

Barrie Liddell - Yorkshire trialler

Kim Gibson



Barrie with Moss and Bess at Reeth Show

A keen trialler and judge, Barrie Liddle is a semi-retired farmer from Kettleasing near Harrogate in North Yorkshire. He farms fifty acres there and a further eighty acres at West End, north of Blubberhouses, where he also puts on a good sheepdog trial. If you have met Barrie, you would not forget him. In a way typical of a Yorkshireman, he has a way of speaking his mind very freely, and telling you what he thinks. Very tuned into sheepdog trialling, Barrie analyses it all, formulating opinions that he cannot help but share, sometimes getting himself into bother. Greatly entertaining, even if his opinion is contrary to your own, he does so with a clever sense of humour and a quick wit, often leaving people laughing aloud with a few home truths and food for thought.

Barrie's great grandfather on his father's side, Isaac Johnson Liddle, earned a fortune in Canada building the Canadian Pacific railway. When he returned to Yorkshire, he had been away from his wife and ten children for fifteen years. On his return, he bought and rented seven farms to set up his seven sons, between them having 30,000 Dalesbred sheep. Barrie's grandfather was David Liddle and his father, Alan G Liddle, was born in 1904 at Scaife Hall farm, part of Colonel Galloway's estate. The farm buildings no longer exist. David Liddle worked as an agent for the colonel. In 1918, when Alan left school at the age of fourteen, he went to shepherd for his father at Spittle Ings farm which is part of the Bolton Abbey estate. There would have been a housekeeper there, and Alan did the shepherding work. The family used to sell 600 Dalesbred gimmer shearlings annually at Kilnsey. In 1934, foot & mouth restrictions meant that animals were not allowed on the roads, so Alan walked 600 shearlings from Spittal Ings to

Kilnsey with his two trial dogs, Bruce and Fly. As it was a distance of sixteen miles, he set off at 4.30 am and walked the sheep over Packstones, Hardcastle, Heathfield, Ramsgill, Stean moors, and down to Conistone arriving at 9.00am.

Proud of his heritage, Barrie is only too pleased to tell you that he was bred to work sheepdogs, for his father Alan Liddle won the English National twice before Barrie was even born. Both times were with Fly 1764, and he won the English National Brace in 1939 with Fly 1764 and Ben 2812, having the silverware to polish over the war years. Fly was bred by J Murray at Sanquar, she came as a pup to John Hodgson at East Witton. He trained her and Alan bought her at Reeth Show after he had seen her run in the trials. She was a year old, there being no nurseries in those days, and cost £18 which was good going at that time. Looking at some of the photos from that time "there were no gates on the pens in trials in those days, and they weren't so big, it makes you wonder how they got them in".

Alan had another dog at that time, a black dog called Lad, he bought him for £4 from Ramsey Hall at Masham Show. Ramsey lives near Stokesley, and in his nineties, still attends Jane Simpson's trials at Hutton Rudby, and he made it to the English National last year. "My father used to shepherd 300 acres north of the A59 at Menwith Hill. There were no fences but the sheep were never wrong, he would send Lad around the whole 300 acres, three or four times a day. Once, the dog penned the sheep and then followed the sheep into the pen, getting disqualified in the process. Father kept Lad until he was eight and then he told Ramsey he could have him back saying 'I've calmed him down for you'. Father never trained a pup, he probably did not have enough patience, but he was an expert at spotting a good dog. In those days, everyone had dogs to sell, they did not hold on to them like they do these days. He bought Maurice Collin's Kep, Maurice wasn't always a trialler but he trained dogs. Father used the dog for work, and the dog went back to Maurice later and he trialled it. Father would have several men training dogs for him. There was Jim Crabtree at Addingham Moorside and Cyril Selby over Keighley way, he came to me and asked me if I remembered his bringing a blue merle bitch to Silsden Show, he had trained it for my father. There was also the Holmes brothers, Jim, John and Cecil. They were all batchelors, they would have twenty or thirty dogs to show you and you could take your pick. It was the hey day really. Not like nowadays, farmers don't bother training dogs, and the trials men keep hold of the good ones. It's not so easy to pick up a good youngster to improve for trials work. At the time, I was told that my father won the Nationals and ran in the International and both times came home saying that he got beat by a Scotsman in a long coat with a one-eyed dog, and he couldn't even whistle properly". That was the famous J M Wilson.



