

## Herding Breeds, Purposefully Different Celeste R. Pongrácz

What makes a herding breed a herding breed? Why should we keep them separated and instinctively different? Is this really necessary in today's world?

You might think that it's really not important or worse, you don't even care. But if you own a herding breed dog and especially if you own a rare herding breed like the Mudi, it can mean the difference for that breed and what you can do with it, not just today, but tomorrow as well.

There are 7 groups of dog breeds in the AKC and 10 in the FCI. All breeds are put into these groups by their function or purpose. Neither kennel club has an agility, obedience, search and rescue, dog dancing or tracking group. Why? Because most any purebred dog breed or mixed breed can do these activities. They may not be world champions, but let's be realistic, how many dogs are world champions in any given breed for any given sport. To excel at anything takes a special person and a special dog, both require talent, but mostly both need the time, energy and dedication, plus a little extra pocket change to go to the top in any competitive event.

What makes a herding breed livestock motivated? The same thing that makes a sporting breed a retriever and flusher of fowl, a terrier that will eradicate varmints and a hound that will pursue and capture wild game, that thing is inherited instinct. It takes inborn capability that was created solely for an intended purpose to make the dog focused to its function.

It is not the ability to work with humans as many incorrectly assume. A Golden Retriever can work with man as well as a Border Collie. In fact the Golden Retriever was the top obedience competitor and breed in the AKC statistics for 2004, with not only the #1 dog being a Golden but also 13 of the top 25 competitors being Golden Retrievers. To top that, 16 of the top 25 by lifetime points dogs, were Golden Retrievers. Can a Golden Retriever herd?

It is not the ability to be agile or fast, again as many seem to think. The ability to do clean, fast runs in agility can be achieved equally by the sporting, non-sporting, terriers and mixed breed dogs as often as the herding breeds. The many different sizes of herding breeds helps to make them more popular picks for this sport, but the ability to herd is not ever a requirement to perform agility on even a mediocre level. Can any size of Poodle herd?

It is not scent or sight ability either. Scenthounds and sighthounds far surpass all other breeds in capability in these areas. So herding is obviously not a requirement in the coursing and treeing instinct needed in hounds, in fact, while herding instinct might be detrimental to a lure courser, the further developed prey drive of a courser can be hazardous to the herding dog. The courser needs to grab and bring down the prey, a sheepdog would be shot for this behavior. Can a Deerhound or Vizsla herd?

It is not guarding or protecting ability that is most useful either. A working breed dog is good for military or police purposes as long as a strong handler and leash separates the teeth from the suspect. Obedience is vitally important with a lethal canine weapon. However protecting or guarding instinct has to also be well within limits, the same as prey drive, in order for the herding

dog to function properly. Eating a sheep or stranger will not be conducive to a lengthy life span for a herding dog. Can a Mastiff herd?

It is not running or fashion ability most certainly. It is common knowledge that a sled dog let off leash in a park has a fair chance of not returning for a day or two and a perfectly coiffed Lhasa would never be in the park to begin with. Neither of these abilities is good for a herding dog or an agility dog. The first puddle or manure pile and that hairdo is hairdone. When the Husky returns, where will the sheep be? A well trained Husky and a trimmed Lhasa could do agility, but the sheep are not even on the horizon. Fashion and the desire to run all day in a straight line are not needed to herd and can actually be a deterrent. Can a Husky or Lhasa herd?

It is not about great companion capability either. A good herding dog does not have to be your best buddy, loving friend or fun to be around. It just needs to do what it is asked to do without any fuss. It needs to have the will and stamina to do this every day of the year. Friendship is not mandatory for this to occur. Can a Bulldog herd?

So what is herding instinct? It is the desire of the dog to do something with livestock. Each herding breed has variations in the usage of this instinctual preference as well as each individual dog within each breed. Some dogs will show an inclination to gather, others to drive and some dogs have varying degrees of each tendency. The display of these tendencies will determine the training approach necessary, but will not limit any trained dog, regardless of breed, to only exhibit one instinctual desire, as all trained dogs should eventually be able to both gather and drive livestock.

