

Border Collies Compete

The U.S. Border Collie Handlers Association Sheepdog Finals featured the best in the country.

By Nicole Espinola

Posted: September 22, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Despite inclement weather and ornery sheep, Ian Zoerb of Alberta, Canada, and his Border Collie, Peg, won the 2008 United States Border Collie Handlers Association Sheepdog Finals, which were held Sept. 9 to 14 in Sturgis, S.D. The herding duo beat out 150 other dog-and-handler teams from around the United States and Canada. The 2nd-place (Reserve Champion) title went to Beverly Lambert and her Border Collie, Bill, of Andover, Conn.

During the five-day competition, the herding teams gave good performances for the many spectators and judges. "I was looking for a dog that takes the sheep around the field, instead of the sheep taking the dog around," says Alf Kyme of Lancashire, England, one of the four judges of the event.

During the preliminary and semifinal rounds, the dogs were judged on how well they began the outrun (the run up to the sheep, in either a clockwise or counterclockwise arc); the lift (the moment when the dog and sheep meet and assess each other); the fetch (the straight path in which the dog must herd the sheep to the handler); the drive (herding the sheep through a series of gates); the pen (herding the sheep into a fenced area); and the shed (taking the sheep from the pen to a marked ring and holding them there).

During the final round, the course was relatively the same, but the penning could not begin until specific sheep were first separated from the herd, which were marked with red bandannas around their necks.

The unpredictable nature of the sheep during the competition made for many surprising and exciting moments. Many of the sheep (which were flown in from Hulett, Wyo., specifically for the event) refused to be herded by the Border Collies, and some even stamped their feet and butted their heads at the dogs.

The dogs carried on, however, and spectators were treated to a competition that showcased the talent and amazing skill of the top herding Border Collies in North America.

Nicole Espinola is the managing editor of Dogs for Kids magazine and the Popular Dogs Series.