

Basic Information about Herding

When German Shepherd Dog owners hear that my dogs actually herd sheep, their sentiments, expressed somewhat wistfully, are more often than not: "I always wanted to take my dog Herding.. I think he might like sheep".

Most folks have no idea what this really means, where to do it, or how old their dog should be before they introduce him to herding. Others simply think it sounds like a fun afternoon, but do not yet understand it takes time to train a dog the basic tenets of Herding, and it takes a commitment of regular time for the dog to establish good working skills.

For our Traumahof puppy families; Your dogs have been bred specifically for strong Herding ability. While not every puppy in every litter is equally suited to the work, there is a very good chance your puppy will grow up to exhibit interest in the sheep and tending work.

Here you will find some very basic information.

How old should my puppy be before I introduce him to stock?

Your puppy's age at time of introduction will vary, depending on how mature he is. As a general rule, you should NOT expose very small puppies to sheep very early on, except when closely supervised. I know this seems contradictory. We usually recommend exposing puppies to all sorts of things when young, so they accept them when older, but there is a reason for this caution! Sometimes sheep will intimidate a puppy. I have seen a sheep walk over, stare a puppy down, and head butt him. This is not a good early experience.

Once your puppy is bigger and more mature, you must determine his maturity level. I have had 10 month old pups who were ready to begin working on a line, and I have had 14 months old pups only just starting to be ready.

What skills should my dog know before going to meet sheep & start training?

A dog does not need tremendous amounts of obedience to begin to work sheep. Sheep herding is largely independent, instinct based work. However, it will help if you can call your dog to come, & tell him to stay.

Later, as you prepare your dog to move forward in his training & work towards a title, you will need to have a few more commands firmly in place.

What Happens my first time taking my dog to sheep?

Not every trainer trains the same way. Usually, your trainer will first want to assess your puppy's readiness to work & interest in the sheep.

Some trainers will ask you to bring your dog, on a long (30 foot) lead, up to a pen, with some sheep inside the pen. The trainer might ask you to walk your dog around the perimeter of the pen a few times, and judge his reaction. Then, he might ask you to remove the lead and walk around the pen. The trainer will watch what your dog does. Does he follow you, does he run around the pen barking at the sheep? Does he wander off to sniff elsewhere?

Other trainers will have you first bring your dog on a long line, and take up a position on the border, with sheep already in the graze. You will then set right to work establishing the border, and letting your dog know he can not cross this boundary. Again, the trainer is now evaluating your dog's interest in the sheep. At this point you are just inside the border, close to your dog so you can correct any trespass into the graze/over the border.

Some dogs do not show interest right away. They might take several introductions to sheep before they show interest. Other dogs show interest right away, and they have an intuitive understanding for what their job will be.

Some dogs must remain on a line, learning the border concept for many visits to sheep. Other dogs demonstrate early readiness to begin tending in earnest.

What Happens next, once my dog is Working a border?

Once your dog is free of a line & trotting along the border, watching the sheep, your next move will be to move away from your position just inside the border, stand with your sheep, & let your dog continue patrolling. When your dog "forgets" and tries to come over the border, you will remind him verbally to get "Out... Border."

You will work this way for some time. At some point, you will show your dog how to work more than one border - or - that it is okay to go around a corner and work as many sides of the graze as necessary. Once your dog exhibits the skill and work ethic to proceed, you will begin moving the sheep. How many visits you need, before you move sheep really depends on your individual dog.

How much time must I commit?

It takes many, many training sessions to prepare a dog for a SchH 1. Similarly, it takes many, many hours with sheep before your dog is ready for any level of competition or trial. The more time your dog can work sheep, the more regularly, the faster he will progress. Remember, professional shepherd dogs work 8 hour days, several days a week. If you Herd twice a week for one hour, your progress will be considerably slower than the professional's!

What exactly will my dog & I DO?

The end result of much training, will be that you and your dog can work together to tend the sheep. You will learn to fetch the sheep out of the pen, take them to their graze, have your dog keep them in the graze, move them down a "road", negotiate traffic obstacles, a bridge, and later, re pen the sheep. Your dog will learn to keep the sheep where they are supposed to be, and he will learn to "put back" any sheep that stray. The dog will only grip a sheep when the sheep directly opposes the dog. The dog will not run into the flock and cause panic and chaos. The dog will act in a workman like manner, and the sheep will appear peaceful. All will be harmonious. These things require some skill and some time to achieve.

As the Shepherd, YOU will need to learn basic handling and training skills, too! You will be learning right along side your dog! You need to learn how to position your own body in order to cue your dog, how to use your crook, and how much help to give your dog.

This Sounds Like a lot of Work... Why Would I do it?

This IS a lot of training and work. You and your dog will strengthen your partnership, and learn skills, together. Herding is a great way to work your dog's mind, as well as great physical exercise. Some people like Obedience, or Agility or Schutzhund or Tracking... others prefer Herding.

Where do I go?

There are not a lot of options, but there are a few people in various areas, who offer lessons or seminars or group classes. With a little research, you should be able to find some place! You might have to drive an hour or more to get to sheep Herding.

- We are now accepting membership to our Herding Club. Contact us for more info.
- Club Website coming soon!

Here at Traumhof, we have founded our program on Herding lines. Most of our youngsters will make good Herding dogs. We encourage our puppy families to get involved & work their dogs. We support our clients whether they want to title their dog HGH, or if they prefer to do some AKC "C" course Herding, if they want to do an HIC or PT only, or if they just want to bring their dog to try Herding a few times. We believe ongoing training helps develop your bond and partnership with your dog, and we are supportive of your endeavors to do so!