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I got started in sheepdogs long before I even knew there were competitions in herding, about 20 years earlier. I fell in love with the Border collie breed. My obedience instructor owned several and I really liked their temperament and sweetness. That was when I decided if I was ever in a position to have Borders, then I want to learn to herd with them.

20 years later, while living in Idaho, my husband was reading the paper and mentioned that there were Border collie x Australian shepherd pups for sale on a ranch. We ended up choosing one and a week later brought home Bonnie. When Bonnie was 6 and we were back in CA, I finally made the call to Shelley Parker, my trainer, and scheduled my first lesson. After the lesson, my cheeks actually hurt from smiling for such a long time.

Two years after Bonnie started in sheep, I started trialing her, mainly in ASCA and a little in small Border collie trials. And I purchased my first purebred ABCA Border collie, Kate.

To prepare for the Finals, I practice some, of course. Condition for the heat for both me and my dogs. I will go out a few times for lessons at my trainer's place and stretch out the girls so they know to run far and look for sheep. I also practice for me, my timing and my depth perception, both are super important. And right before the finals I will firm up my dog's downs.

Tam's best trait I would say is her ability to read stock - feel. Often when I give a command, in my ignorance, she would not take it and sure enough she would be right. I trust her a lot. She is my happy dog and fun for me to trial her.

Corrie's is my youngest one at 3, so she is still coming along. Her best trait is her speed and ability to cover the stock. She is very fast, has not slowed down yet, and a bit of a header, so covers quite nicely. Sheep do not get away from her. She is also fun for me to trial.

Please keep in mind that this sport is the most difficult dog sport that you can learn. It takes at least 3-5 years to train up a herding-bred dog to the Open level of competition and many years to become a competitive Open handler. Grit and determination are needed to succeed. And most likely your dog will be trained well before you are! It just takes the human much longer. Also the human needs to stretch themselves to get better and better, go to different trials, change of terrain, change of sheep, change of handlers. Desensitize yourself and your dog to all of this. Push yourself! FYI, this sport is addicting.

Advice: Watch your sheep, not your dog. Don't make the right, but correct the wrongs. That is my mentor Jack Knox's words, and they have served him well and now serve me. However, not making the right and only correcting the wrongs are not easily found. Much of our training (the handler's) is against our human nature.

I will be running Tam at the Finals, Corrie is on the waiting list. I will be vending there as well. My shop is called Operation Sheepdog Herding, www.SheepdogHerding.com