



Jed Watson from Dartmoor

In Jed Watson, we find a man totally devoted to the art and skill of bringing out the finer points of the herding instinct in the Border Collie and who delights in training the young dog. He is also a fine horseman and has spent many years as a working huntsman to a few local hunts. He has also spent time in the Brecon Beacons which, because of his prowess on the trialling field, afforded him the inclusion in the Welsh National team one year.

Most recently he captained the English National team in 2016. He was second (to Dave Woods and Lin), with Huthwaite Roy and sixth with Jill, in the National Nursery Trial finals of March 2017.



*Jed with Eryri Rock
at the 2008 World Trial Final*

CW *Thinking of how harsh the weather conditions on Dartmoor can be, is there a particular type of collie that works sheep better than others?*

JW It is really the type of dog who works for **you** that is important not necessarily the weather conditions. My father and brothers look for a different type of dog from me; it is just in the way we are. When father was in his heyday a lot of the dogs were ones that I may have taken a bit too far. Father, being a kinder more relaxed person in his style of handling, had the dogs working better for him, they not being able to take the pressure I applied. I go through a lot of dogs but just because I don't like them or want them, that does not mean to say that they are not good dogs. They just have not got enough in them for what I want.

CW *Do you have very high expectations of the dogs who work for you; would that be a way of putting it?*

JW I don't know. Put it this way; father would ask of a dog and I demand. It does not always work out but if they cannot take that I do not want to know them. It was John Thomas, who now lives near Aylesbury, who pointed me in the right direction about the sort of dog that I work with best. It is a different type from the ones that the rest of my family work with. But I do like a smooth coated prick eared dog – I'll take a second look.



CW *Do you prefer dogs to bitches?*

JW I have an open mind but, saying that, I have only the one bitch in my current pack. I think it is easier to get a dog to a standard than a bitch. But if you do get a bitch who can take the pressure, then she'll go past any dog.

CW *Would you just be talking about trialling dogs here? Do you apply the same pressure to your working dogs?*

JW To me they are not separate. The best trials dogs I have had have come up through the farm work with me working them every day. If the dog is not what I like, or hasn't got the potential to replace a dog that I already have, then it gets passed on.



CW *You spent some time a few years back training handlers. How did you view working with the handler as opposed to working directly with the dog?*

JW As a person I can respond to an animal and can read it a lot more easily than I can a human. Looking at a dog I can feel whether or not it is a time waster, or if it has potential or whether I'd like it for myself. But I thought I would have difficulty in telling people how to bring that out in their own dog. I could see how to do it myself but it is difficult getting that across to somebody else. People came for my opinion and how I went about it was this: I looked at the dog first and the person second. Whether I pleased or offended, I hoped that whatever I said would be for the dog's sake. It might not be what the person wanted to hear but hopefully it was said in such a way that it did not cause offence. As far as I was concerned I was there as a mouthpiece for the dog.

Jed with Rob



CW *And with the dog saying 'this is how I want to be treated', your method has been hugely successful!*

JW Some people would go out on to the field and never give the dog a chance to see what it could do. Now, I cannot swim. I've been to the pool hundreds of times but I'm still not swimming. When I am going down in the pool it is very hard to relax. It is the same with these handlers. Dog on end of chain, owner terrified, dog yanking, owner pulling. As you know at Postbridge we had a four or five hundred yard walk to the field from the car park. I could sum up the dog and the person while they were going down that lane. Nine times out of ten when I suggested letting it off the lead the handler would protest 'Oh no, it might



cause a problem'. It was the dog picking up on the tension in the handler that was causing the stress. That was the hard thing to get across; that the instinct of the dog is right. It might have its problems but there is no bad fault other than those that people put there.

Jed running a training clinic in 2005

CW *By our saying that it is handler and dog training, it seems we've got it the right way round, doesn't it? It is the handler that needs the training so that the dog's natural instincts can be harnessed and supported.*

JW I try to be honest. If somebody has come for help, do you tell them things that they want to hear? If so, the situation does not change. Or do you put your neck on the line and be truthful and say 'if you kept quiet a minute and let the dog breathe, you'd get a working dog?'

Another thing; father's best bitch lived in the house, never moved out of her box. Come a trialling day, and it could be the middle of the week, she'd follow him everywhere until she could get out of the house when she would go and lie by the garage, waiting for father. How she knew that that was a trials day we never could find out.



Eryri Rock

CW *So a house dog can still be a good working dog. But it is the exception rather than the rule?*

JW One of the biggest faults with the novice handler is that they talk to their dog too much. In a light voice they keep talking. 'Sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down

CW *Brevity then, and not over commanding?*

JW There is a limit as to how much we can take in. This applies to dogs as well. Basics and, yes, as we go up the trialling ladder, some dogs do get more commands. For the basic principles of dog handling, however, keep it simple. The dog has to have a clear cut and defined command system. If he does not then you can't blame him if something goes wrong. You have got to give that dog a chance to do what you want it to do. If you are yapping to it all the time, it gets confused. A big problem with handlers is that when they give a command in amongst a lot of other stuff, the dog ignores them. They chucked the command in to make the dog right and the dog ends up working the handler. Biggest thing to get across to new handlers is that the dog is **your** aid and not the other way about.

CW *What are your thoughts on the 'novice handler, novice dog and no sheep experience' equation?*

JW In a perfect world it is not the best start, but you've got to go with what you've got. It is part of why I wanted to help out, to look at the challenge and for that to go along with the sport that I love.



Rob at an international



Jed with Mirk at the 2010 International