Bruce, the best dog A G Liddle ever owned

King George V visited Spittal Ings every year, with the Duchess of Devonshire, the mother-in-law of the present Duchess who has been a keen supporter of the ISDS as host of the Chatsworth Internationals. Before she married the late Duke, her name was Deborah Mitford. In about 1932, the King fell ill and David Liddle, Barrie's grandfather, sent him a box of white heathers picked from the garden where there was a six foot square bed of white heathers that had been transplanted from the moor. Each year, on his visit, the King would collect some to put in his buttonhole. Some of the white heather was transplanted to the garden at Kettlesing and can be seen today.

A G Liddle gave up shepherding at Spittal Ings when the war came, the family had farmed there since 1895, but there was three years' worth of wool in the barn and nobody interested in buying it. Wool paid the rent, so they gave up the farm and transferred the time and resources into the other farms. It was 1940 when Alan went to West End farm, again on the Duke of Devonshire's estate. That was the year Barrie was born. Alan never ran in trials seriously again. "He judged a lot. One time, at the Washburn Valley show, he shouted at the men at the top of the field to let some of the sheep out for him, they would have been his sheep in the trial. Then he ran a black & tan dog called Roy. He got him from the Holmes brothers, or was it Gordon Rogerson? He put the sheep round the course perfectly. If he had been in the trial, he would have won it. The dog had never been near a trials field".

Later, the family moved to Delvesridge at Darley, another one of the seven farms that were set up by Barrie's great grandfather Isaac. "One day, there was a knock at the door, when we lived at Delvesridge up by the American camp, it was John Holliday from Blazefield near



The Duchess of Devonshire and King George V outside Spittal Ings in 1928



A G Liddle penning with Fly during their winning run at the English National at Ilkley in 1934



Two of A G's dogs demonstrating with pigs at Spittal Ings



Charlie and A G Liddle at Rydal trial in about 1938 where they came first and second

Pateley Bridge, and he said 'I'd like to win the English National'. Father told him that he would teach him all that he knew. John Holliday seem to live at Delvesridge at the time, he came day after day. When he started, he hadn't a clue. Father must have made a good job of him for he won the International at Loughborough (with Moss 11241 in 1947), and the English National twice (in 1951 with Roy 5406, and in 1968 with Moss II 28996). At Loughborough, the sheep were very heavy and to finish, Moss backed the sheep into

the pen. It was supposed to be one of the best Internationals. A man of means, John Holliday had an estate consisting of five farms above Penrith. A young man in his prime, he spent every day trying to achieve his ambitions". In 1985, John won the Oldest Competitor Cup and Best Sportsman at the International with Moss 128584.

When A G Liddle died in 1955, he was described as a 'flockmaster genius' and 'a genius with sheepdogs'. "This was at a time when there were not so many



A G Liddle and his National winner Fly



Barrie as a youngster on the farm



Barrie with Nora, his first dog

handlers locally, there was Mark Hayton and his son Arthur from Otley, Jack Suttill at Pateley Bridge. He was a one-off, the Suttills were a wealthy family, he only ever wore his suit and trilby, even when gathering the moor. Most handlers travelled up to the trials from the Derbyshire area, the Priestleys and the Bagshaws. Of course, Northumberland and the Borders were always strong, where dogs originated from. My father had a gift, dogs worked well for him. He could take a dog and improve it. He was not hard on them, it was something to do with his voice. He would send me off with a dog and a packet of sheep, over at West End where the lane was sunken and the sheep would run up the walls and get into the meadows. I could not get them back, I would be in tears because the old dog would not get them back for me. As soon as my father appeared, the dog would just do the job".