What is natural ability and is it necessary? It is an extension of the herding instinct in the dog which makes it able to read the livestock and events and respond correctly. Natural ability is the first trait to disappear when breeding programs start to select for things other than herding ability. Not all dogs with herding instinct have natural ability. Each dog comes with varying degrees of natural ability which makes for easier or harder training, but the end result is that a dog with little or no natural ability will not be able to work independently of the handler and will have a much harder time working the stock. A dog with a high level of natural ability is intelligent, has a great attitude, desire to herd and please the handler, along with the ability to read the stock in respect to pressure and balance. A dog with little or no natural ability does not have the scope and value that a dog with more natural ability possesses and is far less useful in either competition or ranch work.

What does all this mean? A breed specific quality can only be measured by working ability for the group whose selection it was developed for. If your dog has good herding abilities it will almost surely also be able to do the other sports that we do today as well. Why? Because these activities all have one thing in common, the dog needs a desire to obey, learn and follow directions. Herding, retrieving and ratting abilities also need the ability to learn. But the capacity to learn and channel what is inborn into a function can only be tapped if the ability is there to begin with. You cannot make the most obedient Golden Retriever herd like a Mudi and you cannot make the most talented Border Collie find and bring down a prey animal like a Deerhound. These things take innate ability that cannot be taught. If the opposite was true and

all agility dogs could herd, then we would see Beagles and Russell terriers in the pens with sheep and ducks.

In the future if we want to have wonderful herding dogs that perform also wonderfully in the other dog sports, we need to protect these herding instincts that were developed, because this is what made them great for these other sports events in the first place.

We should not breed and select solely for agility or any other dog sport capability. We should breed for what these breeds were intended to do which will then fulfill the sport needs.

Right now herding instinct-less Mudis are quite rare, this is the way it should be in all herding breeds. If you need to search far and wide to find a dog that can herd from your chosen herding breed, then the breed is past the point of easy return to function. This is why wise selection for breeding is mandatory. If you lose this inborn ability, it is near to impossible to get it back. If you lose it what other qualities will be lost along with it? Will it still be a great agility competitor or will that capacity suffer as well when the inborn instinct is gone?

Agility, obedience and companionship are wonderful things to do with dogs, all dogs, purebred and mixed breed alike. But adherence to breed function for breeding is essential to maintain the abilities we all want for the future. A Golden Retriever that cannot fetch, a Mudi that cannot herd, a Russell that cannot find and kill a rat, can have a great time on the competition field or couch, but should not be bred.

A breeding animal should be able to do what the breed was developed to do among the many other concerns one takes into account when planning a litter. There are many great dogs, but not all should be breeding stock. To get the best, you should breed with the best. Five elements are key to preserving a breed as it was originally developed:

- 1) If a dog is not healthy, it cannot perform its intended purpose for the breed it belongs to, it should not be bred.
- 2) If a dog is not able to do its breed intended purpose because it lacks the inborn ability to do so, than it should not be bred.
- 3) If a dog does not have a stable temperament like a member of its breed should possess, then it cannot perform the purpose for which it was intended, it should not be bred.
- 4) If the dog does not meet the basic breed requirements judged by an expert source, it should not be bred.
- 5) If the breeding would create an inbreeding coefficient higher than is recommended for gene pool stability and variability, the breeding should not occur.

Life is full of hard choices, but what you do with your dogs will have an effect on the breed you work with for years to come. You have to use your head and not your heart to stay out of trouble. Are you up to the responsibility of breeding? If not, and the vast majority of people aren't, then have fun with your dog, and leave the breeding to those that will do the best they can for the breed, not for personal gain. Breeding is not about ego, ribbons, titles, power, money or fame. It is about making the breed better. If you try to improve the breed with every breeding you do, by making sure the 5 principles outlined above are followed, then you do the best you

can for the breed. If you skip one principle then you jeopardize the others. A rare breed like the Mudi can rarely afford such a mistake. Only a solid breeding program incorporating purpose will keep the Mudi breed growing and preserved for future owners to utilize, this purpose is and always will be, natural herding ability. It is what makes a Mudi a Mudi, without it, it's just a dog.