Introduction ► Herding is one of the dog sports that relies on pure instinct. This instinct developed over thousands of years to give the wolf pack hunting success. The instinct has been refined in the herding dog to allow the close, subtle dance between shepherd and dog.

There are different methods with which dogs control the movement of livestock. In herding terms, Bernese are "upright", "loose-eyed" dogs. "Upright" means that Bernese walk normally while herding. They do not crouch or slink. "Loose-eyed" implies that they do not use their gaze in a fixed, predator's stare to control the stock. This is very different than a Border Collie. Bernese also work very close to the stock. Learning the Bernese-style of herding requires a trainer familiar with these traits.

Berners were traditionally used as drovers to herd slower, tame dairy cows. Speed was not a requirement for this work. Nor were the more aggressive herding behaviors associated with handling flighty, fast sheep on a hillside a mile away. "Droving" involves moving stock to accomplish the daily chores such as going from the barn to the pasture, down the road for the day, and back again at night. The dogs took the cows to market and put them in the sale pens. All of those tasks (and many others) together are considered droving. This shouldn't be confused with "driving", which is a very specific method of moving stock away from the handler with the dog being behind the flock. Most dogs are "gatherers", which means they move the stock towards the handler from a point opposite the handler.

Some people think that dogs with herding instinct are less desirable from a family companion standpoint. They are concerned that the dog would be hard to live with for it might show unwanted behaviors such as nipping heels, herding kids and barking. None of these behaviors will likely be true of a Bernese with instinct. Since the BMD herding style is the less aggressive, upright style, they don't have the drive to herd everything in sight.

Prerequisites ► The single best preparation for your dog is to be in good health and in good physical condition. Sheep know a couch potato when they see one. An out-of-shape dog won't be able to make the quick moves necessary to control livestock. Herding is a strenuous activity for both dog and owner. A dog that gets tired out before it can learn will be wasting its owner's time and money.

Because herding is a very exciting activity for your dog, some preparatory steps can help make the early work with livestock easier. It is important that the dog have a good recall and a good stop (sit or down). These can be practiced away from stock, and with distractions. By doing this preliminary work, the dog gains a working relationship with its owner without the added stress and excitement of the presence of stock. Dogs often get so excited by herding they forget their schooling.

Nothing can be substituted for instinct. The best trainer, the perfect facility and the most talented handler can't make up for a dog without instinct. Participating in a *Herding Capability Test* (described below) is the best method to determine if your dog has instinct. Testing a young pup isn't always successful. Instinct may not become apparent until a pup reaches a higher level of maturity.

About Competition ► Bernese Mountain Dogs can participate in **American Herding Breed Association** (AHBA) tests and trials. There are two levels in the test division of competition – the *Herding Dog Capability Test* (HCT) and the *Junior Herding Dog Test* (JHD).

The *Herding Dog Capability Test* (HCT) is a basic, pass/fail test of instinct. There are two "legs" or parts to this level. Each leg must be performed under different judges. In the first leg, the dog is introduced to the stock. The handler, dog and judge all enter a small arena with the livestock. The judge will look for herding behavior (explained below) as the dog interacts with the livestock. This part of the test requires no herding training and often provides dog and handler with their first taste of what herding is all about. And, it is a great way to see the instinct a dog was born with come to life.

The second part of the test requires that the dog move the stock from one end of a small arena to the other and that the dog be called off the stock by having it lie down, sit or come to the handler. This leg also requires that the judge be outside the arena, but the judge can call directions and advice to the handler. The HCT is a great way to get familiar with herding.

The *Junior Herding Dog Test* requires a substantial training foundation. This test asks the dog and handler to move through a series of three obstacles (such as fence panels) and to pen the stock. One of the obstacles is freestanding in the middle of the arena. The pen is just outside the arena and accessed by a gate in the fence line. The two legs of the JHD have the same elements, but must be passed under different judges. This level (and the higher levels) is recognized for the BMDCA Versatility and Working Awards.

AHBA's Trial level competition involves an increasingly

difficult set of tasks such as moving stock through obstacles or gates and placing them in pens. An example of an obstacle is two fence panels about 10 feet apart set up in the middle of the arena. The dog must move the stock through the opening formed by the two panels. The pen can be four fence panels arranged in a square with one side set up as a gate. The handler must open the gate and direct the dog to move the stock into the pen. In level 1, the pen has one side against the arena fence. Trials are scored by the judge and placements are made depending on the score earned. Trial level competition requires substantial training and practice to achieve the advanced skills required.

