

## Herding Dogs as Pets

**Fanciers explore whether herding dogs make good matches for pet owners.**

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"I want a Lassie dog," is a familiar utterance of pet people, and perhaps also of some active dog fanciers in their youth. The valiant acts of Lassie, and fellow herding colleagues on television, Rin Tin Tin and the Shaggy Dog, did much to boost the popularity of Herding breeds and dogs in general by portraying them as hard-working heroes, fiercely loyal to their humans.

The high intelligence and trainability of many Herding breeds endears them to pet people. But does the first-time owner really know what they're getting? How many are simply smitten with a breed's appearance and reputation for being smart, thinking they come that way in a neat little package?

To find out, I contacted parent club breeder referral officers for several Herding breeds. Those fanciers kind enough to respond on short notice provided a snapshot of their day-to-day experiences helping pet buyers understand the breed and its needs before directing them to reputable breeders.

Everyone interviewed for this piece exudes such passion for the referral task, devoting countless hours to counseling pet people patiently listening, then making that vital connection one which directly affects their breed, as well as families across the nation. In a word, these folks are invaluable.

Each described the one thing they must constantly explain to pet people, as well as what constitutes an ideal home. In addition, respondents shared their secret to effectively dealing with pet people. Here's what they had to say:

Chris Machado American Shetland Sheepdog Association I handle the phone calls, which average 20 per week. Given the high volume of inquiries we have a separate club person to handle e-mails.

I spend a great deal of time explaining how important socialization is to owning a good pet Sheltie. Without it they can become shy. If these dogs don't get enough time, they will revert back to "herding" behavior. They'll back up when approached by a stranger, just as they would when guarding a flock. It says so right in the Sheltie standard: "not friendly to strangers." This is why it's incredibly important to socialize the breed at a very early age so they are keen on being with people. When that is done, these dogs are so smart they'll do almost anything you want. The Sheltie breed, in that sense, is a good ambassador for dogs in general.