

Stockdogs put on their work clothes.

Story & photos by Joann Pipkin, freelancer

It's been said that a dog is man's best friend. For a cattleman, that phrase is often the rule rather than the exception.

"A good dog will save you a lot of steps," explains cattleman and stockdog trainer Danny Shilling. "If you have a good dog and get your cattle [trained] to it, the dog is better than having people help."

Without a doubt, help on the farm is what having a working stockdog is all about. Shilling uses them daily on his cattle and sheep operation, located west of Springfield, Mo.

A world-renowned stockdog trial judge, Shilling has picked up some tricks of the trade through the years, having bought his first Border Collie in 1986. A stockdog trial, where the dog is evaluated based on its working ability with cattle or sheep, is a common sport among Border Collie owners.

"That first dog taught me a lot,"



► Stockmen and their dogs need to be a team, says world-renowned stockdog trial judge Danny Shilling.

► Basic commands for training a working stockdog might include come by (clockwise), away to me (counter clockwise), down, there, get back and walk up.

Tip-top shape

He's by your side every day, helping you move and care for your cattle. You depend on him. Skimping on the health care of your working stockdog won't save you steps in the long run.

"We take care of the dogs just like we do our kids," explains Lynn Daniel, an Oklahoma stockdog breeder and trainer.

Proper health care for the working dog is no different than that of a dog kept simply as a pet. According to Chuck Dake, Dake Veterinary Clinic, Miller, Mo., vaccinations for distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus and parainfluenza should be given annually, while rabies can be a one- to three-year vaccine, depending on the manufacturer.

Dake recommends every dog — indoor and outdoor — receive heartworm prevention.

Flea and tick control is also beneficial for the working dog to aid in the prevention of disease.

Dake says often the real healthcare concerns for working dogs come by way of trauma. "You can see a lot of kicks to the mouth and head."

Additionally, he notes, Australian shepherds have a color-associated gene that can sometimes cause deafness.

While hip dysplasia can be a problem in some breeds, Dake says it's not as big of an issue with herding dogs as it is in others, particularly the Labrador.

He notes a study conducted by Purina that showed a 50% increase in hip dysplasia in a group of puppies on full feed when compared to a group on a 25% calorie-restricted diet.

"With that," Dake says, "the hip dysplasia is less a function of the amount the dog works and more a function of the dog's genetics and how it was handled as a puppy."

he explains. "He knew where to be when working cattle."

Atoka, Okla., stockdog breeder and trainer Lynn Daniel says, "It's hard to find good help anymore. One thing about a dog is that he shows up every day. If you love him, he'll show up every day and do everything in the world to help you."

However, finding a good, working stockdog can be a daunting task.

Daniel compares dog selection to that of buying a car. "Go where you trust someone," he says simply.

"If you are just getting a stockdog for the first time, find a breeder who is honest and who will help you with your purchase because he knows the dog firsthand," Daniel continues.

Beyond finding a reputable breeder, first and foremost, a working stockdog must have a natural herding instinct, Shilling says. "You can take about any dog and teach it to go a certain direction, right or left, but you can't teach it herding instinct. It's a predator instinct. If you watch, a dog is like a cat trying to pounce. Then, you control that predator instinct."

Veteran trainer Nyle Sealine agrees with Shilling on wanting the dog to show natural

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► Above: Cattle should be trained to work with stockdogs to be most effective.

► Right: Although there are other breeds of herding dogs, these stockdog enthusiasts are partial to the Border Collie.



Help From a Friend

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ability. He's been training stockdogs in north-central Missouri near Princeton for more than 50 years.

Early on, Sealine purchased a book, hoping it would help guide him through the dog training process.

"You think when you read a book that everything should happen in chronological order," Sealine says. "It didn't work that way."

Sealine admits he never used the book after that and has since come to rely on his own abilities.

"I like to see natural ability in a dog,"

Sealine emphasizes. "The ultimate for a stockdog is its ability to work on the perimeter of the livestock. That way the stock filter to the center, and you have control."

Although there are other breeds of herding dogs, these stockdog enthusiasts are partial to the Border Collie.

"As a breed, the Border Collie generally has more tools you can work with," Sealine explains.

Shilling is adamant that you make friends with the dog while it is a puppy.

"Some dogs don't buddy up with you enough," he says. "You have to be a team."

Building teamwork

That teamwork begins at a young age. Shilling says you should befriend the dog from the time it is 8 weeks old.

"A lot of people leave [the dog] in a pen until it's old enough to start working," he explains. "You need to put 'em in your pick-up, haul 'em. Teach 'em to come and sit ... stay."

Shilling says a lot of dogs will display herding instinct from the puppy stage, but their attention span isn't very long.

While there's no set age that is better for training a working dog, Sealine usually doesn't do a lot of training with one to work livestock until the dog is about a year old.

"Up to that point, obedience is crucial. Teach it to sit, stay, heel. Mainly get the dog to mind to begin with; that's important," he says.

Shilling agrees. "They have to be a puppy before they can be a dog. I think some people start 'em too quick."

Nonetheless, teaching a puppy to do tricks like fetch or roll over will help its listening skills, he says. "[The puppy] will start listening before it is interested in the stock."

A special kind of farm help

Time — one of those things farmers and ranchers don't often have a lot of, it can easily be taken for granted.

Imagine caring for your livestock amid disease and disability. Time, then, takes on a whole other meaning.

"The idea behind the program is to train the dog to meet the farmer's needs so that the dog can assist them when needed," explains Jackie Allenbrand, founder, PHARM Dog USA. "The dog then saves the farmer time and energy that he or she can now spend on other things that need to be completed on the farm."

