



Your new Border Collie

Thank you for choosing a Border Collie to be your new companion. You are taking home an intelligent dog that can adapt very quickly to new surroundings, and with gentle guidance one that can soon become a loving and loyal family companion. This booklet is a brief guide designed to give you some basic advice to help you and your new dog live a happy life together. At the end of the booklet you will find a list of recommended books for further reading.

Border Collies are sheepdogs and although they are very versatile they are by nature a herding dog. For over a century their breeding has been selective in order to produce the ultimate working dog for farmers and shepherds. As a result they are quick thinking, capable of working out situations and have boundless energy. These attributes make the breed very versatile and a popular choice for the competitive canine disciplines such as agility and obedience. However these same attributes also mean that they need to be kept stimulated, not just by physical exercise but also they need to be kept mentally occupied.

Border Collies vary in appearance, they can be short or long coated, black and white, tri-coloured, white and black, blue or red merle but the traditional markings are considered to be black and white. Their ears can be dropped or pricked and they vary in size and bone structure although they should not be too heavy boned as this would impede their speed when working sheep. Border Collies can be registered with either the International Sheep Dog Society (ISDS) or the Kennel Club (KC), however non-registered dogs can be just as pure bred but without a certificate to prove their pedigree they will not be eligible for registration.

Companion dog

Border Collies can make excellent companions and family dogs but they do need to be understood. They are basically a pack dog and understand rules and boundaries, this can make them relatively easy to teach and train but only if guidelines are set to begin with. If you do not want your Collie to jump on the furniture then make sure from the very beginning that he is aware of this rule. It would be a mistake to think that because he is new in your home that you can allow certain behaviour until he is settled in and then change the rules. Border Collies are excellent at remembering the rules you wish to change!

Being energetic and fun loving their interaction with children can be beneficial to both child and dog but once again it is essential that the initial boundaries are set first. To involve the children in the training and welfare of your dog not only helps them to understand and share responsibility for him but it will also encourage him to see them as hierarchy.

Border Collies vary in personality and character almost as much as they vary in colour and coat length. There is no set rule as to how a Border Collie will behave in any given circumstance, some can be quite shy and retiring and some can be bold and enquiring. They can also be very sensitive and are quick to detect atmospheres. This can make them a good barometer but it also means they will suffer if they are exposed to stress. With this in mind you need to give

your dog the chance to feel safe in your house and with you, as this will help to establish a mental 'safety net' for him before taking him out to meet new people. You are also allowing a shy dog time to build up trust in you and an extrovert dog time to realise that he has to listen to you.

Feeding

There are many different types of food available and it can be confusing, not all dogs like the same kind of food and whereas some will do well on one type another may not. The most important thing to remember with a Border Collie is that because it has a naturally high energy level it does not need a high-energy diet. For example although your dog is a working breed if he is not working he does not need food for a working dog!

Always check the details of the food before purchasing. For example if a food is high in protein and fat the chances are it will produce a lot of energy in your dog, which if not worked off can make him become over excitable and appear to be highly strung. On the other end of the scale the foods with the lower protein and fat content can help to calm your dog down. Some Border Collies can eat a basic meat diet and remain calm but many can appear to become quite hyperactive when fed on a diet consisting of mainly red meat. It can be confusing reading the food labels, for tinned meat may appear to be lower in protein than the dry complete foods but when the moisture content is understood their levels can change quite dramatically. Whether you prefer to feed fresh meat, tinned food, biscuit, or one of the many complete dry foods available, you have to remember that it is not what you prefer but what is best for your dog. Similarly although you may be guided by other dog owners, or by diets you have fed in the past, you need to take a good look at your dog as an individual, for what is good for a friend's dog may not always be right for your dog.

If you are unsure, seek advice from someone who understands the breed and nutrition or refer to 'further reading' at the end of this booklet.

Exercise

Most Border Collies have a high energy level and they need to be able to satisfy this energy physically but it is not compulsory for them to be walked miles each day. They are bred to work sheep which involves running for miles each day but they do not automatically accomplish these distances overnight. A shepherd will keep taking his dog a little further each week increasing his stamina gradually, thus over a period of time he will create an athlete. But if his work does not require as much running for his dog he will only exercise him according to the stamina level he requires. Similarly if you walk your dog for miles each day you will be creating an athlete that will constantly demand the same level of exercise each day. A sensible amount of exercise each day to ensure that your dog is kept fit and healthy without stretching him unnecessarily is important. But also make sure you exercise him within your own time and energy levels or you may find yourself having to commit to a regime you find difficult to keep to.



Toys/treats and games

Most dogs love treats, like to play games and enjoy a game of 'fetch the ball', but a Border Collie is an intelligent dog and will soon work out how to use these to his advantage so make sure you play any games on your terms and not his. Taking a new dog into your home is rather like taking in a child, you must set all the parameters first before you introduce toys and games!

Try to keep titbits to a minimum especially to begin with, or at least until you have a good feeding regime established. In fact sometimes it is better to use some of the dog's food as a titbit rather than buying tasty morsels which he may decide are better than his food.

Most Border Collies love playing with a ball but sometimes they don't know when to stop and calm down. Make sure that he doesn't become too exhausted for they are a stoic breed and will often carry on trying to please at the expense of their own health. Try not to be tempted to use playing with the ball as your dog's exercise, for although he may be running and appear to be exercising himself he will benefit far more from a nice long companionable walk with you. Playing with a ball is a game and can often get a dog over excited which can then lead to chasing if not controlled. It is far more constructive to play for a little while, as a short game, and then spend more time together keeping him calm and interacting with each other. As you learn more about your new dog and begin to understand him as an individual you will soon know what his energy levels are and when he is about to get too excited, thus making it easy for you to keep him calm and to keep his attention focused on you.

