

Good boy.

by Alan Williams

It's quite simple - don't move.
No fake or feint - just stand your ground.
The fixed gaze, the thousand yard stare, hold your place.

If the old ewe takes a step forward, makes a challenge; lock eyes,
stare her down. On the second step give her a nip on that gnarly old
nose. Not hard. No blood. Just a reminder of her place; stay put.

When the whistle blows, break right on the out-run. Hard and fast,
born to run, showing your ancestors urge to chase. Cut back, turn
in, the element of surprise. A moments panic; push them forward.
Over the grass and the meadow flowers of summer, away from the
hay manger in the winter; towards the pen, towards the barn.

The whistle, jink left.
Drop down, lie still.
The stare. Concentrate.

One of the flock breaks right. Up, move fast, catch the eye, turn the
beast back to the flock.
Keep moving until...

Until those words, "That'll do."

"Good boy."

No pet, a working dog. Bred to run, to herd, to follow the words of
command.

"Away."

"Come-by."

“Lie down.”

“There.”

“Walk up.”

“That'll do.”

“Good boy.”

Always, good boy. No doubt, no hesitation. Follow the commands, and always good boy.

Tuned to the flock, tuned to his master. Never loose focus. Even at meal times, eat fast, never far from duty.

Until that day. The day, the lorry came. The large lorry, with the wooden slatted sides, and the arms on the back, like the sides of a pen.

The usual commands, only this time move the sheep towards the lorry. Into the arms of the pen, into the dark interior. He could sense the sheep's fear. They didn't want to go into the dark, and he had to push them. Snap at their heels, keep them in order. More than once they wanted to break. If he let one go, the rest would follow, he had to make sure that they were more afraid of him than they were of the dark.

Eventually, “That'll do.”

“Good boy.”

Work completed. The lorry taking the flock away. What now?

Duty done?

Work complete?

Were there going to be more sheep soon? New ones perhaps?

Ones that didn't know what a dog was. Didn't behave and needed to be taught?

Days turned into weeks. He followed his master everywhere. Around the farm, to the shops, but there were no sheep. No reason for being. Sure there was a ball to chase, a stick to fetch, but this was procrastination. There must be real work to do?

Weeks turned into months. There was no farm now. No fields, not place to be. Time spent in front of the cottage fire, and now the humiliation of walks on a lead. Walks to the big green field, to chase the ball.

Too noisy though, and too many kids. Try herding them, but they scream, make too much fuss.

Just the fire in the cottage. Warm at least, but no sheep. No focus and no thrill of the chase.

No commands either; well apart from one.

"Good boy."

