



ANKC vs. Instinct

By Shell Gurney

Being part of the ANKC's working dog group, it's natural to assume that Lappies would excel in the herding arena; after all, group 5 is entirely dedicated to herding breeds and Lappies were originally used to herd reindeer. However it has only been recently that the first Australian Lappie, Sup Ch. C'est Louis Armstrong des Chevaloupsgreg CD RA HSAs (imp USA) "Louis", has made it past the test levels in the herding ring and onto the trial levels. In truth, despite having a strong herding instinct, a Lappie's natural herding style is not geared towards the kind of herding the ANKC requires for its herding titles.

Anyone who has ever tried their Lappie on sheep will probably have witnessed the barking, chasing and bouncing that occurs when the stock is running and issues keeping their attention when the stock slows to a walk. Lappies also tend to have a lack of distance from the stock while working and a tendency to switch off when a handler or instructor comes down on the dog too harshly. While it's incredibly frustrating at the time, particularly when faced with an instructor who doesn't "get" why Lappies as a breed tend to look like they're chasing rather than actually herding, to really understand why Lappies have this common trait, we have to understand their original purpose and how it differs from the work required to qualify in the ANKC trials around the country.

When working with the Sami people, the Finnish Lapphund was used like a moving fence, waiting until one of the reindeer split off from the herd before going to work. Lappies work large herds, often hundreds of reindeer at a time. In herding terms, they are known as an upright, loose-eyed breed. What this

means is that rather than herding while crouched close to the ground at a loping trot, and rather than "working" the stock the whole time, Lappies are geared towards short, galloping bursts of work when the stock splits. They are built to transition easily from a walk into a gallop to run out and bring the rogue reindeer (or several rogue reindeer) back into the herd and then, their job being done for the moment, switch off to return to their handler's side or to mill about making sure none of the other reindeer split off.



Rather than using the Lappies to move the stock, the Sami people used the herd's natural instinct to want to stay together to keep the herd moving as one and had one reindeer either in a halter or being ridden up the front to get the herd to move in the right direction. Reindeer are very unlike any stock Lappies would have the opportunity to work in Australia, without the same flight instinct of the stock used for ANKC trials. They are large animals and can be quite aggressive towards the dogs trying to work them.





sheep, though the ANKC also recognises cattle and running ducks in their trials. While this work makes sense for the breeds Australian farmers would use to work their stock, for Lappies, this work is a stretch because when the stock are under control and with the handler, Lappies instinctually switch off, believing that their work is done. To many trainers, who don't understand their herding style, it can appear as though Lappies don't have much instinct, when in fact they do, but it is just not the same instinct they are used to seeing in some of the other working breeds.

Because of this Lappies need to be fast and furious in their work, aggressive with their voices and their body (though this doesn't extend to biting or "heeling" like a cattle dog) and ready to shy away and come back twice as hard to get in the reindeer's face if it turns on them and swings an antler their way. It is for this reason, that many Lappies have a strong startle reflex. While this can be seen to be a fearful reaction in certain situations (if they shy away from a loud noise for example), this startle reflex may save their life if a reindeer were to turn on them suddenly.



In the beginning levels, dogs are encouraged to "balance" to the handler, which means they work on the opposite side of the sheep. If you were to imagine this on a clock face with the sheep standing in

the middle, when the handler was at 12 o'clock, the dog would be at 6 o'clock. If the handler moved to 3 o'clock, the dog would move to 9 o'clock and so on. If the dog was to put too much pressure on the sheep and push them past the handler, it would run to the head of the sheep to slow them down and then resume their position back at

When there is no work for them to do, Lappies often walk by their handler's side within the stock, which is why they have no natural distance. While they know not to get under the hooves of the reindeer, and they know to keep their distance if the reindeer turns suddenly, they do not naturally work the stock at a distance like a kelpie or border collie would. If they were to work the reindeer like this, they would not be able to put enough pressure on the reindeer to turn it and herd it back into the rest of the herd.

the back of the sheep, balancing the handler. As they progress through the levels, dogs would be expected to be able to cast around the back of the sheep and work them independently while their handler remained on the spot. Again, this is not work Lappies instinctually understand because it is so far removed from their original work, that they have to be entirely retrained and essentially taught to ignore what their instinct is telling them to do.

