

The Working Shetland in England

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A few times per year, especially before and after the ASSA National, I hear grumblings about how the "performance or working" Shelties are treated. Rightly or wrongly, many performance exhibitors feel that the ASSA treats them as second class citizens. And, the question always arises, should the "performance" people start their own club?

Yet, the profile of the working Sheltie has been raised by the ASSA sponsored Versatility (VC/VCX) program and the National's Best All-Around Sheltie award. Should there be a special "Performance/Working Sheltie Club"?

While we Americans may think this phenomenon of the working Sheltie vs. the breed Sheltie is a recent phenomenon, it is not. Back over 30 years ago, in 1972, the English Shetland Sheepdog Club (ESSC) formed a section called "The Working Section of the ESSC".

The Working Section was the brainstorm of Rosemary and Tony Seys. Rosemary and Tony had the idea of the Sheltie as "the marriage of beauty and brains". They wanted to raise the profile of the working Sheltie, while retaining its beauty and essential Sheltie traits.



1930's photo of Rosemary Seys with Golden Boy of Inchmery and Col. Bertram Russel with CH. Jenny Wren of Crawleyridge CDex, UDex

HOW THE WORKING SECTION BEGAN

In 1936, a young Rosemary Seys went to the well-known Exford kennels to purchase a pup for her grandmother. During that train journey back with this pup, she fell in love with the breed and was determined to eventually get her own little Sheltie.

Soon Rosemary purchased her Sheltie, a lovely show bitch for the then-large amount of \$30 and began her own kennel under the prefix "Inchmery". Under that kennel name, she owned and bred many champions and certificate winners.

At the time Rosemary was very involved in breeding and showing, she did not train her own Shelties. She had a well known obedience trainer, Peggy Osbourne, help her to train and show her Shelties in obedience and working trials. One of Rosemary's early Shelties was a great breed winner called "Golden Boy of Inchmery" who along with being undefeated in the Breed ring, competed successfully in obedience.

Unfortunately, due to the war, along with many other kennels, Inchmery Kennels had to be dispersed. After the war Rosemary and her husband Tony, moved to Kenya and imported many top English Shelties. These included many Riverhill Shelties such as Int. Ch. Riverhill Rikki, who Rosemary called "The most perfect Sheltie I have ever seen or owned".

Upon returning to England years later in 1963, Rosemary became interested in obedience. Her kennel name was changed to Rhodora and she began training and showing her own Shelties very successfully in obedience.

It was during this time that Rosemary had the great idea of promoting the "Dual Purpose" Sheltie in obedience/working trials and the breed ring. She approached the Parent body of the ESSC and got permission to form a new section. This new section, now called "The Working Section" had their first meeting in 1970.

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Initially, there was great opposition to this new section. Rosemary remembers leaving one ESSC meeting in tears after she was told by one member that they didn't consider obedience to be for Shelties. They said it was unkind and too rough! But, Rosemary pushed ahead determined to promote the working Sheltie.

On the working side, Rosemary wanted to see good representatives of Shelties performing in obedience. And she wanted be able to help the competitors learn to show their performance dogs in a well-groomed and well-conditioned state.



1930's photos of Golden Boy of Inchmery; Ch. Jenny Wren of Crawleyridge CDex, UDex; Seamist from Shiel; Moonenshiel CDex, UDex and Working trial CC winner.

On the breed side, Rosemary wanted to see improvements in temperament. In an article she wrote for an early ESSC Handbook, "A bold outgoing dog full of courage can cope with the many exercises he will have to learn." She felt that the strides that had been made by breeders to improve

temperament were helped by the contribution of the obedience competitors.

In the US today, many Sheltie breeders lament about the performance/agility competitors' desire for a smaller Sheltie. In contrast, in the early stages of the Working Section's history, the opposite was a problem! As obedience became more and more competitive in England, exhibitors wanted larger Shelties to be able to get better scores and compete against the larger dogs. Rosemary felt very strongly that the Sheltie in performance should be within the breed standard as much as possible.

THE WORKING SECTION THEN AND NOW

Once the hurdle of forming the section was passed, Rosemary and Tony went on to organize many activities for the section. One very popular activity became known as "Sheltie Camp"! The first Sheltie camp was in 1972, held at the Sey's Farm in Devon, and lasted for 5 days. It included a trip to a Championship breed show, obedience training sessions, a working trial training session (which included tracking), Sheltie "beauty" class and quiz night. Milk was provided from the pedigree cows at the farm, as well as farm fresh eggs. Participants camped in their tents and trailers and enjoyed a friendly few days with other Sheltie lovers. What a lovely week that must have been!

Over the years the section has grown. It now organizes obedience and agility training sessions throughout the year. Sheltie Camp continues and is constantly trying to change and adapt with the times.

Agility has continued to grow in popularity and the ESSC Working Section was the first breed club in England to hold a single-breed (Sheltie only) agility trial. These agility trials have continued and have become a great way to promote the working Sheltie.



A few of the "Sheltie Camp" campers

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The Working Section also organizes and runs the obedience trials which are held twice per year in conjunction with the ESSC Open and Championship shows. The breed ring, side by side with the obedience ring, just as Rosemary envisioned many years ago!

After all the initial opposition, Rosemary is especially proud that this year the Working Section was asked to put on an Agility trial in conjunction with the prestigious "Sheltie of the Year" show - a great honor for the Working Section.

WOULD THIS WORK IN THE USA?

England is a fairly small country. The Working Section encompasses the entire country. This would be extremely difficult to do in the USA. Meetings and training sessions would be difficult to organize and to make available to all.

One solution is for Sheltie performance people to join their local clubs and offer to help promote the performance section of that club. If that fails, you can organize your own local Sheltie club!

One local group of Sheltie lovers in the New York/New Jersey area has done just that and formed a club called METRO Shetland Sheepdog Club. Formed by a small band of people, they are organizing herding training days, agility training sessions and general get-togethers after shows. By creating a strong network of similar-minded Sheltie lovers, they are determined to

promote the TRI-Purpose Sheltie (herding, obedience/agility and breed).

Doesn't this sound remarkably similar to Rosemary's original ideas from thirty-five years ago? It shows that no matter what country, no matter what decade, we all want to see that "marriage of beauty and brains".

The author Bernadette Bay (O'Bay Shelties) is an American currently living in England with her Shelties. Her website is:

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Much thanks to Rosemary Seys for taking the time to relate some of the fascinating history of the Working Section and her own life in Shelties. Check out the Working Section of the ESSC website at:

<http://www.esscwork.fsnet.co.uk/>

Check out Metro SSC website at:

www.geocities.com/metrossc/