

Cattle dog trials bring Canadian champions to Castleton farm

Competitors travel from as far away as Saskatchewan and Nunavut.

by JOHN CAMPBELL

The Independent

The Canadian Kennel Club (CKC) believes in equal opportunities for dogs. Why should border collies and Australian cattle dogs be the only ones tested for their ability to herd livestock?

The CKC has been holding herding trials and awarding titles officially for about five years now and the competition is open to any breed. Such was the case when the Australian Cattle Dog Club of Canada recently held CKC herding trials at Ewe's Welcome Farm east of Castleton. The trials, held Aug. 14-15, were preceded by two days of instinct testing and herding clinics. Seventeen dogs and their owners took part in the training sessions.

Serving as judge and trainer was Lynn Leach, a sheep rancher from Hope, B.C. who was instrumental in designing the herding program. Running clinics and judging at trials has become a full-time job for Leach over the past three years and the work takes her across North America.

It marked the first time that herding trials for all breeds had been held at Ewe's Welcome Farm. Owners Larry and Sylvia Forster bought the farm six years ago in order to train border collies, their own - they now have 11 - and those belonging to other people. They have more than 100 sheep to work with to train dogs in herding.

Bev Lewis, who organized the training and competition on behalf of the Australian Cattle Dog Club, said finding venues to hold clinics and trials for all breeds is "next to impossible" in Ontario. "For Sylvia to open up for us is really marvelous," she said.

"It's hard to find a place (with) livestock to train a new dog on," Leach said.

To earn a CKC herding title with a score of at least 75 out of a 100, a dog must guide sheep around a course, usually a ring 200 by 100 feet, following the voice or whistle commands of its handler. Many of the dogs tested work on farms but there are "weekend herders," Leach said.

No one breed is superior to all others in herding livestock. German shepherds and Rottweilers "have herding in them," for example, Leach said, but "the breeds are bred to do different jobs," so it's impossible to draw comparisons.

A good stock dog must be willing to work with its handler as well as have the ability to read animals, so that it knows where the livestock is going "before they go there" and thus be able to react without having to be told what to do.

"This is something that takes real teamwork between you and the dog," said Gina McDonnell, a sheep farmer from Goderich who served as a judge for

one day of the trials. "It's a challenge, and every time you go out, it's different."

She's seen all kinds of breeds entered in the CKC herding program, including Doberman pinschers and standard poodles.

"Most of them will catch onto it, in varying degrees," McDonnell said.

Usually, with owners who are beginners, "the dog catches on sooner than the person does. It takes a while for the person to know where to be, and what to do."

Some dogs are more difficult to train than others, depending on the breed and the personality of the animal, Leach said, but again it comes down to how knowledgeable is the dog's handler.

"If you don't know how to move stock, how are you going to ask your dog to move stock?" Leach asked.

But "once you've managed a farm with a good dog, you don't want to ever manage without (one)," Leach said, because they save so much in labour, even for farmers accustomed to using all-terrain

vehicles and buckets of grain as lures to move livestock around.

One couple drove 30 hours from Saskatchewan to enter two of their Australian sheep dogs in the clinic and they vowed to begin incorporating the animals in the running of their sheep farm when they returned home.

They didn't travel as far as Valerie Sharp, however, to take part in the training sessions and trials. She needed a plane to reach Ontario from her home in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut.

She brought with her a six-month Icelandic sheep dog, a breed so rare there are only about 2,800 worldwide. She owns four of them. Her Folda of Greenstone was the first Icelandic to participate in a CKC herding event.

"No one has done anything with them in Canada," she said. "I'm hoping to get them to the point where they will be able to (acquire) some titles because they are, after all, a working breed (in their native country)."

Their outgoing, playful nature and love of people also make them good companions and they are often used as therapy dogs.



TOWNSHIP OF CRAMAHE REQUIRES AN ACCOUNTS, PAYROLL & TAX CLERK

Reporting to the Treasurer, our Accounts, Payroll and Tax Clerk prepares and mails tax and water bills; receives, processes, and enters into the general ledger various tax, water and other payments; provides tax and water bill information to the public and updates accounts; processes payments for the Township's accounts payable; and prepares the payroll for Councillors, Township and Library employees.

Included are general office/administrative support duties, providing public information, telephone reception, mail distribution, filing, etc. Inputs all computer operations and oversees all computer files and programs pertaining to taxes, accounts and payroll.

In addition to excellent customer service skills, the preferred candidate shall possess Grade 12 with post-secondary training in basic accounting, with a demonstrated knowledge of Municipal systems supported by two years' related experience with payroll and financial transactions, in a computerized environment.

The 2003 salary range for this position is \$31,200 - \$36,500 with a performance incentive and a comprehensive benefit package.

Interested parties are invited to forward their resume, in confidence to Chief Administrative Officer, Township of Cramahe, P.O. Box 357, Colborne, ON, K0K 1S0 or to cao@cramahetownship.ca by September 10, 2003.

We thank all applicants and advise that only those selected for an interview will be contacted. Personal information will be used to determine eligibility for potential employment, and is pursuant to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Act.

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