as a drover, bringing them to me and taking cattle from feeder to pasture. This again was with no commands.

Turk works with his method, harsh and forceful. Blue works the same cattle Turk started working with; her method gentle and with determination.

On October 29th, Blue presented us with six puppies sired by Turk; four are still with us. They were born in the stable and kept in a box stall. When just past two months of age, they were allowed out of the box stall and given the freedom of the barn. They use the driveway back of the cattle for a 'play pen'. To my knowledge they have never run under the cattle and horses, yet show no fear of them. When they want to go in front of the cattle, they use the

alley that I use while feeding. Regardless of the weather, they go outside for a while every day and are allowed freedom of the farm. I have noticed they are picking up the commands I give the older dogs and they never get in the path of moving machinery.

One puppy left to become a cattle working dog. He is already learning commands and riding the farm tractor with his new master.

I have mentioned the working of both Turk and Blue and the actions of the puppies to stress the natural working instinct, adaptability and superior intelligence that I believe is within the breed. The Beardie is the most intelligent dog I have ever worked with regardless of age.

Every Beardie that ever leaves here will be of proven working parents, as the original Beardie was bred for.

Contrary to what many think, our working dogs have always been a member of the family, playmate for the children, guardian of all and never barred from the house. Now

the Beardie is taking over the same spot with the grandchildren.

We have received many compliments on the beauty and working ability of our dogs and it has been mentioned that within the puppies there are some outstanding show prospects.

We love our Beardies!

San Francisco Bay Area Bearded Collie Club @May 1981

Every effort has been made to contact Mr Maxson directly. Judging from the "flavor" of the article we are guessing British background and that he may have been born around @ 1909-1915

Permission granted by:
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