

Working Trials Article

When breeders get it wrong



Although most breeder's worst nightmare is producing stock with hereditary defects of health or temperament, the next thing on the worry list must be finding the right homes.

Although I have been breeding for over 30 years, and in all that time have only had cause to regret my choice of owners three or four times, it is still devastating when it happens and it has just happened again.

I was absolutely delighted with my last litter of nine well bred, healthy and outgoing working border collies, and my only concern was finding the right people to give them the best chance of fulfilling their potential. With previous pups from a similar mating going into agility and doing well I had some enquires and a couple of successful sales to the agility fraternity, and my own connections with trials ensured that four of the pups went in that direction. Contrary to my usual practise I did let one of the pups go to a pet home but it was an active home with experience of collies, and a lady with lots of time to spend with him, and I have since see how well he has turned out. The last two pups went to do obedience and of these one is doing very well and has paid us a visit to show how much she has learned, but the other has just come back to us because her owners could not cope with her.

I must confess to having my doubts about this particular home at the time, as the couple turned out to be considerably older than I had anticipated from the original phone call. However, the lady who was intending to work the pup assured me that

she was very experienced with collies and not only owned and worked two but also ran training classes, so I had no reason to suspect that they wouldn't be able to cope. As it turned out they were the last to choose their pup and the pup that was left was the smallest by quite a lot. Although by no means a runt she was undeniably only about half the size of the rest of the litter, but more than made up for this with her bold and determined temperament, so I had no reason to think she would be any less than the rest. I explained this to the couple and said that what she lacked in size she made up for in heart, and even as a tiny pup she was exceptionally fast and agile. When they came to collect her at 8 weeks little Mo, as we called her, literally ran rings around them for fun, and I felt another pang of anxiety, but they assured me that they were not concerned and would manage fine so I convinced myself everything would be alright.

For the first few weeks I had constant updates and photos of Mo (now renamed Lexie) and they seemed absolutely delighted with her, and so I felt relieved and did not worry when I heard nothing more from them. That was until last week when, out of the blue, I had a phone call to say they loved her to bits but could not keep her as she was too much for them, and they couldn't cope. Apparently, she didn't come when she was called, was never still, didn't miss a thing and chased traffic. Needless to say, we arranged to collect her the next day, although we were very concerned about what we would be collecting as she had been made to sound like some sort of mad dog.

When we collected her she came with us without a backward glance, jumped into our van and travelled home silently. When we arrived home we let her straight on to the paddock to stretch her legs but she did not know what to do as she had never been off a line, and when I called her to me she showed no recognition of her name. We decided then and there to change it back to Mo, and within 24 hours she was coming when she was called, had met and made friends with all our dogs and the cats, settled into the kennel and run and joined us in the house for the evening. She sleeps soundlessly in her cage at night, runs and plays on the paddock three times a day, and is already searching for articles, retrieving a ball, walking nicely on the lead and showing no signs of chasing traffic. We have taken her out with us to a trials training day and she has met our

friends and their dogs without incident, and although she is naive and un-socialised, her natural temperament is such that if anything spooks her she takes a second look and then gets used to it. So far we cannot fault her and our only headache will be finding the right home for her as we clearly didn't manage it last time. We really cannot keep her with six dogs of our own, one more isn't really an option, but if she doesn't go soon it will be that much harder to part with her. Who says breeders don't care!!

(posted 11/07/2013)
