

Nancy Denecke & Aiko aus der Glockenbergsschäferei

Win The 2009 Bundesleistungshuten With 95 Points!

by Karen Priest
Photos by 24kPhoto

A Shepherd is walking through the sheep pen, amidst a sea of several hundred Merino ewes. The 2009 BLH is underway, and this next competitor is preparing for the exit from the pen, as two dogs wait, sentinel, by the gate panel.

Wearing a loose black Shepherd's coat and traditional hat, Nancy Denecke is distinguishable to the gathered crowd by the long blonde hair spilling down her back, and perhaps also by the way the sheep accept her with utter calm. Nancy's presence is no longer a surprise to the other Shepherds—all men, mostly seasoned competitors, but the crowd is immediately curious about her, and murmurs of, "That is a woman," whisper through the crowd. Nancy becomes the sentimental favorite.

Nancy is an unassuming young woman of 23. She seems unaware that she is strikingly beautiful, with her blue eyes, blonde hair and sweet smile. As Nancy awaited her score, after her wonderful performance with Aiko, she seemed to shrink back under the protective wide brim of her hat, struggling to remain expressionless with the eyes of the spectators and her colleagues resting on her, and well wishers calling out to her. Nancy's focus is on her sheep and her dogs, and I sense that she wishes no one would notice her beyond her work.

And indeed, it is impossible NOT to notice her work.

Herr Scheld, the head SV Herding Judge, and one of the judges presiding over the 2009 BLH, once said to me, "Very few people have this ability she has—perhaps the only other person who has this way with sheep is Karl Fuller." Karl Fuller has won the BLH 8 times with dogs from his kennel "vom Kirschtal" and is one of Herding's "living legends."

Nancy's work is steady, quiet, and purposeful. The sheep flow out behind her as if hypnotized, and her dogs work with a concentration of mind and drive. Nancy

is beautiful to watch, and it has nothing to do with her own physical beauty.

Nancy has a poise usually possessed by a much older, more seasoned competitor. She is comfortable in her work, and her dogs and sheep are comfortable, too. Her work is correct and precise, and it is apparent that in addition to her natural talent, Nancy has obviously been well taught.

Her teacher is the very well respected Shepherd, Gerd Jahnke, of kennel Glockenbergsschäferei. Herr Jahnke is perhaps my favorite Shepherd to watch. I love to see how bonded his dogs are to him and how they smile proudly when he praises them—which he does often. Gerd is crystal clear in communicating his expectations to his dogs, as well as in his reward and praise for their performing correctly as he asks. Gerd Jahnke's dogs obviously adore him, and this is not always evident when you watch every dog and handler team.

The dogs Nancy trialed for the 2009 BLH, Aiko and Elan Glockenbergsschäferei, were bred by Herr Jahnke. In the top 10 places, Nancy held 1st and 7th with Aiko and Elan Glockenbergsschäferei respectively, and Gerd held 2nd and 4th with litter brothers Canto & Caro Glockenbergsschäferei. Impressive.

Nancy first entered the BLH in 2006, finishing a respectable 5th place, earning 85 points, with Urmia Glockenbergsschäferei. I imagine that first BLH was the most difficult, as folks whispered about the WOMAN—barely more than a girl—who had entered, and wondered if she was any good. Women entrants are not entirely unheard of at the BLH, but they remain a minority.

In 2007, Nancy trialed Aiko, placing 14th, after her young dog made some mistakes. Nancy returned to the BLH in 2008, and she & Aiko finished 5th, one place ahead of her mentor, Gerd Jahnke, and his dog Canto.

HGH competition – and the Herding profession – has always been dominated by men, many of them now retired and of considerable age. Compared to the entries a decade ago, fewer Shepherds are entering major competitions, and fewer young people endeavor to become Professional Shepherds. Having a new generation to uphold tradition, pass on knowledge, and carry both into the future is imperative to preserving the original work of our German Shepherd Dog. To witness Nancy, a talented young superstar rising to the pinnacle of competition, and winning the BLH, was truly exciting. The fact that Nancy is the first woman in history to win, added to the fairy tale ending of the 2009 BLH.

Nancy Denecke is a young woman with a bright future, and I look forward to watching her compete for many years to come! ✂



Nancy & Aiko with mentor, Gerd Jahnke