Keeping this in mind, it is easy to see why Lappies are not naturally geared towards the smooth, controlled work we would ask of them in ANKC herding trials, particularly when asked to work so few animals, at such a slow pace. It is simply against their instinct.

In the beginning levels of ANKC herding, dogs are expected to collect and bring the stock to the handler in a controlled manner. In NSW, this stock is always



Trialling in the beginning levels of herding:

The first level of trialling in herding, the Herding Instinct Certificate (HIC) only requires the dog to show “sustained interest” in the stock. The dog just has to go in the ring on a lead and look like it’s interested in the sheep. For most Lappies, this is usually lunging at the end of the leash, following where the sheep go and often, barking. While it is not a recognised title anymore (it used to be known as the HIT which was a recognised title), dogs have to complete this level before they can go on. In Finland they do a similar instinct test, however instead of using sheep, they show the Lappie a reindeer. If the dog does not instinctually bark at the reindeer, they fail the test and cannot go further. In Australia, judges often do not understand that Lappies herd with their voices and as such; barking can be frowned upon in the ring. Most Lappies however, switch onto the stock without an issue once the sheep are moving and as such, pass their HIC easily.

After the HIC is the Herding Test (HT). In this level, the dog must be let off leash while they are in the ring and demonstrate that they can do two changes of direction (move the stock both clockwise and counter clockwise), perform a stop (stop working the stock and either sit, stand or drop) and recall to the handler. While many breeds can perform this with minimal training, Lappies tend to need a lot more work for the handler to gain the control they need to get their Lappie to not just run in, split the stock and chase them. Two qualifying passes in this level will earn your Lappie the title of HT.

After the HT comes the Pre-trial Test, also referred to as the Paddock Test or PT. In this level, the area the dogs work in becomes a lot bigger, and without complete control of the dog, there is a lot more space for the dog to split and chase the stock in. For the PT, the dog must demonstrate a stay (a controlled pause), controlled working of the stock (which includes clearing four gates and a change of direction), one stop while on the course and one stop while the handler opens the pen gate. The dog must then demonstrate penning the stock. For this level, the dog works the stock on the fence, in a U shape then changes direction before performing the U shape in the other

direction. When this is complete, the handler would stop the dog, open a pen and ask the dog to slowly walk up to the stock, to push them into the pen. Two qualifications at this level earns the dog the title PT, which would replace the HT on the end of the dog’s name.

After the test levels, dogs move on to the trialling levels. While the courses are too in depth to write about here, there is often confusion about the titles and what they mean. The herding titles at this level all begin with an “H”, denoting that it is a herding title. The next letter in the title denotes the level the dog is working at, either started (S), intermediate (I) or advanced (X). The third letter denotes the course, either A-course (A), B-course (B) or C-course (C) which requires different skills and stock control. So by this logic, a dog who holds the title HSA, like Louis, has received the three qualifications they need to hold the Herding Started A-course title. Finally, a lower case letter is also added to the end of the title to denote the stock the dog worked, either sheep (s), cattle (c) or ducks (d) to make up the full title of HSAs. Should a dog receive the qualifications it needs to receive the HSA title with more than one type of stock, it may have more than one lower case letter on the end of it’s name, for example HSAsc if the dog has received the qualifications it needs to have both the HSAs title and HSAc title.

Finally is the title of “herding champion” or HCh which requires the dog to not only qualify in the advanced level of herding 5 times with a score of 75 points or higher, but also receive a high in trial. For a Lappie to ever receive this title, would require years of work. As there has not yet been a Lappie who was able to work at intermediate level, it will be some time before we see a Lappie receive the HCh title, if ever.

And so, while our Lappies are not naturally geared towards the kind of herding the ANKC requires for it’s herding trials, there have been many Lappies who have received herding titles and hopefully many more to come in the future.

*Photos include: Ch. Armahani Diamond Dansut (AI) HT,
Ch. Armahani Crystal Caibmat RN and
Ch. & Neut. Ch. Armahani Bloodstone Bilaidit RA*

