

## TENDING SHEEP WITH ONE DOG VERSUS TWO DOGS

by Ulf Kintzel

Shepherds in Germany sometimes use one dog (Main Dog, *Haupthund*) and sometimes two dogs (second dog: Man Dog, *Beihund* or *Mannhund*) to tend their sheep. The German herding competitions can be done with either one dog or two dogs. I have done both, in real life and in competitions. I would like to describe the differences based on my own experience.

When working one dog I only have to watch this one. This might sound simple, however, when a flock gets moved to a different location one has to watch where to go, has to watch the sheep, has to watch the dog. That can be difficult enough as it is. If there is a second dog one has to watch this one also. This takes a while to learn, to get used to it. Before somebody thinks about a second dog the first one should be pretty well under control otherwise the two will cheer each other on when it comes to doing foolish things.

On the other hand, there is the flock which can leave the road either on the left or on the right hand side, which can leave the graze on either side or in the front or in the rear, which can go to either side when entering the graze etc etc. That means the handler or the shepherd, when working one dog, has to think more quickly and be more alert as to what the flock might do, and where they most likely would want to go in order to have the dog there on time. For instance, it is very difficult to have a dog change sides at the pen when a few hundred sheep enter the pen and a few sheep go around it opposite to where the dog is standing. A second dog makes that kind of task a lot easier.

Two more important issues when working a second dog are the team work and the second dog's characteristics. Both are connected to each other. Two very lively, independent working dogs don't match each other. When the dogs are alike as described, one of them will often feel tempted to do the job that the other one needs to do or was told to do. Ideally, the Main Dog should be the better dog, the more experienced dog, the more independent dog. The Man Dog should be a little less independent and can be a dog that needs more of a command to do something. It can be also a calmer or an older dog. It also can be a dog that is a little more submissive than the other. Otherwise, they should have certain characteristics in common. When one dog is very handler hard and the other quite sensitive, the latter one will shut down when the former one receives a strong verbal correction from the handler. When the two dogs match one can start working them together and let them get used to and experience team work. That process in itself takes at least several months.

Generally speaking, whether somebody works or competes with one dog or two dogs, there will be both advantages to enjoy and disadvantages to deal with and work out.



Two dogs that work together must make a team. This was my best team I owned: Sina &Cora.