

The Collie



Collie Club of America

Judges Education Committee

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Foreword

The material contained herein is the result of months of work and discussion by a committee whose members have spent a "lifetime" in Collies. Although such long-term experience results in strong points of view and personal preferences, each of us remained steadfast to the goal of elucidating the Collie for those wishing to judge the breed. We feel strongly that a clear understanding of the Breed Standard and those unique characteristics and virtues that are the essence of the Collie is necessary for good judging.

The photographs that we used were chosen without regard to ownership, show record, pedigree, or color, but rather for the image captured by the photographer at that particular moment. Hopefully, the articles selected for inclusion will withstand the tests of time and enhance the long-term educational value of this publication.

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The Collie - A Brief History

The origin of both Smooth and Rough Collies is as much a matter of faith and belief as it is a matter of fact. There is no question that useful sheepdogs of many varieties existed in many parts of the world for centuries. The Collie in more or less modern form appears to have emerged in the British Isles sometime during the 1800s, though its most likely progenitors, the sheepdog, the ban dog, and the cur, were well known long before that. The sheepdog, a somewhat smaller, lower, and longer dog, appears to be the most likely candidate for an early Rough Collie prototype, while the cur and ban dog, with their light mastiff background, could have easily played a significant role in the origins of the Smooth. One persistent genetic marker which would appear to support this theory is associated with the markings on some newborn sable Smooth Collies. These puppies are born either plain-faced (no mask on the backskull) or with light skulls and dark muzzles. This mastiff-type coloration disappears, usually by the time the pup is weaned, and more typical Collie markings appear. These dogs were proportioned more like today's dogs than were the early sheepdogs. Though often called the Scottish or Scotch Collie, this breed is as likely to have emerged in the lowlands of northern England as in the highlands of Scotland.

To understand how this breed has developed, it is important to recognize the work it was intended to do. While this work centered on the care and management of livestock, largely sheep, the early owners and developers of these dogs were not well-to-do fanciers but practical, hard working, thrifty individuals. A dog had to earn its keep, possibly playing several roles in its daily work.

Tradition has the Rough Collie more closely associated with the work of maintaining flocks on their home pastures, doing some guard duty, driving and gathering stock

from the pasture to pasture in all sorts of weather. Most of this work was done in close association with the shepherd, so a quick, responsive dog had to be able to work in all sorts of weather and on varied terrains. They needed great endurance and agility to control stock that were quick, mercurial, and sometimes flighty.

The Smooth Collie is more closely associated with the duties of drovers whose work entailed putting together stock from various home farms to take to market. The work of keeping very large flocks of sheep, unfamiliar with each other, together and on the road to market demanded dogs that were willing to work effectively in strange surroundings and with unfamiliar stock. Since they were on the road for long hours they also had to have great endurance and agility as did their counterparts in the fields. Among Irish immigrants to Canada, who sometimes managed to bring their Smooth Collies with them, the dogs also enjoyed a reputation as a good poacher's dog, as ready to hunt as to herd.

In actuality both types were used for both herding and driving to market, though there appears to be some logic for the work assigned by tradition to the two varieties. The heavier coat would be very useful to a dog whose herding responsibilities often involved working among brambles, rocky hillsides, and snowdrifts. It was also armor when the dog had to guard the flock against predators. On the other hand, Smooths are recognized by their owners to be somewhat more bold and are certainly the jokesters of the breed.

These two types of Collies have been interbred since the dawning of the breed and only the most persistent of the genetic linkages to their different pasts remain. They generally share in all of the major characteristics of the breed, aside from the coat.