

SHOCK COLLARS – TRAINING’S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

When training a Border Collie on stock, there is no reason to ever use a shock collar. Period. Shock collars are the lazy mans training tool and the quickest way to ruin anything natural or instinctual in your dog.

Dogs in a pack naturally work off the alpha dog, taking their behavioral cues from the pack leader. Corrections from the leader are hands on and may be severe, and quite possibly seem unwarranted to us, but they do not have a long-term devastating effect on the dog being chastised. It is the natural order. The dog knows exactly where the correction came from and it learns from the encounter. Take some time to watch your dogs interacting as a group to observe this natural “training process”.

Your job as a handler/trainer is to assume this leadership role. Your dog should be looking to you for cues of or clues to your expectations. A hit from a shock collar comes out- of- the- blue:

- ◇ There is no way for a dog to understand this sudden snap of pain coming out of nowhere;
- ◇ There is no proper way for the dog to relate this pain back to the Alpha/trainer;
- ◇ There is no relationship between this pain and the **natural** skill you are trying to harness.

Using a shock collar stops the development of natural, instinctual ability in the dog and turns it into fear. The dog loses the qualities that we have so carefully selected for and becomes a robot in dog’s clothing. The dog loses its’ desire, heart and self-confidence. This fear can show itself in a variety of ways, from subtle changes in the dog’s desire and intensity level to more obvious behaviors such as orbiting the stock.

In severe cases, this fear brings out the aggressive nature in the dog. In this case, the grip is now about biting from fear and frustration rather than a calculated grip and release. Quite often, you see this in a trial setting, especially at the pen where the intensity of the dog and handler is high. An example of this is when a handler at the pen asks the dog to back off and instead the dog, expecting a jolt from the collar, flies in and takes down a sheep. *This is different from the dog that grips and hangs on.*

When working, a border collie is asked to continually perform a complex series of skills. They take their cues from the sheep, the terrain and perhaps most importantly, you the handler/trainer. Whether right or wrong, the dog has a context and a reason for each decision he makes. A trainer’s job is to harness these natural tendencies and provide the cues to get the desired result from the dog. A blast from a collar, mainly used when a trainer has no idea how to get the desired result by using actual tried and true training methods, quite literally shocks the dog into obedience. There is no context for

this correction. The dog has learned only to fear the shock and the work becomes fear motivated.

I have never seen a shock collared dog work with the same degree of enthusiasm and possess the same work ethic as an un-collared dog. The collared dog seems to be just trying to process information that hundreds of years of careful selection in breeding enable border collies to do naturally. I cannot argue that, taken at face value, a shock collar versus a severe reprimand should work better, but the dog does not process information the way a human does. They cannot process information without body language and physical information as a reference point. A shock collar transmits only pain and a working dog is not built to process this type of correction. Without knowing where the pain comes from and exactly why, the working dog often shuts down.

To a large degree, training and mileage develop and enhance a dog's ability and self-confidence. The trainer's job is to take what is initially instinct and gradually move these behaviors to command. The fine art of this process is maintaining the instinct so that the dog is working from both their natural instinct and your commands. Use of a shock collar, if it does not stop this development cold, seriously impairs three of the attributes we value most in our Border Collies: intelligence, natural ability and heart. Two of the reasons a trainer resorts to a shock collar are laziness and ignorance, two attributes we would never tolerate in a Border Collie.

If you want to train your dog, there is plenty of information out there to read and study. There are knowledgeable people and trainers that have learned how to train a dog to its potential leaving the dog with its brain intact, its intelligence and ability keen and its love of you and his work a top priority. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** Think of the damage you will do to the natural abilities that have been bred into the Border Collie and that your dog possesses. If you should choose to work with a shock collar or with someone who uses this type of abusive training device, do not plan to come up my driveway.