

WHY A BEARDIE isn't a Rough Collie

by Anne V. Dolan

Picture this scenario, (it happens over and over again). You are walking down a street. Beardie on leash, tail wagging, body undulating, when a passerby, unable to resist this shaggy charmer asks, "What kind of dog is this?" You reply, "It's a Bearded Collie." The passerby responds incredulously, "A Bearded Collie? Well, it certainly doesn't look like a Collie!" Of course not, because it isn't a Collie, although they do share the same Gaelic names and origins as a sheep dog.

A Look Of Its Own

Stand back objectively and examine this interesting dog. Medium sized, shaggy and not terribly glamorous, the Beardie has a wonderful expression, reflecting the paradox of his personality. This delightful expression is indeed one of the hallmarks of the breed: stut, intelligent, dreamy, inquiring and quite determined--all this in one glance! His body should be strong but never heavy and his mind is as quick and agile as is his body.

To really understand this breed, study the original function. Under *characteristics*, the standard to the Bearded Collie reads, "The Bearded Collie is hardy and active, with an aura of strength and agility characteristic of a real working dog. Bred for centuries as a companion and servant of man, the Beardie is a devoted and intelligent member of the family. He is stable and confident, showing no signs of shyness or aggression. This is a natural and unspoiled breed.

A Beardie is rather a complex character. If you like a challenge, then he'll appeal to you. He is endlessly energetic, curious, inventive, intense, independent, intelligent and determined. He loves to bark, has a boisterous love of life and is indeed a worth companion. Needing most of all to be a companion and equal, he requires close contact with his human family. This is an important to him as food and water. He is a poor candidate for the kennel.

Understanding His Past

What makes the Beardie what he is? The key to the present is in the past. Begin by taking an imaginary journey to Scotland, the original home of the working Beardie. Close your eyes and capture a little of the magic of the

this beautiful country. The ancient castles, the mists, mountains, lochs. The lilt of a lone pipe on a hill. The soft Gaelic names of the crofts on the hillside. Blairnairn, Inverlauren, the Duirlands. Capture this enchantment, and you'll easily understand the magic of the Beardie.

He is a dog with very humble roots--always a worker, both in the mountainous Highlands and in the gentler slopes of the Lowlands. He would e out on a hillside, running, climbing, scrambling, thereby demonstrating the Beardie's decidedly high energy level.

Imagine the terrain on which the Beardie worked. The Highlands of Scotland are truly beautiful. Great mountains are a brilliant green, and are deeply etched with rocks and streams, or "burns" as they are referred to. They are covered with heather, craggy rocks, and endless stretches of bracken, a tough fern which often grows over six feet tall. Picturesque as it is, the bracken spreads quickly and is nearly indestructible, interfering with the already sparse grazing. On these mountains, dotted with small crofts and farms, the sheep graze. They are moved from area to area as the shepherd sees fit. This is the task of the Beardie, and this type of worker is called a Huntaway. The Beardie's boundless energy is called upon, as working on these steep hillsides requires stamina, drive and strength.

In these mountainous sections the flock of sheep frequently are scattered widely over a large area. The sheep often are unaware that the dog is working and gathering nearby, so the Beardie must park while he works which alerts and frightens the sheep, causing them to flock together. This makes the dog's job much easier. His bark will also convey his location to the shepherd, as the dog is often out of sight in this type of terrain. The Beardie must also think for himself. If he is out of sight of the shepherd, and a problem occurs, such as a sheep breaking away from the flock, he must make a decision without waiting for the vocal command or whistle from the shepherd.

The Beardies in the southern part of Scotland work differently. The hills there are gently sloping and less mountainous, so the dog utilizes more "eye"--and intense, unblinking gaze used by the dog to control the sheep. This almost hypnotic gaze is often accompanied by a creeping approach to the animals.

Shepherd Relationships

What about the Beardie's relationship with the shepherd? This type of farmer is apt to be a lean, sparse man with a face lined by weather. Since

the crofts in the Highlands are often remote and isolated, family and dogs are his closest companions. He depends on his dog to assist him in the endless hours of sheep farming work. With great understated pride, the Scottish shepherd will talk to you about his dog, as he leans on his ever present crook. The bond between man and dog is a secure one.

Today, the Beardie displays for us all of these inherent qualities. The energy, intelligence, independent spirit, and the strong need to be with his master, all make sense. By understanding a Beardie's ancestry, the master knows he'll never "own" the Beardie and he sees why the Beardie expects to be treated as an equal.

Major Jim Logan of Scotland, a true friend of the breed, wrote an intuitive paragraph on the Beardie. It surely reflects the very essence of the breed:

"A Beardie is a dog of almost overpowering friendliness, extremely active, boisterous, an expert in escapology, a dog with a loud bark who is not afraid to use it. It is not a dog for the house-proud or ear-proud, for the fanatical gardener, or for parents of nervous children, or for those who are forced to leave it in the house all day. But for anyone who is prepared to train it and control it, to exercise it and to look after its coat, to put up with the mud, sand, or worse that it will bring into the house, and to keep it occupied, there is no breed which will provide more faithful companionship or greater entertainment."^{1,2}

Note on author: *Past owner of Glen Eire Farm kennels in Schuharie, New York, Ms. Dolan-Smith is listed as a breeder in the Bearded Collie Club of America newsletter as early as 1977, which would make her one of the earliest breeders of the breed.*

She is also listed in the book, "The Complete Bearded Collie," as one of less than 20 breeders who influenced the development of the breed in the United States.

¹ Major Jim Logan, "Our Dogs"

² "This article first appeared in October '84 AKC Gazette and is Reprinted with permission." Norma Rosado-Blake Archivist, American Kennel Club 08/03/07

The book, "Bearded Basics and Beyond," published in 1997, notes she is "no longer actively breeding."

Ms Dolan-Smith served as Vice-president of the parent club for one year, 1982-1983.

An extensive biography can be found in the publication "A Pioneer Spirit," produced for the 2005 Beardie Nationals by the Great Plains Bearded Collie Club.

<http://www.greatplainsbcc.org/page4.html>

