



NATURE OF THE SHEEPDOG

This is an article written years ago by Serena VanRensselaer who owned the famous "Ceiling Zero," about the nature of the sheepdog. It was recently reprinted in the AKC Gazette and I think is worth having.

TELL ME ALL ABOUT OLD ENGLISH

First we might say the Old English Sheepdog remains a true working dog – with all that it implies. Yes he is glamorous, adorable, affectionate, anxious to please, a homebody, and can live anywhere. His habits are clean, his character entirely reliable. But as a working dog he is also a husky, powerful, very energetic, vital, exuberant and extremely intelligent dog. He can bowl over a big man at play, he can be very stubborn and very dignified about it if rudely ordered about; he uses his mind and many inborn talents. He does not roam but his herding instincts are so strong that he may come to harm if loose, his love of man so strong that he will pick up with strangers. His beautiful coat must be understood and must be maintained. He needs a family to perform all of the duties nature leads him to discover as his purpose in life. The family can be any number, any age, and it does not matter where or how they live. Our dog wishes only to be with them always, and to enrich each day in his amazing ways.

A sheepdog is not a "sometime-thing," an ornament, a toy or a status symbol. He is real, honest, and bred marvelously for all the endurance of body and mind which makes the working group the largest and most diversified group (Columnist's Note: written, of course, when present Working and Herding groups were one). They are endowed with every physical and mental quality to keep them able and anxious to extend man's feebler powers in many fields, as they perform tasks beyond man's strength and agility. They can still do their original jobs, but they can also adapt to a remarkable degree for innumerable other purposes. Their affinity for man, their understanding and their devotion set the workers apart.

IDEAL CONFORMATION

Among the working dogs, ours is ideally constructed. He hews to an original standard – the strong, compact, cobby, able-bodied muscular body called for, the balance, and symmetry of his conformation, the broad head, graceful arched back, high rump, short hocks, the very nose, ears, toes, as well as the double coat and its specified texture, his ringing "pot-casse" bark, are all for one purpose

– enduring soundness and stamina, the ability to move tirelessly all day as well as to put on any burst of speed needed, to withstand extremes of climate and weather, to be impervious to attacks from enemies ranging from insects to

wild beasts, and to use his own resources with the unruffled assurance of his wit, humor and strong character. The perfect balance of his proportions remain the same regardless of his size. This balance, achieved through three or four years to his full maturity, also ensures the extended prime of a sound Old English. He is rare among larger breeds for retaining his vigor and full powers of mind, body and senses to the ages of ten, twelve or more. His even temperament and his humorous outlook – his perfect faith in the goodness of man and of life, keep him young in spirit as well. It does not come often, but when it is clear that the chips are down, good will is of no avail, the full power of his wrath, and the legendary bravery, courage and disregard of extreme pain make him the most formidable and effective of foes. It also breaks one's heart in his extremes of distress.

OTHER QUALITIES

In his present role as companion, we find our dog can also be a fine hunting dog or retriever, at home, on land or in water. He stays by his master, he misses no sound or motion, he is keen always, and has a fine soft mouth. No Old English Sheepdog is a food snatcher or a careless bone crusher. He gently takes the choicest tidbit. He is the Nannie supreme – every herding and guarding instinct urges him to unfailing responsibility for the wanderings and disaster imminent for all toddlers. He gently steers them away from possible falls, dunkings and disasters and keeps them on limits. He defends them from man and beast, even from well deserved discipline from parents. With older and grown children he adapts to proper rowdyism. There is no sport, land or water, in which he does not join with enthusiasm.