

Anatolian Shepherd Dogs April 2018

The Importance of Preserving Working Temperament

Working temperament is what makes the Anatolian Shepherd Dog what he is – an outstanding guardian of livestock. Anatolians are low energy dogs. High energy behavior, such as that exhibited by herding breeds, excites stock and draws the attention of predators in the environment, whereas low energy behavior has a calming effect on stock. These are dogs that can move through a herd or flock with barely a ripple.

Picture a flock of sheep in a pasture, guarded by their Anatolians. They calmly graze and put on weight and fiber while the dogs worry about security. The only time the stock show any degree of excitement is when their dogs sound an alarm. The Anatolians are scattered through the flock, some lying in the shade, some wandering amongst the sheep, and one dog is lying on a small rise where she has a clear view of the area.

A pack of half a dozen stray dogs are out looking for some entertainment and they spy our flock of sheep. The stray dogs head toward the flock. They are quickly spotted by the Anatolians. The lead Anatolian is instantly on her feet from her high perch and the rest of the dogs in her group follow suit. The Anatolians move from where they were resting within and near their flock, their heads and tails come up, and they begin to bark to let the predators know that they have been spotted. The sheep bunch together and place themselves behind two of the dogs who have stayed behind to guard them while the other three dogs rush in the direction of the threat.

Once the stray dog threat has been dealt with, the two Anatolians who stayed behind with the sheep move towards their fellows who are returning to the flock. Where the Anatolians raced out to face the threat with heads and tails high, their return is marked by a slower pace, tails at half mast, and heads more on a level with their toplines, a couple of them even curling their bodies into an arc and pinning back their ears as they move towards their fellows and their charges. They greet the dogs who stayed behind, and seamlessly melt back in with their sheep, sniffing a few of their charges, scent marking in a couple of places, and resuming their chosen stations to watch for anything out of the ordinary, anything that might pose a threat to their flock. Where the sheep were alert and agitated at the predatory behavior of the stray dogs, the calming, non-threatening behavior of their Anatolians means that all is right in their world and they can resume their lives, safe from molestation.

The importance of correct temperament and behavior cannot be overstated. Correct livestock guardian dog temperament and behavior is what sets the Anatolian apart from the rest of the dogs in the Working group. Correct temperament for the breed is aloof, although dogs that have been well socialized will generally be more tolerant of new people in off territory situations, and some may be more tolerant of strange dogs off territory.

Correct temperament for the breed also means that Anatolians don't make the best show dogs. Yes, some individuals do tolerate showing, but my concern is that in the effort to be competitive on a national level, where group wins and placements are important, that we may end up breeding for incorrect temperament and behavior just to be more competitive in the ring.

Breeders, if you have your dogs around livestock to assess their working temperament, or if you are lucky enough to have a working situation where the dogs are the only thing standing between your

animals and predators, thank you. Thank you for keeping working temperament at the forefront of your breeding program. Please keep breeding for true working temperament because that is the only thing that will save our breed from becoming generic show dogs. For those breeding Anatolians who do not have the luxury of keeping stock, please work to incorporate dogs into your breeding program who are proven working dogs.

Handlers - both owner and professional - and judges, please understand that the things that make the Anatolian what it is also make it a sometimes poor choice for a show dog. Show the ones with good working temperament, but understand that they are not going to welcome the advances of complete strangers, and they are not going to sparkle and shine like other breeds do. If you are showing a dog with good working temperament, respect that aspect of your dog. Present the dog as he is and don't ask him for things that are alien to his nature, such as manically alert expression and animation. This is a breed that is not so much handled as shown to the judge. Don't try to make the dog behave in a manner that is unnatural for the breed. Anatolians are far more than a handsome face – they are a true working breed and must remain so.

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