

Sheepballs is a rather unique course as there will not be a linear format of what we teach and when we teach it.

## All individuals

Collies and Sheepdogs are a type of dog, rather than a breed, which means they can derive from a vast genetic pool and carry many variations of the genes that go to make up the behaviour we are looking for.

These traits will have been deliberately selected for:

- the type of work on the farm,

  - dogs that work cattle will often be harder than those that don't

  - dogs on very large spreads will often have wide ranging outruns

  - dogs working large quantities of sheep may be selected for their barking

- the type of dog the farm / shepherd likes

  - these can vary by superstition – a dog in the past that have exactly those type of ears / coat colour etc.

  - “stylish” dogs that look very creepy when working, or upright dogs that do not.

- a career in sheepdog trials –

  - successful dogs are strong influencers on many dogs today as they are the most frequently used at stud, some of these may only excel in trial conditions (small number of sheep) and some may not partake in every day work.

- selected for appearance only

  - the absence of selection can result in some traits being extremely strong, and others non-existent.

In short, they come in all shapes and sizes, all skills and variations. In this interview (35mins) Aled talks about finding the right type of dog that makes the top drawer ..... “one in ten thousand” (will have the right qualities in the right balance, and be in tune with that person). It is common for these young dogs to change hands quite frequently, which was the original purpose of trialling, for trainers to find a dog that suits them and the work they have for the dog.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVxLKqJyrCU>

## Advantage of Sheepballs

With the games we can use with balls and discs, we have a greater chance of drawing out the skills, letting the dog practice them in good form, and rebalancing the relationship between the skills. Some games will build confidence in specific areas, and tighten the understanding in other areas.

The games allow us to have a greater control of what the dog is learning, rather than include the unpredictable element of sheep – and goodness me, no one has yet worked out the way a ewe thinks!

Ball games are used extensively to test out young pups who cannot be risked near livestock, and are often seen as the “simulators”. Many of the basic cues and moves can be established in these control environments.

Two of my own dogs have transferred from balls to sheep and onto the trials field. Although I do notice no one in trials will admit to playing games with their dogs. One of THE top dogs was “very handy” at catching lumps of poo from the muck spreader in between International events!

The variations our 8 dogs will demonstrate are individual and WHICH aspects of the games you employ, HOW you employ them and WHEN will be individual to each dog.

I will add Lessons that go into depth on particular aspects or tactics, these will be listed under the “Lessons” and you may be asked to use lessons at particular times to bring out, or tighten up the skills. There may be many more lessons in the early part of the course, but you may not need all of them immediately, but you can download them for the future.

Some lessons will need to be established before others and it will depend on the dog. For some dogs is may take a blend of lessons, or a single way of playing that brings the results you are looking for.

In our forum (Sheepdogs) a Lesson begins a discussion, so that you can ask questions, we can talk further about different aspects of that lesson. Please do not try something out unless you are quite clear how to do it, the timing, and the purpose that we are trying to achieve. Success of application will be measured in what the dog is learning.

I will attach pdfs of lessons so that you can print it out and save them.

## **Video is critical**

Progress on the course is individual. It is unlikely that everyone will participate in the same lesson at the same time – unless it is refining kicking skills!

In your own Space, you will post your videos, up to 9 minutes per week, so please trim and edit as much as possible. You may post as often as you like provided it is ONE skill that is the focus of the video. When I am training I only focus on one piece of learning in each lesson – this makes it easier to monitor the progress of what the dog is learning.

For example I may be working on the exchange skill and want to reward the drop of the toy. I would not work on stopping, or widening or changing direction in that lesson. I will make sure those other skills do not deteriorate.

## **Feedback**

I can only give feedback when I see the videos. This is the benefit of individual tuition. Your first video may include lots of areas you want to work on, or are not sure about, behaviours that may have you head scratching. I will select what is the most urgent to work on. I also expect that work to be done, and seen, before we progress. This tells me that you have understood the feedback and can apply it – always ask if you are unsure, often it sounds easy when you read it, but not so straightforward when doing it. We will then look at what the dog is learning and how their behaviour is changing.

There may be one element that needs confidence and take 5 weeks to build, and when that element is in place, all the other aspects will follow easily.

Do not fall into the trap of trying everything at once, or comparing your progress to that of the others on the course.

## **Follow all the training**

You should be able to see and comment on everyone's training and videos. It is particularly beneficial to learn how others are training, learning to kick, belt, dribble and this will build your experience of the games and how they are played. Play is a natural classroom and all learning will be fast and fixed quite quickly.

Often my feedback for one person may be exactly the point you are seeking but didn't know what to ask.

General queries and questions can be brought up in Admin, but please post your own videos in your space, NOT under the lesson.