

...it's a dog's life

## Man's best friend corrals other canines

**BY DONNA TOMMELLEU  
HARRISBURG** — The big white pup sat amid a pen of Hampshire sheep, his sad eyes peering into those of prospective buyers at the Penn State Ag Arena Sale.

Almost invariably, the 7-month-old Great Pyrenees consigned by David and LuAnn Sverduk caused more than a few double takes.

He had no name at sale time but responded to anyone with a kind voice and a gentle touch.

The Hampshires moved easily around him as the pup's cold, wet nose gingerly nuzzled each ewe. He was no stranger to this pen of sheep, having lived with the ewes for almost six months.

David and LuAnn's 10-month-old daughter Ginger slept peacefully in a corner of the pen, nestled deep in straw. The tall, gangly pup moved about her with the utmost care, aware of his feet at all times. It was only when the pup lowered his shaggy head to give her a very wet, very sloppy good-night kiss, that the little girl stirred for a moment and dropped back off to sleep surrounded by the soft, warm breathing of the gentle creatures in the pen.

But the big pup with the sweet disposition still bore the scars from head wounds suffered in a battle with a German Shepard. The battle resulted six weeks ago when the Shepard entered the pup's 10-acre pen and threatened his sheep. The pup rose to the occasion and turned away one badly beaten Shepard before it could damage the sheep.

"The Great Pyrenees are just doing what they've been bred to do," noted David Sverduk.

Unfortunately, many sheep producers find out too late that such a watch dog may have saved them hundreds of dollars and valuable animals lost each year to dog kills.

The Lackawanna County couple explained their reason for consigning a dog to the Ag Arena Sheep sale was to expose other sheep breeders to the big white breed.

"I don't think that some people are aware of what they can do for dog kills," LuAnn commented.

In the past the Sverduks have tried everything from goats to guns in controlling dog damage on their 150-ewe operation.

Although they still have a pair of Border Collies for herding purposes, the Sverduks opted for the Great Pyrenees guard dogs about three years ago.

They started with an older female but quickly found out that younger dogs adjust better to training and began breeding the Great Pyrenees dogs on their Dalton, Pa. farm.



David and LuAnn Sverduk extend a friendly hand to their canine consignment. The Lackawanna couple are eager to spread the word about the Great Pyrenees effectiveness in guarding sheep.

"There isn't really too much training involved," David explained.

The Sverduks generally introduce a guard dog to its pen of sheep at six weeks of age, or approximately after it's weaned where it will remain indefinitely. The Great Pyrenees usually stay within the confines of the pen because they show little tendency to crawl over fences, said David.

Eventually the Sverduks have built up their guard dog stock to enable them to keep a mature dog in each of the four ewe pens. Their puppies generally sell for \$300.

"No one can afford not to have a guard dog," said LuAnn. "If you save one sheep, the dog's paid for itself."

The young couple may now have a dog in each pen, but before they could increase their numbers they ran only two guard dogs with their purebred stock. They recounted a painful incident when a Husky entered a pen of grade ewes, killed one and molested several others. David shot and killed the predator but the incident led to court case with the dog's

owner. Today the Sverduks are still awaiting compensation for their loss.

"That's what convinced us to put a dog in every pen," LuAnn explained.

Believing in the future of the Great Pyrenees as guard dogs, David and LuAnn armed themselves with literature on the breed in hopes of educating those they encountered during the Ag Arena Sale and especially the lucky new owner of the no name pup.

When the gavel signaled the close of the sheep sale the Sverduks' pup sold for \$170 to Gregory Strausbaugh, a purebred Dorsett breeder from York. The pup, recently christened "Max" had little trouble adjusting to his new home and new wooly buddies according to Strausbaugh.

And while many sheep producers throughout the state keep a watchful eye and a loaded gun in readiness for predators, the Sverduks and now Gregory Strausbaugh can sleep nights knowing dogs like Max feel at home in a pen of sheep.



This 7-month-old Great Pyrenees pup spends a last night with his wooly buddy before both of them were auctioned at the Penn State Ag Arena Sale. The pup has lived with the

sheep since he was 6-weeks-old and has protected the sheep against attacks from other dogs.

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