

## Herding at the 2007 National Specialty (herding--just do it!)

By Mary Jo Rasmussen

Unlike herding trials at most National Specialties, the 2007 herding event took place at the Purina Farms campus close to the other events. Participants usually drive at least an hour from the host hotel to a sheep ranch, which makes it difficult for spectators. This year, folks could actively or vicariously participate in both the herding and draft trials on Monday because of their close proximity to each other and the host hotel.

Plenty of each type of participant was at the herding venue. Clear skies and moderate heat made it comfortable for two and four legged beasts. Two classes were conducted by the American Herding Breeds Association (AHBA); Herding Capability Test (HCT) and Junior Herding Dog (JHD). HCT is an instinct test and JHD is a herding title. Both require two legs under two different judges—by the way, your dog does not need an HCT to enter the JHD class.

### Junior Herding Dog

One very nice and helpful judge, Jim New, presided over both rings. Three successful teams were in the JHD trial, the first class of the morning—a great way to start! The dog and handler teams herded five sheep around and between several obstacles, and finished by gathering them up at the enclosure gate. The dogs had to sit and remain calm while the handler opened the gate to allow the sheep back into the barn. Re-leashing the dog completes the exercise.



Photo by Maud Velders

*Sophia is attempting to keep the sheep away from the fence in this photo. Not an easy task as sheep have minds of their own!*

*Below, Jim Rasmussen and Burley maneuver through the gates, a required element—you'll notice Burley has only four sheep gathered, but all five have to go through at once.*



Photo by Maud Velders

## Herding Capability Test

Next came the novice dogs—many had never seen sheep. This was the case for Thea, featured right. This is obviously her first leg attempt because Thea is on a lead. The rules state, “first-leg tests may take the form of a basic instinct test and are fairly free-form, with no set path of travel...on a long line approximately 6 to 15 ft. in length.” The judge usually handles the dog on the first leg using one to three sheep in the ring.

Photo by Bryan D. Payne



*Looks like Thea is having fun moving the sheep from one end of the arena to the other.*

The second leg of the HCT requires a bit more finesse and the dog is owner handled.



Photo by Maud Velters

1. “The dog is put in position and the lead removed; the dog should hold a brief stay (pause) before being sent to collect the stock.
2. The stock are moved across the arena to the opposite end, then returned to the vicinity of the set-out point, then taken again to the opposite end of the arena, and brought back a second time to the vicinity of the set-out point (approximately four traverses of the arena).
3. The dog is given a final stop command, and recalled.”

*Lillibit is having a bit too much fun teaching this one a few agility tricks!*



*Mouse and Jennie Chen get the job done!*

Photo by Maud Velters

## **Preparation**

Several folks have asked how we prepared our dogs for the JHD title. The answer is simple—we didn't. Really. As incredulous as it sounds, our two dogs and novice handler did it “off the couch.” Because we live in the city, our intention was to enter a herding trial Sunday, the day before the National herding test, as practice. Burley saw sheep for the first time in August at the Aspen National Specialty and earned one HCT leg. Sophia had seen sheep twice; in Aspen and at the preceding National Specialty—and passed the HCT test. Obviously, we needed exposure!

Fortunately, two judges from Reno conducted the Sunday tests which meant every team had two runs, each under a different judge. We entered both dogs for JHD legs hoping to get some pointers from the judges as we don't have herding instructors close to home.

The trial was great for novice folks because most everyone was there to earn advanced titles. Advice was free flowing from all of the handlers. Several teams herded ducks as well as sheep. I volunteered as a timer and sat nose-to-nose with both judges for several hours soaking up answers to every question I asked. And I learned that a well-trained border collie is a lovely thing to watch.

As unbelievable as it sounds, both judges passed Burley and Sophia to earn their JHD titles. The third JHD team (a Samoyed) did not qualify under either judge—and the handler said she had 30 sheep her dog brought in from the pasture on a daily basis. We were flabbergasted. How can this be—our “green” dogs receive double q's and the experienced dog doesn't earn any qualifying scores? There is nothing outstanding about either of our dogs or their handler (sorry Jim!). Just so we knew it wasn't a terrible mistake, Judge New gave each of them qualifying legs on Monday, too.

We have spent some time analyzing how this happened. And here is what we have come up with:

### Keys to success:

1. The dog must have the instinct to herd—they either have it hardwired into them or they don't. As one of the Reno judges said, “You can teach a dog to chase, but that's not the same as herding. You teach the herding dog teamwork.”
2. The dog must have a desire to work with you—being involved in multiple fun activities with your dog helps to instill the teamwork aspect of herding.
3. The judge can give you advice in the ring at the JHD level. This was invaluable and we wouldn't have qualified either day without it.
4. Know the rules so you know what to do. The regulations are at: [www.ahba-herding.org](http://www.ahba-herding.org)

Now, it is your turn to give it a go. Just do it!