

Anatolian Shepherd Dogs, July 2016 Gazette issue

The Anatolian Shepherd Dog In The Show Ring, or The Amazing Disappearing Dog

Anatolian Shepherd Dogs (Anatolians or ASDs) have guarded livestock against toothy predators in Turkey for millennia. This is a breed where many of the dogs being shown in the United States today still work as Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) when they are not being shown.

The working Anatolian blends in with his stock. He is roughly the same size as a full-grown sheep or goat, and he will mingle with his herd, head down, moving slowly like the grazing animals he guards. He doesn't stand out from the crowd unless he has to and often spends much of his day lying in an area that gives him a good view of the terrain he's guarding. The length of time it takes for a dog to go from quietly blending in to tackling a threat depends on the dog(s) involved, but is shockingly short.

The Anatolian standard states 'Temperament: Alert and intelligent, calm and observant... Reserve around strangers and off its territory is acceptable. **Responsiveness with animation is not characteristic of the breed.**' (Emphasis mine.)

In the ring this means that you are not looking for a dog that stands out from the crowd. The Anatolian should be a quiet, unobtrusive dog. He won't have his head and tail up since the chances of running across a coyote at a dog show are pretty slim, and the dog knows this. He very well may look morose or extremely bored.

Approach this dog quietly and from an angle, not head-on. Many times you will find the handler greeting you as you walk up in an attempt to let the dog know that he or she does not perceive you as a threat. Allow the handler to show the dog's bite. There is no need to count the teeth.

You may find yourself being ignored by the dog during the exam, or you may even find the dog actually attempts to avoid you. Do not be offended and do not hold this against the dog. As long as the dog will allow itself to be examined it's all good. This is not a hound or retriever that has been bred for a few hundred years to work for mankind in a servile manner, rather, it is a peer to the shepherd that has been selected for millennia to do man's dirty work and patrol the frontline between predators and livestock.

Judges, when you have an Anatolian in your group ring, do not penalize the dog for lying down while waiting in line. Think of the ring as a pasture, and the handlers and dogs inside its boundaries as livestock. If the Anatolian is lying down that is a sure sign that the dog has examined the area, determined that there are no threats present, and is lying down to keep a low profile while watching for threats. This may be your only indicator of the dog's working temperament in the absence of livestock. A busy, flashy Anatolian that is up pacing and leaping at the end of the lead is not the dog you want guarding your livestock – busy dogs mean upset stock and that means less weight at the sale barn and more activity to draw the attention of predators.

Instead, go out of your way to notice if there is an Anatolian in your ring. Reward this calm, stoic breed when you see a good one. He might not wag his tail at you, or put up his ears when you whistle or shake a box of mints in his face, but push comes to shove he will tackle a coyote to save your goats for you, or put himself between you and a loose dog on a walk. Don't let this quiet breed get lost amongst the other breeds in your ring.

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