

Clinic Review

Northern Nevada April 2008

Well the Simon Leaning clinic here in Northern Nevada was a big success. He was really well received by all, as he is very articulate and has a really nice way of teaching. And he has a wicked sense of humour!

His clinic covered all the steps from selecting a pup to more difficult exercises and up through getting a dog trial ready. It also covered a good deal of stock handling, with several exercises that involved all including auditors that were the people moving the stock so that we could all see things through the dog's eyes, and understand the different movement zones of the stock.

Simon's basic philosophy is to "not take the dog out of the dog", so to speak. Though he likes to trial, he does not want to step out on a field with a robot dog and so he does nothing but let the dog develop their natural instinct until they are really mature enough to begin putting commands to things. So he works off of body pressure only with no commands for quite some time before he put what he calls, "obedience in the vicinity of stock" on them (commands). He encourages developing the strong heading desire in the dog before teaching them to drive, so that the dog's natural ability to want to cover is keen. As he says, if the dog allows the sheep to leave, there isn't really anything left to drive!

What I really liked about the clinic was Simon's ability to break things down and provide ways to focus on one skill in the dog versus trying to teach them all in a lump what their job is. Since I am a big believer in "splitting not lumping" for dog training, I enjoyed this aspect of it and got a lot out of it. As Simon says, he is building the dog's ability piece by piece so that he can focus on his job and the dog has all the skills they need to focus on theirs. He begins by working on the dog's "shape" around the sheep, then building their natural desire to balance (where ever that point might be...in other words, not always at 12 o'clock), then all the other skills they need to successfully handle whatever kind of stock they may encounter.

His methods are really fair to the dog and provide the dog with both positive feedback as well as working with pressure and release to let the dog know when they are not doing it correctly.

We are talking about bring him back next year, and if he doesn't come here, there is an offer to host him in Utah, so hopefully one or the other will pan out. If you have an opportunity to attend a clinic with Simon, I encourage you to do so. He is a really good clinician.

Christine Vaught
Nevada USA