

Dog-Loving Actress Herds for Fun

In her spare time, actress Heather Marie Marsden enjoys sheep herding with her Australian Shepherd.

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What on Earth does a busy Hollywood actor have to do with herding sheep? For actress Heather Marie Marsden, it's a chance to spend some quality time with her beloved canine companion and escape the concrete jungle of Los Angeles.

Marsden, who stars in the film "Crash 'N Burn," released on DVD this fall, takes her bouncy 3-year-old Australian Shepherd, Viggo, for herding lessons on weekends at a ranch 40 miles outside Los Angeles.

Viggo is a big plushy toy-loving "momma's boy" at home, Marsden explains, but when he enters the sheep-herding ring, "he becomes a 'man.'"

"It's amazing – the light switch truly does just flick on," she says, referring to her Aussie's instinct to move the flock. "Viggo is really a natural. I'm the idiot in the ring," Marsden says, explaining that her dog just knows what to do, even though as his handler, she's supposed to be directing how he works the sheep.

Although Marsden and Viggo could compete in canine herding trails, their herding time is strictly for fun. "I don't sheep herd to compete," Marsden says, adding that she deals with plenty of competition in her acting career.

In "Crash 'N Burn," Marsden plays Penny Middleton, a young woman whose life gets turned upside down when her boyfriend Kevin (played by Erik Palladino) returns to town and becomes caught up in high-stakes car theft.

Marsden recently filmed a particularly disturbing scene for the movie, in which actor Michael Madsen had to hold a prop gun to her head for most of the day. It didn't matter that the gun was a fake, she says. "He could be scary holding a plastic drinking straw to my head."

It's days like those that Marsden is glad to come home to Viggo and her 15-year-old Silky Terrier, Tinkerbelle. "Dogs don't care what you did all day. They're just happy that you're back."