

Sheep Dog Trials

By L. A. BELDEN

A Good Sheep Dog Trial Is Well Worth Watching.

The distinction of promoting the first American sheep dog trials goes to Fillmore Farms, Bennington, Vermont. On August 16, 1928 Fillmore Farms was host to New England sheep breeders and other interested visitors. People came from many miles distance prepared to enjoy the field day program and sheep dog trials. The idea of sponsoring this novel attraction originated with Mr. Colgate, the proprietor of Fillmore Farms. Mr. Colgate is a New York banker and enjoys as a hobby sheep and the familiar accomplishments of shepherds, including the art of training a dog to drive sheep. Mr. Jack Storey, shepherd at Fillmore Farms, is considered to be an expert with a sheep dog; he had experience in England before coming to America and a brother of his trained a recent winner of the English Sheep Dog Trials. No doubt the skill of Mr. Storey aroused the interest as well as admiration of Mr. Colgate for his shepherd and the dog and stirred him sufficiently to promote the first sheep dog trials.

In England the ability of a shepherd is based nearly as much on the accomplishments of his dog as on the show ring winnings of his sheep. But here in America there are many good shepherds who will not be bothered with a dog. There are several well trained dogs in this country, but never before have these dogs competed in a sheep driving contest. (Mr. Tom Bradburne, shepherd for Mr. Jesse Andrew of West Point, Indiana, has given many demonstrations with his dog "Lassie" throughout the cornbelt states.)

It is probably significant and natural that the first trial was held somewhere in the East, for the early sheep population was on the New England hills before it moved to the West preceding the advance of civilization, and ideas imported from England naturally are tried out first along the Eastern coast. Bennington is a beautiful Vermont town tucked in by the hills and it made a very attractive setting for this gala occasion; it resembled somewhat the picturesque English Sheep Dog Trial scenes as described in books. Fillmore Farms is a group of farms with a combined acreage of about 1000 acres. Dairy cattle enterprises are conducted on some of these farms, a herd of beef cattle on another farm, and the farm is internationally known for its flock of Dorset sheep.

The weather was ideal for a field day and the morning's program was completed with an inspection of the Dorset flocks, and luncheon, served by Fillmore Farms employees. As customary at any gathering, speeches were made and sheep problems discussed by authorities. Townspeople and spectators other than sheepmen arrived until an estimated crowd of 3000 was present. The trials began promptly at 2:30 p. m. Seven dogs were entered in the competition; all had more or less local fame and one "Spot" owned by Mr. Stoddard of New Hampshire was internationally known. He was imported into the United States soon after winning the

English Sheep Dog Trials. Each shepherd was to take five fresh sheep and with his dog drive the sheep through two gateways made by hurdles, and then climax the performance by driving all the sheep into a pen in the middle of the field. The dog doing the feat the quickest and most skillfully was to be the winner. The shepherds have no part in the driving except to issue commands to their dogs. To handle five sheep as a unit requires more skill than

It is a treat to watch a real sheep dog at work; one eye is on the shepherd continually and the other is alertly watching for a stubborn sheep to break ranks and flee. In such cases the dog is ahead of the sheep almost instantly and will drop to his belly like a flash, and then at a signal will edge forward cautiously until the sheep becomes frightened and returns to the flock. A good dog instinctively knows how to keep the sheep in a group and the de-



A good sheep dog is a real necessity in handling a large flock.

to drive a flock, and some of the dogs had difficulty before the course was completed. It was very interesting to watch the man and dog work; seldom was a word spoken; all instructions were by signals such as a whistle, a nod of the head, or a pointing with a cane. The understanding between man and dog was mutual and at times seemed miraculous to the bystanders.

vices and methods he uses are interesting to watch.

Each dog's performance drew a shout of applause from the enthusiastic spectators. The last entry was a ten months old female named "Spottie" owned by

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Preston Davenport of Massachusetts. She was the quickest, most skilful, and seemed to be the best trained, and when she had finally urged the last stubborn sheep into the fold the crowd went wild and acclaimed her the popular winner. For this excellent demonstration Mr. Davenport received a prize of \$75.00 and a very appropriate silver cup. Mr. Storey with his entry, a beautiful dog, won second prize, \$50.00, and the champion dog "Spot" placed third after having a bit of bad luck in starting his sheep, which cost him some valuable time. Mr. Joe Pritchard, shepherd for Connecticut Agricultural College, with his dog, which was a very willing worker but a little slow, won fourth place and in fifth place was a dog owned and worked by Mr. Percy Hampton from the Greatwood flock of Shropshires, Plainfield, Vermont.

The trials were over and they had been successful, the spectators departed and the hot August sun slipped down out of sight behind the New York hills. The day was full of interesting experiences for everyone; old friends met again and new ones were made. All the visitors had a new and better conception of Fillmore Farms and of the work that Mr. Colgate is doing. At dusk after the excitement of the day had subsided, Jack Storey, followed by

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his sheep dog, quietly attended to the wants of his sheep. He was happy just in doing the day's work; probably the day had recalled old memories of his boyhood days in England, for he whistled cheerily as he went about his tasks.