

Tips when buying a Cowdog

By: Richard Brandon

Most anybody that has ever been looking for a cowdog knows that finding the right dog to fit your needs is often difficult. Buying a cowdog is a little like buying a new piece of equipment; it's a big investment sometimes costing several thousand dollars and you expect the dog



"Are you looking for a pup, started or fully trained cowdog?"

to get the job done and earn his or her keep. But, this dog will be much more than a piece of equipment; it will be your faithful companion for many years and in most cases will become a member of your family. The point being take your time, do the research and make sure the breeder you choose is reputable and is a proven producer of the type dog you are looking for.

Before you start your search for a new cowdog here are a few questions you need to ask yourself.

What do I want or need this dog to do?

This is probably the most important question to be answered. My suggestion would be making an itemized list of what you will want the dog to do and be specific. When you are shopping around for a dog you can use a checklist to inform the breeder of what you're looking for.

Example:

a. Dog will be required to gather 100 Charolais brood cows and yearlings.

b. Dog will be required to gather at a distance 50 head of dairy cows.

c. Dog will be used daily in a feedlot, working pens, sorting, loading, etc.

d. Dog will be used to gather sheep and Holstein feeder steers.

Are you looking for a pup, started or fully trained cowdog?

If you're looking for a cowdog pup I will share the following tips that are important to me.

Make sure the pup comes from working parents. Preferably I would want both parents to have the ability to do what you want the pup to do. If you're going to be working rank cattle or dog breaking yearlings make sure the parents are both able to work this type of cattle. Videos of the parents working dog broke cattle will only show you what level of training the dog has, intensity level, amount of eye, balance and speed. It will not show you if the dog is strong enough to work rank cattle. I would suggest seeing the

parents work cattle that will test them by putting pressure on the dog. If the breeder is not willing to do this I would suggest looking for a breeder that will.

A loose-eyed dog that can bite both ends (nose and heel) clean is what I prefer for working cattle, but it is my opinion that a good clean nose bite is the most important trait the dog must have if you plan on dog breaking any type of cattle. If the parents can both do this your chances of getting a good cowdog pup are much greater.

It is a good idea to inquire as to whether the pup's parents / grandparents have had any history of genetic problems such as CEA (Collie Eye Anomaly) hip dysplasia or epilepsy. As a breeder myself I DNA test all my dogs for CEA before breeding them so I can guarantee the buyer that the pup does not have CEA. This is a rather expensive test and you will find that most breeders do not practice this which is acceptable, but it doesn't hurt to ask the breeder if the parents have been examined by an ophthalmologist for CEA

or if they have any history of hip dysplasia or other genetic problems. The breeder should give you some type of health guarantee when purchasing a pup including proof the pup has had all required vaccinations and has been dewormed accordingly.

OK; you've bought a pup that comes from proven parents and are pleased with your choice. The next 8-10 months are very important. I would highly recommend reading the article "Raising Your Puppy Right" by Jimmy Walker. It can be found on www.cowdogworld.com under general cowdog information.

If you're a first time cowdog owner I would suggest you purchase some of the training tapes that are available. Some of the more popular tapes for training a cowdog are:

1. "Selecting and Training a Stockdog" by L.R. Alexander
2. "Training the Working Stockdog" by Elvin Kopp
3. "The Perfect Stockdog" by Ben Means.

I made many mistakes when I trained my first dog. If I knew then what I know now I would have definitely taken lessons from a reputable trainer or attended a cowdog clinic. If you plan on training the dog yourself; I would recommend attending a reputable cowdog clinic or scheduling an appointment with a reputable trainer when the dog is 10-13 mos. of age.

If you're looking for a started cowdog keep these tips in mind.

This is a good choice for



"...a good clean nose bite is the most important trait the dog must have if you plan on dog breaking any type of cattle. "



"make sure the dog can work the type of stock you will be using it for. There are lots of dogs that can gather dog broke or gentle cattle, but few can bring in rank cattle."

someone that doesn't want to pay for a fully trained dog and has experience handling dogs, but can be a poor choice for a first time cowdog owner. Remember, this dog is not fully trained and a young started dog can quickly come untrained by a novice or first time handler. The dog will probably require additional training by a professional or you and the dog will need to take lessons from an experienced handler or trainer.

There are many different opinions of what level of training a dog must have to be called a started dog and there's really no standard. Regardless of how much training the dog has; it should have the desire or keenness to work stock with some degree of training.

A started dog with minimum training should have a recall or that'll do command and stop or down command while working stock. The dog should be able to gather stock to you.

The more training will typically mean a pricier dog. The main thing when choosing a started dog is to make sure the dog will be able to work the kind of stock you will be requiring the dog to work for you. So, here again; if you want a dog that can work rank cattle; this is the time to make sure it can.

