

In the late summer of 2004, I was contacted by Darlene Fritz and asked if I would be available to judge the CNASA CKC Herding trials on September 30 and October 1, 2005.

I was both pleased and excited by the prospect.

Firstly, I was pleased that the Stock Dog committee recognized my experience, passion and commitment to all breed herding, and secondly, excited, that as a fellow handler and trainer, I would have the opportunity to observe the style and working ability of Australian Shepherds from various places in North America, notably, Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington.

The organization and facilities

Overall, the CNASA Stock Dog committee, event organizers, stock, competing dogs, and handlers collectively made this event a highly memorable and refreshing experience for me, both as a judge and a fellow handler.

The organizers of this event were most definitely confronted with a challenging and risky undertaking.

Trials of this nature typically require a minimum of 1 year to plan and organize. Acquiring an affordable and accessible facility to meet the standards and satisfy the needs of the various programs, Obedience, Conformation, Agility, Herding etc. is very difficult.



The 1st annual CNASA National Herding Trials – a judge and fellow handler's perspective

By Randy Kelly

2005 National Herding Judge

Acquiring sponsors, funding, volunteers, and support staff that can sustain the pressures and responsibilities for the duration is also a huge challenge.

To the credit of organizers, the facilities were 1st rate, stock excellent, the awards abundant, and the banquet a good time.

The trial

There were five stock dog trials over the course of two days, 2 duck trials and 3 sheep trials. There were between 16 and 20 dogs entered in each of the five trials.

These trials ran concurrent with MVA Conformation, Agility, and Obedience trials. To complete all runs by sunset (roughly 5:00 PM) was a credit to the scribes, stock handlers, course director, and competitors.

I presided over trials 1, 2, and 4.

The dogs and handlers that competed in the HT, HS, HI, and HA classes clearly demonstrated their working abilities and were rewarded accordingly. The field consisted of approximately 6 advanced dogs, 3 intermediate dogs, 8 started dogs, and 2 tested dogs.

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The sheep

The sheep were controllable, dog broke, and at times very uncooperative which is typical when placed in a foreign environment and exposed to dogs with which they are unfamiliar.

Furthermore, as the trials progress the sheep prove to be more difficult and less cooperative as they are placed under duress and quickly approach the state of passive resistance.

The sheep were well suited for the HT and HS levels which require that the handler and dog move and manage the stock by fetching and wearing the stock around the course and through the obstacles. However, the HI and HS dogs experienced considerable difficulty when attempting to drive the stock away from the handler to the set out area. This directly contributed to the majority of non-qualifying runs in the advanced class. To their credit, the majority of the handlers and their dogs managed step up to the challenge and demonstrate some excellent work in an effort to complete the task at hand when faced with a most difficult situation.

The ducks

Generally, the ducks were controllable and cooperative. However, the weather on the Saturday was not quite as accommodating. Significant rainfall led to an accumulation of between 8 – 12 centimeters of water in the middle of the duck arena rendering the footing quite tricky.

Each run included herding by land, sea, and in a couple of cases, by air (a little wing clipping was in order). One might say that the conditions led to a lot of mudslinging.

To their credit, the competitors showed their grit and accepted their plight as true stock handlers. To achieve success in these conditions required the dog and handler to be patient and hold position, while continuing to adjust to the pressure of the stock which at times took to swimming rather than walking. The HA competitors and their dogs adapted well to the stock and arena conditions, however, the HS and HI dogs were unable to adapt as readily which is somewhat attributable to their inexperience and youth.

The true measure of a successful trial

As an Aussie trainer and handler I was impressed with the quality of the competing dogs and demeanor of the handlers. The trial results were close and the high-in-trial placements spread throughout the HS, HI, and HA field of competitors.

As a fellow competitor, I am generally quite selective of the trials that I enter. I look to spend my trialing weekends with people that appreciate the spirit of the game, and share the dedication, patience, frustration, and persistence required by the sport.

This said, I would most definitely welcome the opportunity to compete or participate in an event hosted and/or attended by these organizers and competitors in future. All are to be commended for not allowing their competitiveness and pursuit of titles to overshadow the primary goal which is one of completing the task at hand and ensuring the well being of the all involved: handler, stock, and dog.

Thanks for the memories and see you on the trial field.

Randy Kelly

Congratulations to the CNASA on hosting their first Australian Shepherd National Specialty. It was a wonderful event and took a lot of time, manpower and planning to pull it off.

As one of your herding judges I must again tell you how pleased and truly honored I was to be asked to judge. I had planned to participate in some way to support the event but was ever more thrilled to be part of back stage action!

The trials brought competitors and dogs of all levels and ages. It was great to watch dogs I was familiar with; some I had seen years before, and the new wonder Aussies arriving on the scene. There is some real talent in our herding Aussies and I was privileged to have the opportunity to witness many of these dogs compete in Canada.

Although sheepdog trialing is the competitive aspect of our activity, many people tell me I do it in the name of "passion" and a true love for the exciting thing that is "herding". We do it for the insight into instinct, and for the challenge of working with a dog to achieve the teamwork and communication that is what it's all about. It certainly isn't for the money!

I saw a lot of people inspired and enticed by the same things I feel about herding. I saw teamwork, enthusiasm, strong effort and hard work behind



By Tanya Wheeler
2005 National Herding Judge

many of the dogs and handlers in the arena and it was great to watch. I saw addictions emerging and wallets full of money starting to leave competitors back pockets as their interest in the sport grew with every qualifying ribbon, placement and all the tremendous prizes offered by the CNASA. By the end of the trials, we had hooked a whole new parcel of people who I am sure will continue into their herding careers with their dogs and be the ever present force behind trials and events across Canada. It was rewarding to see the Australian Shepherd doing what it does so well and what it was intended to do.

Thanks again for the opportunity to judge the CNASA herding trials at our first specialty. It was a blast to meet you all and get to put some faces to the names I correspond with often through e-mail or telephone. The event was executed professionally and kudos to all the hard working volunteers in the background. The stock (and facility) were excellent and presented an occasional challenge which is what's it's all about. Thanks again to Ron Forbes for the hard work in the cold and rain stock handling sheep and the duck wranglers in the mud holes by the horse trailer. Without these guys and the rest of our volunteers, we'd be out of luck. To all the volunteers with CNASA and all those who helped as trial secretary, scribe, set up panels, sort stock, bring us hot chocolate and keep the jokes coming – THANKS – I'll come back anytime.

Happy Herding
Tanya Wheeler