Barrie first had a go at trialling at the age of fourteen but, when his father died in 1955, he spent all his time working on the farm. His father taught him how to handle a dog, and told him to do the work at home with a trial in mind. John Holliday told him that his father had trained him so he would train Barrie. The first dog he had was a white-bodied bitch called Nora. His father went to buy her from John Squires from Meltham. He said 'I won't sell it to you but if its for the lad, I'll give her to him'. With a solid foundation in working dogs, Barrie always had good dogs as he worked large numbers of sheep "Sometimes, we moved 1500 sheep six miles down the road from West End to Dacre". Risk was one of the work dogs, unregistered, "he would have trialled if I had been trialling. I got him from John Rayner at Gouthwaite where he had been trained on cattle, he hadn't seen any sheep. There was a sister that was even better, she was sold to Derbyshire, I was reluctant to let her go".

Throughout his life, Barrie knew that he would trial again, when he had more time. In 2003, he got his white-headed

Moss 262980 from a friend and neighbour, Maurice Kay who bred John Holliday's 1957 International winner Moss 11029. There was deliberate intent that he would be the dog for Barrie to get trialling again "It was something I always wanted to do. I always prided myself on having a good dog. I promised myself that when I had the time, I would have a go again. Knowing time was short, as Maurice had a brain tumour, Barrie did get Moss to run at Reeth Show when the dog was just seven months old, but unfortunately it was too late for Maurice to see, he died just the week before. He left Bess 262979, a littermate, for Barrie, and Barrie did indeed set off trialling again. Moss won his first nursery at a year old and Bess went on to gain sixteen placings in nurseries and novice, six of them seconds. Their sire is Maurice's Murc 200384 (a grandson of Sydney Price's Davy and Ian Ibbotson's Don) and their dam is Lyn 202596 (by Edwin Knightson's Tweed and a granddaughter of Bwch Taff). Barrie runs Bess mainly, along with another bitch that he considers as the best he has ever had, Fly 268881 "Fly will gather fifty heifers and put them in a pen. She is from an outstanding litter of ten by Dick Roper's International Supreme finalist Tom 246801, and out of Richard Alp's Peg 256351. A bitch that Richard kept, Fizz, was an exceptional littermate that did very well in the nurseries but unfortunately died in a freak accident when she was loose in a barn and her collar got caught on a tap.

Barrie has a cupboard full of silverware from showing sheep, Dalesbred tups and Masham lambs, many trophies from the Nidderdale show. There's one that he is particularly proud of, for he has won it outright, there being the names of many good sheep men engraved on it, Jack Suttill being one who had won the cup on previous occasions, in the 1930s. The cup was donated by the Demetri Ardy who owned Heathfield Moor when Jack shepherded there. Barrie has shown sheep all his life, and has been unbeaten at Pateley Show for three years with



With Dalesbred sheep in the 1950s

the Masham gimmer lambs. He won the Championship with a Dalesbred tup three years ago. Barrie lambs about two hundred and fifty Dalesbred ewes, eighty go to the Dalesbred tup to breed replacements, and the rest go to the Teeswater tup to breed Mashams.

Barrie also used to train steeplechasers successfully "the last one we trained won at Wetherby at 50-1, unfortunately, we did not put any money on it. I had a good horse called Kileenmore, and another one called Ocean Day, that won the Grimthorpe Cup twice at Middleton point-to-point at Whitwell near York. It is a four and a half mile famous race, not many win it twice".

Kim: With sheep, sheepdogs and the horses, you have had three major interests, which would you say has dominated?

Barrie: I have not had the experience with trialling that I have had with rearing sheep, and I would say that I still have ambitions with the sheepdogs. But you need the right dog. Like with Fly, the best bitch I have had, I gather such big areas with her and she's so used to jumping walls, in a small trials field, she'll jump a wall if she sees it, thinking there's another thirty or forty sheep on the other side. That might be a disadvantage at a trial! I do intend to do more with the dogs now, and less work with the sheep. I'm still learning, and young enough to win an International! But it's a job to compete with these young chaps like Aled Owen, Kevin Evans and Richard Millichap, running about like stags to help their dogs. They are in their prime and take some beating. Us old chaps are at a disadvantage. The problem is when you come to trialling as I have, later in life, with a lifetime of running working dogs in work situations, the timing needed for trialling just is not there. Like when sheep are heading for a hurdle, you need a dog that is obedient but dogs still vary in how they answer to flanks. You need to judge the direction and speed of the sheep and the dog all at once and quickly. Two steps too far, and you have missed the hurdle. It's not luck, it's reading sheep, their reactions to a dog, and all the other circumstances. Sheep can sense more than they are given credit for, they know where they want to go. The dog has to be in exactly the right position to keep them on line, that's the difficulty. Having a dog on perfect command helps.