There are two types of trials. The *Herding Dog Trial* (HTD) always takes place in the confines of one arena or pasture. It's a test of finesse. The *Ranch Dog Trial* (RDT) is never the same twice. It tests the ability of dog and handler to do normal ranch tasks such as putting sheep into a trailer, separating a flock and moving half through a gate into another pasture or holding a flock in one area of a pasture so they can graze. The HTD and RTD can be repeated on different stock (ducks, cows, sheep and goats). It takes two legs to complete these titles and both legs must use the same type of stock.

Getting Started ► Not many Bernese are lucky enough to live on a dairy farm these days. Raising a herding star around the farm, with daily exposure to livestock and droving tasks, is ideal, but not always possible. So what's a suburban owner to do?

The best way to begin is to work with an experienced herding trainer. The trainer will be able to provide individual attention and instruction suited to your particular dog. The stock and the facility should be suitable for beginners as well as for those who have more experience. The lessons aren't necessarily private ones given in a single block of time, but usually involve several short sessions interspersed with rest periods. While the dog is taking a break, the owner can learn by watching others and talking with fellow participants.

It's very important to make sure the trainer is experienced with upright dogs. Remember, Bernese don't herd like Border Collies. A good trainer will recognize this style and will train you and your dog appropriately. This means they won't insist on working far away from the stock with wide approaches to the animals (called "outruns"'.) It also means they won't put too much pressure on the dog. But remember, the best trainer in the world can't overcome a lack of instinct.

There's a big difference in herding and just chasing. The trainer should be able to recognize the difference and advise you accordingly. Dogs showing instinct will try to circle around the outside of the flock and bring them towards the handler. They will show a natural balance between the flock and the handler. That means the dog will try to keep the flock directly between itself and the handler. Instinct will also cause a dog to want the animals to stay grouped together, so the dog will move

around to a wandering animal and gently guide it back to the rest.

A good herding dog must use its own judgment, but be responsive and obedient. It must be bold in facing down defiant stock, but gentle with cooperative stock. Judgment, adaptability and soundness of body and mind are important qualities of the herding dog. That describes the Berner perfectly!

Herding isn't glamorous. You're outside in the pasture with the sheep, which aren't like the pampered and primped ones at the county fair. It can be dirty, cold, muddy, hot, dusty, poopy and tons of fun. Herding is something people have done for thousands of years with their dogs at their sides fulfilling their role in the family unit. Once you get past the initial stages, it has a rhythm unlike any other sport. It's you, your dog, the sheep and all the herders from history dancing together to survive.

Safety Considerations ► It's very important to find the right trainer. Ask for recommendations, go watch a lesson before signing up.

A good trainer won't be rough. He/she will recognize that Bernese work close in to the livestock and won't pressure the dog to work in a different style. Putting lots of pressure on a dog can cause them to shut down and refuse to work. A trainer should also realize that Bernese can't easily control very fast breeds of sheep and will use their more sedate animals for training.

Be very careful about the stock you allow your dog to handle. Cows kick! They can be very dangerous and even the most talented, experienced herding dog can be hurt. Sheep that have been exposed to dogs before are ideal. A good trainer will start a dog with stock that have lots of experience being worked by dogs. A defiant sheep can create a lasting confidence problem for a green dog.

Herding can be addicting. Watch out or your backyard will harbor a flock of sheep in no time!

Resources ► Books and internet sites for further learning include:
- *Anybody Can Do It* by Pope Robertson. (Rovar Publishing Co., 522 East 2nd St., Elgin, TX 78621)
- *The Farmer's Dog* by John Holmes. (Popular Dogs Publishing Co. Ltd., 3 Fitzroy Square, London, WIP 6JD, UK)
- *Herding Dogs: Progressive Training* by Vergil Holland. (Howell Book House, 15 Columbus Circle, New York,   NY 10023)
- *Lessons from a Stock Dog* by Bruce Fogt. (The Working Border Collie, Inc., 14933 Kirkwood Rd., Sidney, OH 45365)
- *Selecting and Training a Stockdog* by L. R. Alexander. (Rt. #3, Box 145, Marshfield, MO 65706)
- *Sheepdogs at Work and One Man and His Dogs* by Tony Iley. (The Dalesman Publishing Co., Ltd., Clapham, via Lancaster LA1 8EB, U.K.)
- *Sheepdog Training, an All-Breed Approach* by Mari Taggart. (Alpine Publications, P.O. Box 7027, Loveland, CO)
- http://www.glassportal.com/herding/herding.htm -
- http://www.ahba-herding.org (American Herding Breed Association)