When you're watching the dog work cattle watch for

signs of weakness, low intensity or lack of desire to work. Some of these signs are:

1. Dog sniffs the ground frequently while working stock.
2. Dog's tail is over its back while working stock.
3. Dog barks frequently while working stock. (This doesn't apply to some breeds)

Most breeders offer a 30 day trial period when buying this type of dog. It gives you time to bond with the dog which might take 2

days or 2 weeks. It is also a good time to take the dog to your vet for a thorough check up. I always take this time to check the dog for internal parasites, heartworms and canine brucellosis. Again make sure to ask the breeder about any history of genetic problems on the dog's pedigree.

If you're looking for a fully trained cowdog keep these tips in mind.

This is a good choice for a first time cowdog owner. A fully trained dog depending on its age will typically be the most expensive choice and the hardest to find. Make sure the previous owner gives you all the correct verbal commands in writing and a recording of the correct whistle commands if available. I would suggest you video the dog being worked by the previous owner. With a few lessons from the previous owner or a professional trainer this type of dog can teach a first time owner how to work and use a dog on stock. Make sure the dog is fully trained. A fully trained dog should be able to perform most of these tasks.

It should have a solid recall or that'll do command off of stock.

It should have a solid stop or down command while working stock.

It should be able to cast out or outrun long distances in either direction and gather stock. A well trained dog will be able to cast out without actually seeing the stock, locate and gather the stock to you with few if any commands. This is more commonly known as a “blind outrun” or “go look” command. Here again; make sure the dog can work the type of stock you will be using it for. There are lots of dogs that can gather dog broke or gentle cattle, but few can bring in rank cattle.

A fully trained dog should have a “look back” or “way back” command. This command would be used to send the dog back to gather strays or stock that got separated from the main group.

You should be able to control a fully trained dog by verbal or whistle commands when it is working stock. This dog should be able to flank 360 degrees around the stock in either direction by verbal or whistle commands to control the direction of the stock.

However, you don't want the dog to be too mechanical; especially on the gather. The dog needs to be free thinking and able to gather the stock independently.

A fully trained dog can drive stock away from you in a controlled manner.

It's not a must but, If you plan on sorting cattle make sure the dog is trained to do so.

Do you want a male or female? Is there any difference in their ability? What is the best breed?

It is my opinion that it doesn't matter whether you get a male or female. Both have equal abilities when it comes to working stock.

There are several good breeds of dogs to choose from and each breeder will tell you theirs is the best. This choice is up to you. Just remember to follow the same advice I mentioned above when buying a pup, started or trained dog.

How do I find the right breeder or dog?

Dog trials are a really good place to find good breeders and trainers. If you're looking for a sheepdog I would suggest going to a sheepdog trial; if you're looking for a cowdog you need to go to a cowdog trial. Remember most cattle at trials are dog broke, so again make sure you see potential parents work the kind of stock you will be working.



Six (6) month old pups out of working lines

Ranchers that use dogs in everyday real working conditions are a great place to find good breeding programs.

The website www.cowdogworld.com is a good place to locate dogs for sale, breeders and or trainers.

There are also several very good organized cowdog sales held annually:

1. Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale
www.redbluffbullsale.com
2. Winnemucca Ranch Hand Rodeo
www.ranchrodeonv.com
3. Nebraska Cattlemen`s Classic www.cattlemens.org

Regardless of what breed you choose make sure you research your breeder.

Ask the breeder for references from previous customers.

How long has this person been breeding this type of dog?

Beware of puppy mills! They are abundant! Some of these breeders have slick websites with no videos or proof that these pups come from working cowdog parents.

Any farmer, rancher or feedlot operator that has owned a good cowdog will tell you they never want to be without one.

I hope these tips are helpful to anyone that is looking for that good cowdog.

WINNEMUCCA, NV...



Photo Courtesy WT Bruce

RANCH HAND RODEO WEEKEND February 27- March 3, 2013

Ranch, Rope & Performance Horse Sale
Featuring Rick Machado, 1999 World Champion Auctioneer

Cow Dog Trial & Sale ~ Stock Horse Challenge
Winnemucca Bull Sale
Western Trade Show ~ Ranch Hand Rodeo

For More Information on Participation or Consignment
1-800-962-2638 or 775-623-5071
www.RanchRodeoNV.com

WINNEMUCCA COW DOG TRIAL & SALE Open, Brace, and Ranch Classes

February 27 - March 3, 2013

Entry fees include sanctioning and cattle fees.
A portion of the proceeds will be donated to
Humboldt County Search & Rescue.



There will be one elimination round with the top five dogs advancing to the finals in both the Open and Ranch Class. There is a nursery class built into the Ranch Class. Up to five places will be paid in the Open and Ranch, and three places paid in the Brace Class.