

## Val Powell from Northamptonshire

Val and Bob Powell were interviewed for Working Sheepdog News in 1997 (can be downloaded from [www.isdssheepdogarchive.org.uk/english-sheepdog-handlers/239-val-powell-from-northamptonshire.html](http://www.isdssheepdogarchive.org.uk/english-sheepdog-handlers/239-val-powell-from-northamptonshire.html)). Val's father was a shepherd, as was Bob's uncle. Both have been trialling for over 30 years and Val was kind enough to give us an update on her thoughts for the ISDS Sheepdog Archive website.

***It was mentioned in 1997, that you had a strain from Val's father's Sheppey line. Is that still in existence?***

This line was descended from my father's bitch, Floss. We have kept that line running throughout our working lives and into retirement. In fact, Tyke, the young bitch I am running now, is the thirteenth generation of this line. They have always been good dogs for the day-to-day work but have that little extra polish to make them good trial dogs too.



*2014 Winners of the Mid-Shires trial*

***You also talked of "gentle robotic dogs" becoming a problem. Do you think that problem has faded or got more pronounced in the intervening years since we spoke last?***

I still believe that the prevalence of gentle robotic dogs within trialling is an issue, probably more so



now, as over the years. fewer competitors come from a traditional shepherding background. This is great in one way, as sheepdog trialling is a fantastic sport that can be enjoyed by everyone, and in many ways as shepherding declines we need their continued enthusiasm and interest to keep the sport going. But they need dogs that are easy to handle at weekends without requiring too much work during the week as many of them have full time jobs and access to sheep and a suitable field is not always easy.

*2014 English National at Northleach - at the start of their brace run*

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**Do you think there is more of an issue now with finding sheep that are used to dogs for trialling? Do you think this will impact adversely on the working dog?**

As I said above, changes to farming and shepherding practices mean that, increasingly in response to larger flocks and greater demands on the shepherd's time, quad bikes have continued to replace dogs as a means of handling sheep. This results in fewer sheep being worked by dogs on a regular basis and when they are, they tend to be in much bigger flocks which seems to reduce the respect they would naturally show towards a dog, I have noticed that even in Wales the sheep seem to be more erratic and increasingly more difficult to handle.



*2015 English National Brace where Val qualified Mint & Cully for the International Brace*

**How much of the work required for trialling is genuinely useful in the everyday working situation?**

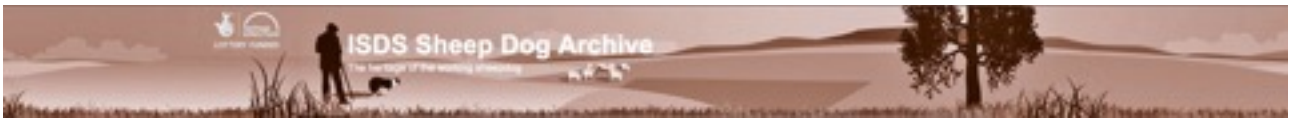


I still think that a good dog should be able to work and trial. A good trial dog should be a good work dog with a bit of extra polish; such a dog is worth its weight in gold. Hence the record prices we see at dog sales these days. A good trial reflects this as it is still essentially a test of the dog's day to day working skills; that is to say gathering, fetching, driving, holding and penning sheep for the shepherd to be able to do their work. Obviously it is a bit unnatural to pen the sheep in the middle of the field but it is a competition after all.

*Devon English National Brace*

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**In 1997 you felt that we were in danger of losing the natural ability of the dog to move sheep on its own. Have you modified that opinion?**

I do still hold concerns that dogs are losing their natural working ability due to the increasing number of dogs which are solely trained for trialling; and hence are only taught what they need in order to complete a standard course. This goes back to the increasing number of gentle robotic dogs within the sport which are highly obedient but are losing their ability to think for themselves.

**Some trials that used to be a regular feature of the trialling calendar are, sadly, no more. Are there any that are/were particularly dear to you and do you have memories of them that you can share?**

My favourite trial of all time was the Moelyniadd Hill Trial run by John Nicholls. The course was set up in the middle of a vast hillside. The first time I ran Ria there I could not believe the amount of open space around the course but we just did our thing and we won. My favourite memory of this trial was a few years later when running my Bet dog. She had completed the 800 yard outrun and picked up the sheep; at which point John's dog, which was with him at the letting out pen, decided to come and help. Bet never was one to tolerate this sort of behaviour so she chased him back to where he was supposed to be then calmly returned to her sheep and carried on as if nothing had happened. John found this highly amusing and we laughed about it every time we met. He was a lovely man and is sadly missed.

**I remember seeing Ria work for Val. What made her such a good worker?**

Ria, what can I say? She was a one off. She was so natural and could cope with anything that was thrown at her. She was just as happy working a flock as she was trialling. She had a natural feel for sheep and no job was too big or small as long as she was with me, unfortunately this is not something that can be taught. She was the best friend I ever had.



*2006 Judging the English National with Paul Turnbull*

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