

Trainer vows Border collies are smartest dog

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

"I started with dogs when I was four years old. As I got older I had one dog after another," Jim Shearer recalls as he talks about how his interest in dogs developed.

Shearer, Hershey Mill Road, Mountville, grew up on a farm in Indiana County and started with a Scotch collie which belonged to his mother, moved on to coon hounds, beagles, German shepherds and Airdales. "I just kept going," he remembers.

Along the way he read about Border collies and after getting one of his own, his allegiance was sealed. He now limits his breeding and training to Border collies, a dog which he considers the most intelligent of any breed.

Shearer trains his Border collies to be working dogs, used for herding other animals, and he breeds them with that purpose in mind. "we only breed for three things - intelligence, obedience and the herding instinct. Border collies are the greatest herding dogs in the world."

He points out that there is no standard as to length of hair, color or size - the three above characteristics are the ones which count.

His first puppy made Shearer aware of the breed's natural herding instincts. Shearer says, "I didn't know a thing about training Border collies because it was so different. I felt so sorry for my dog, because he was so much smarter than I was!"

Shearer recalls taking his dog with him when he went to get the sheep and one day when he reached up to scratch his head the collie took of and brought them to him. Shearer laughs and says, "I tried the other hand and he came in behind the sheep and brought them to me. So we started and pretty soon we were in high gear. I taught him to stop with a whistle and all the rest was hand signals. It was amazing - that's how I trained my first dog."

Eventually Shearer lost his whistle and when he bought a new one, his dog paid no attention to him, although to his human ears the sound was the same. "I had to break him again," Shearer says. That was in 1948.

Since then Shearer has trained dozens of Border collies, and the beginning training is similar to other breeds. A very basic rule to which Shearer adheres is to name the dogs a one syllable name at birth. he says, "You can say it quick and the dog doesn't have to wait all day 'til you get to the end of his name."

He begins with basic obedience training after he has tied up the dog and gotten him used to a chain and collar. The training initially occurs on a leash.

"I teach a dog obedience. I teach them to come back, to heel and to go slow, and then I take them to the field to work on livestock. By then they already know the command to go right or to go left, and they know



Shots are a must for all puppies, and Jim Shearer, Mountville, administers his own to a new litter of border collies.

when to slow down and when to stop."

The training is a combination of whistle and voice commands. He said training a dog can vary from six weeks to three years, depending upon the dog and its maturity level. How long does it take? "If he's mature I work him every day and in three months I can have him trained because he understands."

Tips come flying from his lips as he talks, and Shearer says, "I'm going to write a book. For 10 years I've been writing it, but I can't get Virginia to do it" Virginia is his wife, as well as partner and supporter. Now he says he's making progress and a cousin in California is going to help him.

Because of the breed's natural ability, Shearer maintains that 98 percent of the farmers who have a Border collie ruins it. "Every other dog runs everything away from them, but a Border collie holds them in and brings them in. Farmers who have experienced other dogs, therefore, don't know how to properly let the Border collie do what comes naturally for him."

Shearer trains his dogs on sheep because he coincidentally raises

Southdown sheep to "show, sell and eat." He has cut down on his sheep population because of more people moving into his area and more stray dogs.

About his Border collies he says, "I never had any that wouldn't work anything that moved."

He once trained a Border collie to go on railroad cars and get hogs off. This was at the request of a packing company in Fresno, California which needed a dog for the job because humans didn't want to do it. It was important, however, that the dogs not bite the hogs in the hams - after all, that's pretty valuable to a packing company. Jim did the training, and the dog has taken over an undesirable job for humans.

The dogs are trained to nip an animal, if necessary, if it won't cooperate. "He can nip it anywhere from the shoulder to the point of nose, but not the ears or tail of any animal. They should also not hold onto animals," Shearer says. When he is working with new dogs, Shearer leaves the wool on the sheep in case the dog gets excited and nips it, so there is no damage done.

Animals bred by Shearer will be



This Border collie named Rock is two years old, and according to Shearer, has beautiful confirmation, with a nicely shaped head. Rock was happy to be the center of attention, but obediently listened to Shearer as he gave him commands.



This cow does not like the looks of these Border collies, and is very protective of her young calf. Despite her bold advances, the dogs keep after her to move her where they want her to go.

sold as puppies, or started into training of fully trained. No matter which way the animal is sold, there is always a lot of good, solid advice offered for handling the dogs.

He has sold his dogs as far away as Alaska, but he says he usually

never hears from the people who purchase them, and he figures that's because they are satisfied.

Is there a difference in training males and females? This question was posed while we were in the field working the dogs. Jim replied that it would take some time to answer and suggested it wait until we got in the house. Eventually we put the dogs away and settled into his comfortable farmhouse and the question came up again. His answer was, "No, there is no dif-

(Turn to Page B4)

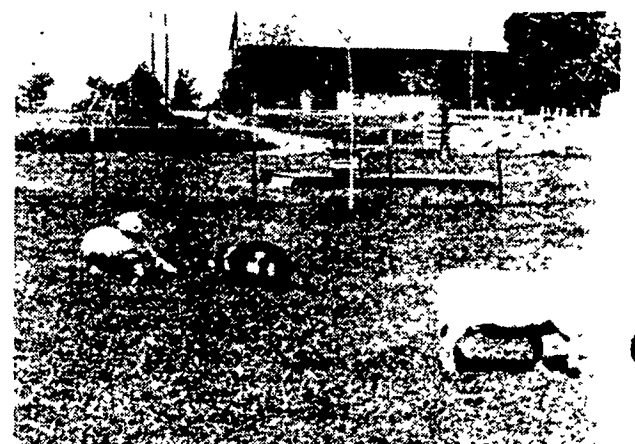
Homestead Notes



Tam gets on his feet and moves toward the sheep, advancing slowly and cautiously, knowing that it is his responsibility to keep the sheep where they belong.



Here, Tam carefully rounds up the sheep and gets them in the desired position, reacting to commands from Shearer with lightning speed.



Tam heads into the sheep, in an effort to shed two of the animals away from the other two. Mother and baby lamb do not wish to be separated from each other.