

Being a Responsible Custodian

Readers of my book 'Understanding Border Collies' will be familiar with the closing lines of the last chapter.

'You are a custodian for one of the noblest breeds of dog, enjoy every minute of living with your Border Collie'.

As custodians of this remarkable breed we must think very carefully about what the future holds for it, as we may be in danger of losing the quality of breeding our ancestors have provided for us over the past century. A quality that is as precious as the very air this magnificent breed breathes if it is to retain its wonderful qualities.

Much is written about the collie and its working traits and most of it is unfavourable, the breed is accused of being hyperactive, of chasing, nipping and being destructive. Are all other breeds perfect?

The Border Collie as a breed is not guilty of any of these 'sins' but incorrect diet, management and communication are, they can cause a collie to act in a manner that has become known as the BC Syndrome. Understanding the breed helps in training and management but with that knowledge must come an understanding of the breed's ancestry and of the commitment of the shepherds who cared enough to only breed the best. For without them and their knowledge the Border Collie as we know it would not exist. Yet only recently one of the tabloids proudly boasted an article written by a journalist, who is a self confessed 'expert' on collie behaviour, declaring that she has seen 'working collies climbing the walls in frustration from being kept in pet homes'. The article then goes on to say that when buying a collie ensure you buy one that has been bred for a pet. The collie we all know and love is a sheepdog, this is what it was bred to do. Years of developing that wonderful brain, enabling these dogs to work on their own initiative, to solve problems and to give their all for man can be destroyed by careless, thoughtless breeding in a few very short years.

If anyone is in any doubt as to the capabilities of the potential of a Border Collie of strong working lines they need only look as far as the three dogs belonging to Susan Ross.

Spot, one of Scotland's finest National and International trialling dogs and also years of experience working on the hills, retired to live as a pet, with Susan.

Glen, son of Spot, a big strong dog who is incredibly strong and forceful with sheep,

Meg, daughter of Glen and already working sheep.

What is so special about these three dogs? Nothing! They just take each day as it comes, they can be a handful and they can be delightful, they are three normal Border Collies from strong working lines and they all work sheep. Glen just happens to have won in the show ring, Spot just happens to be a top class trial dog, and Meg is following in the family footsteps, they all live in the house and one of their accolades was Theropet of the year

Giving - this is what Border Collie do, this is when they are at their best, this is what 100 years of dedicated breeding has given us so please before you breed or even consider breeding look carefully to the future. When you hear people say there are not going to be enough sheep in the future to keep all the dogs working don't be tempted to believe the working brain should be watered down. Collies are doing Search and Rescue, searching for drugs, they are detecting epilepsy in humans they are doing so much good that the number of sheep in the country is not as important as the number of sheepdogs that are being bred to ignore them. We must all play our parts as custodians to make sure this wonderful breed remains what the last century has made it and what the rest of the world is only just discovering, a friend, a soulmate, a workmate, a partner, a **sheepdog**