Chewing and mouthing

Young dogs will chew as they are teething but there is no excuse for an older dog to chew and be destructive other than him having been allowed to do so. In the wild, dogs will only chew to keep their teeth clean and sharp, they do not chew to be destructive. So by all means provide your dog with something to satisfy his need to look after his teeth but do not allow him to chew anything other than what you provide. For example if he is allowed to chew every toy you give him he will find it difficult to differentiate between his toys and yours, remember the word toy is one we use to describe his playthings but he will see most things that you touch as toys. Leads, towels, dishes, brushes and then shoes and socks as he graduates to bigger and more personal things are all fair game to a dog that has not been told, "this is what you chew and this is what you play with". As dogs mature they will usually grow out of chewing as their teeth become naturally stronger but if your dog is young or is inclined to chew try to establish some early rules such as giving him something he can chew and a place to chew it. For example a garden, utility or his own 'quarters' are the ideal places for him to play and chew but when in your house with you he should be more attentive to you and not to running around and playing. Try to think of the rules you would give to a small child, soft toys and gentle games inside but balls and energetic games are for outside.

Border Collies are bred to use their eyes on stock and only use their teeth when they have no choice. So do not encourage your dog to use his teeth – tuggy toys and tugging at a lead, even in play, can send mixed messages to your dog. Border Collies do not round up people or other dogs as they would sheep, when they are rounding up sheep they are working and all their working skills are put to the test. However they do love to be in control and bringing a group of people, children or other dogs together is a powerful feeling for a dog that likes to be in charge. If he has not been discouraged from using his teeth he may feel it necessary to keep his charges in order by using a little more force. This is not his sheepworking instinct making him do this; he is simply exercising his love of trying to control all situations. It can be amusing watching a dog do this but it is not always good for the dog. Make sure that he is aware that you are in control of him and not the other way round and if he has a habit of mouthing don't allow him to try and take control, not even in fun.

Other dogs and people

Border Collies can often be quite reserved, they are known to be a one person/family dog and when they do mix they often tend to prefer the company of other Collies rather than other breeds, and some may try and stalk smaller dogs. On the whole they are usually friendly and will mix quite well with other dogs and people. There are some who prefer to remain more independent, seeking only the company of their owner and immediate family, especially the dogs with lighter coloured eyes. If a Collie does not crave the attention of other people or dogs do not try to force it to mix, it will only add pressure to the dog and make even more reserved. In time it will come to trust you and your judgement. Never try to rush your dog, instead enjoy the quality time you can share together getting to know one another.

Training classes/competitions

If you want to take your Border Collie to training classes it is advisable to go on your own first and watch the class. You will see if there are any other people and dogs similar to yourself attending and you will be able to tell if the style of training will suit you and your dog. Border Collies excel at most of the canine disciplines and if you are wanting to try and train for competitions you will need to select a club that caters for more advanced training, however it is not compulsory for a dog to attend classes nor for it to enter competitions. If you don't want to compete don't be pushed into it, especially if your dog does not appear to be happy.

It is a misconception that Border Collies must be walked miles each day, kept constantly occupied and need to be socialising and competing. They spend hours in the company of one person when they are shepherding and when they are not working they are content to amuse themselves. Just like children they need both mental and physical exercise, too little will encourage them to be mischievous and too much will encourage an overactive mind. Get to know your dog first and monitor his reactions to certain situations and you will soon know what is best for him and you.

Factsheet

Border Collie



Border Collies like to feel needed and they love being included in family events, but they can sometimes become quite possessive and over protective, so although its nice to feel your dog is looking after you and your family he must do so on your terms. Praise him for being loyal to you but also make sure you can make him sit quietly and behave whenever he shows signs of becoming too possessive with either a person or an object.

Finally remember that you know you are taking a new dog into your home and you will be excited and want to give him or her your undivided attention, also you will have been planning this moment for a long time. But your dog knows nothing of this until the day you take him home and to him it is a big step, for he is suddenly in different surroundings, with different smells, he no longer has people he recognises around him and his bed is different. Give him time to settle in and to adjust, allow him time to learn what he can and cannot do before introducing him to other learning curves. Try to spend time just enjoying his company and talking to him after a walk or a play, rather than ending your communication with him each time you finish his exercise. Share your thoughts with him out loud and you may be surprised to find what a good and patient listener he is. Above all allow him to become your best friend.

Written by Barbara Sykes MBIPDT

References and recommended reading

Understanding Border Collie

by Barbara Sykes, Crowood Press

Understanding your dog

by Barbara Sykes, Crowood Press

Understanding and training puppies

by Barbara Sykes, Crowood Press

For advice, articles, behaviour and further information
www.bordercollies.co.uk
info@bordercollies.co.uk
Mainline Border Collie Centre 01274 56163

Useful contacts

Battersea's Behaviour Advice Line

0905 020 0222 (calls cost 25p per minute)

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

4 Battersea Park Road
London
SW8 4AA

Telephone 020 7622 3626

Fax 020 7622 6451

Old Windsor

Priest Hill
Old Windsor
Berkshire
SL4 2JN

Telephone 01784 432929

Fax 01784 471538

Brands Hatch

Crowhurst Lane
Ash
Kent
TN15 7HH

Telephone 01474 874994

Fax 01474 872855

www.dogshome.org