A nonprofit organization founded in 2005, PHARM Dog USA, or Pets Helping Agriculture in Rural America, provides training for dogs for farmers, farm family members or farm workers that may have a disability or disease.

According to Allenbrand, the program uses Border Collies for herding purposes and Labrador Retrievers or Lab mixes saved from shelters or rescues for service work. Three



► **Left:** "Work off of the dog's ability to control the livestock," Sealine suggests. "You and the dog need to be on the same page when it comes to control. Every dog is an individual."

► **Below:** Training begins with teaching the dog basic commands — a task that isn't necessarily easy.



Aside from showing natural ability, Sealine says it's entirely possible to have a dog with a lot of herding qualities that will not respond to training.

"You can have a young dog with a lot of ability," Sealine explains, "but you must first get control of the dog. You want to be able to call the dog to you with one command."

"Work off of the dog's ability to control the livestock," he suggests. "You and the dog need to be on the same page when it comes to control. Every dog is an individual."

Control is everything, Shilling says. To get that in the training process, he says you can't go out in the middle of 40 acres and really train the working dog, especially if you want it to be precise.

"You need a training environment so that when the dog makes a mistake, you are right there to correct him," Shilling notes. A 60- or 70-foot pen with some lightweight calves is a good starting point. Then, he says teach the dog to go right and left, down, walk up, get back, come to you. Then, drive away.

"You have to be there, though," Shilling explains. "You teach the dog to go right and left by blocking him. It's like riding a horse. You control him through applying pressure to the reins attached to the bit. Pressure on, pressure off. It's the same way with the dog."

A dog that has the herding instinct will want to circle, he adds.

Training begins with teaching the dog basic commands — a task that isn't necessarily easy.

"Every dog is an individual," Sealine says. "It's important not to ask a dog to do something with two different commands."

Consistency is key, much the same way it is with raising a child.

"You have to be the leader," Shilling continues. "It's not something you get too rough with them about, but they have to respect you."

Commands

Basic commands for training a working stockdog might include come by (clockwise),

trainers work with Allenbrand. While the Border Collies are trained specifically for herding, service dogs are schooled to retrieve tools, carry buckets and assist with mobility. Some are even trained to open gates.

"We talk to each farmer to see what his or her needs might be," Allenbrand says. "When the training is complete, we travel to the farm to work with the farmer one on one. At this time we teach them the commands, get the dogs used to their new surroundings on the farm, and work on anything that the farmers have questions about."

Once the dog is placed, the farmer can call any time assistance is needed.

A nonprofit organization, PHARM Dog USA operates under the motto, "We help farmers to 'heel' and 'heal.'"

"These dogs not only help with physical needs, but they also provide emotional support as well."

Get more information on PHARM Dog USA by visiting the web at www.pharmdog.org.

others, because they don't all have the same personality."

Abilities and personalities can vary even within a litter of pups. "It's like breeding cattle," Shilling explains. "It's an inherited trait, only here we're talking about brains and not muscle or gain. It's still genetic."

If a dog will take the training process "pretty consistently," Sealine says he can have a dog "well-started" in three months.

"Then, the dog is kind of like a green-broke horse," he explains. "They are ready for use, but you have to be consistent to make sure the dog does what you ask it to do. Training should never stop."

Once the handler or owner knows how to use the dog, Sealine says there are unlimited possibilities for how you can use that dog in your operation.

"You and that dog work together every day," Shilling adds. "With a person, you might only work together during big jobs."

Shilling goes on to say that when working with a person, you expect him or her to know as much as you do. "I'm not as forgiving toward a person that gets in the wrong place or moves the wrong cow as I am a dog."

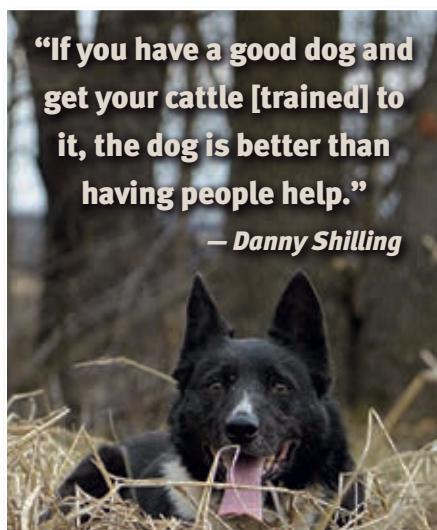
Plus, Daniel says the dog doesn't come with any excess baggage or emotional distractions. "He's there to please you. He'll be there when everybody else leaves."

A properly trained working stockdog is worth its weight in gold to a cattleman.

As Shilling says with a chuckle, "A good dog will save more arguments at the kitchen table than anything."

A

Editor's Note: Joann Pipkin is a cattlewoman and freelance writer from Republic, Mo.



away to me (counter clockwise), down, there, get back and walk up.

Teach the dog the "down" command

before working it with livestock, suggests Shilling. "Then, he doesn't think you are getting on to him if he gets too aggressive while you're working."

Once the dog responds to "down," it should be immediately praised. Then, Shilling says you can train it to go clockwise. He says a round pen is helpful for training because then the livestock can't pile up in a corner.

"You can get by with just a few commands," Shilling notes, "but the more you have, the more you can get accomplished."

Moving livestock from point A to point B can be achieved with four basic commands, according to Sealine: two flanking commands (one clockwise, one counterclockwise); a stop command; and an approach command.

Like people, all dogs are different, Daniel says. "You have to do what works for that dog. You have to train some dogs differently than