Kim: Which handlers do you respect?

Barrie: Obviously Jim Cropper, you have to watch him every time he runs a dog to try to work out how he does it. Tom Huddleston is very professional in all that he does, the training and the trialling. It all depends on the dog's training, Tom gives the right commands and his dogs obey. Timothy Longton, you have to respect, he does not make many mistakes. He is a good reader of sheep. Thomas Longton, a great handler, he seems to know what the sheep are going to do. You don't win Internationals for nothing. And how he ran that dog in the



Moving sheep

storm at Llandeilo. There are some good young handlers about, Sophie Holt, Chloe Cropper and Tom Lawrenson. It brings to mind the saying "Good horses make good jockeys".

Kim: I think pretty much everyone agrees that the best dog is a good work dog that can work well away from home in a trial, adapting to different circumstances, what are your thoughts on this?

Barrie: Obviously, a good work dog is of great value. How you run a dog at home is not the same as a trial. At home, you can make mistakes and you do not even have to bother rectifying them. You cannot do that at a trial. You need tight corners on a big flock, but you can not have that in a trial. It is different at a trial to home. A lot of trial work can spoil a dog as you are looking for different things. Take the sheep at trials, a lot of them do not know what a dog is, they can not stand a dog that puts pressure on them. Another thing is that a work dog may have to do things at home to get the job done, that they cannot do at a trial, such as gripping on command. I still think that if you have a good dog, it should be able to handle all types of sheep. There are dogs that would be able to, but not necessarily in a trialling situation. And there are dogs that can work a thousand sheep and then know when they are on three sheep, but they are few and far between. But not all dogs get the chance to prove both sorts of skills.

Kim: Any other thoughts about working dogs?

Barrie: Most working dogs do not gather anymore. In Nidderdale, they get different dogs in to gather Stean moor as the terrain won't let them take their quad bikes with their own dogs. Sometimes, the main thing when selling a dog is 'does it ride on a bike'? It is sad when you need a quad to pen sheep. Buy some sheep in, you can soon tell what sort of a dog they have had on them. There is nothing as cute as sheep for sussing out dogs, they

know what sort of a dog has just walked into the field.

Kim: What do you think is a most important quality in a dog?

Barrie: With all work, you must have a dog that you can ask up. If a sheep stamps its foot, it is a battle to be won, and you must win it, or the sheep will end up chasing the dogs.

Kim: Thinking back, are dogs getting better or worse?

Barrie: A lot of people say that dogs are getting worse, so why is it that when Deerplay Hill trial first started in about 1974 that only seven dogs got their sheep. This year, forty-eight dogs got their sheep. That has to say something.

Kim: Are dogs getting weaker?

Barrie: A lot of people say that dogs are getting weaker, I am not so sure. I think there have always been weak dogs and strong dogs. I don't think the balance of each has changed. I think dogs are better trained.

Kim: What are your thoughts on the amount of eye in a dog?

Barrie: Loads of handlers say you don't need a dog with eye. I find that they don't concentrate on the sheep and balance them properly. Some of the best dogs are some that set off with too much eye, and they are the best dogs now. Have they gone more free with work? It's not easy to do, but there must be a way of doing it. If I was going to quote examples, I would say Chloe Cropper's Roy and Tom Huddleston's Udale Spring, they have both improved with age and seem to have less eye that when they were in the nurseries. Robert Fielden's dog that won Deerplay last year is the same, everyone thought it had too much eye, but he has given it a lot of work and it has improved the dog. Deerplay takes a bit of winning. I think this proves that some eye dogs can get more free with time, not all of them get more eye with age.