

The Working Sheepdog Website



This true sheepdog story is our tribute to one of the greatest sheepdogs of all time - Aled Owen's Roy ISDS 200199 - Updated Monday 29th June 2009

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A Dog to Remember

A tribute to Aled Owen's legendary sheepdog Roy.

by Austin Bennett

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[Aled Owen](#), double supreme champion and a handler who has known success with a number of dogs, had to part company last year with the one he rates the best.

Roy, a prodigiously talented collie whose tally on the trials field bordered on ostentation, died in December 2002, not old enough at eleven years of age. Slick coated and somewhat unprepossessing in looks, he was nevertheless imbued with all the great qualities that make his breed unique.



Roy
Supreme International Champions 1999
Aled Owen

In work mode, he wasn't a dog you'd forget, upstanding and authoritative yet graceful to watch and collected in his approach. The trail he blazed in his native Wales, and his lethal forays to the Internationals, will be talked about by sheepdog enthusiasts for many years to come.

Bred for Success.

Roy 200199 was bred by Aled Owen's brother, Aelwyn, out of Nell 174815 a Butcher's Mac bitch with lines back to Elwyn Griffiths' Craig, Dick Nicholls' Moss and Barbara Carpenter's Brocken Robbie. Nell was a good working bitch, a litter sister to Alistair Gilchrist's International dog Roy, a dog that had previously made the Welsh Team under Aled's ownership in 1990.

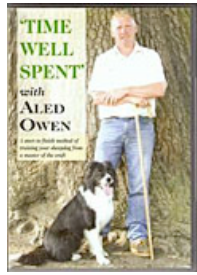
The father of Aled's Supreme Champion Roy was his own Ben 129820, who also brought his master the Welsh National Championship amongst numerous other trials successes. Roy was sold from the litter as a pup to a local farmer, Dafyd Roberts with the proviso that Aled could have first refusal if he was ever offered for sale.

That offer was duly made when Roy was around eleven months old but declined by Aled who felt he had enough dogs to be getting on with at the time. It obviously wasn't a decision taken with any degree of conviction because, after a couple of weeks, Aled was wondering if he should just have taken a peep at the youngster and, undeterred by the fact that Roy had already been turned down by another top handler, he made that augural appointment.

Roy was taken to a field of just four acres or thereabouts with a ditch at the far end and a bunch of sheep firmly rooted in one of its corners. Aled recalls thinking that, given the circumstances, he wasn't going to blame the dog if he crossed the field or made a mess of his gather; but he didn't.

Roy set off at a good pace and was flat out when he took the ditch athletically, slowing down nicely as he prepared to lift. The sheep just came away from their corner as Roy eased in behind them and started to bring them on an absolutely direct course. As Aled says, "he obviously didn't just go there to whip them out, he went there to fetch them. I knew there was something in this dog, as he brought them on so straight, with great big strides and no hesitation. Not much stop on him but that didn't bother me. He was my type of dog and I brought him home

Sheepdog Training



Time Well Spent. Aled Owen's student on this DVD (ROY 266416) became 2007 ISDS Supreme, then 2008 World Champion! [More info](#) - or [more DVDs](#).

straight away."

Early Days.

At home Aled began the careful schooling that would blossom into a partnership of legendary status. Like a good many other dogs that went on to become outstanding workers, Roy had his fair share of detractors early on. "A lot of people thought he was a hard dog," says Aled. "He wasn't hard, he just needed checking a lot of the time. Yes he wanted to come on forward but he wouldn't charge sheep and he wouldn't whip in. His flanks were always clean and so were his outrun and his lift. Nothing wrong or hard about any of that."

He remembers one horrible wet day up on the mountain when he was trying some particularly difficult outruns with two dogs that had already run at National level. His great friend, the handler Eddie Humphries, was holding the sheep at the top and Aled was getting his dogs to them over the tricky ground. "I sent each one of them two or three times, on 'away' and then to the other side and, if I'd have been judging, I'd probably have been taking five or six points off them, that sort of thing."

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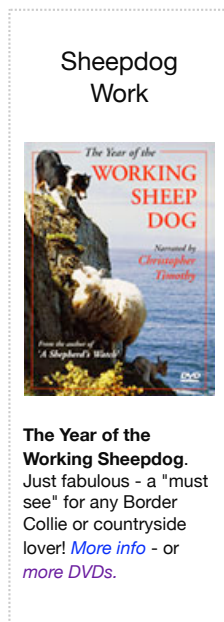
Aled took the dogs back to the pickup and Roy jumped out, around thirteen months old now and eager for any work that was going. "I was going to put him back in", Aled continued, "but Eddie was still up there and I couldn't resist seeing what Roy would make of it. He seemed to see the sheep immediately and I sent him to the right. With the other dogs there'd been a command or two to get them out or to bring them in but Roy just went on a pear shaped outrun all the way; a hundred percent".

Natural ability throughout his career.

Roy's method of gathering his sheep remained impeccable. If they were tight against a boundary he would ease them gently away and if they were in plenty of space his distance for the lift was both generous and positive.

At times Aled thought he might have looked a bit too wide, but he never was. "Many times Roy has settled in well behind sheep that are running fast down the fetch and you might have thought he looked too far off them but he'd be spot on and by the time they came down through the fetch he'd be well in contact and they'd be walking and settled. He just had that natural ability to adapt to his sheep and take control.

Aled started trialling Roy when he was around eighteen months old. To start with he admits he wasn't easy and he had his work cut out holding him back. But he was taking every command, flanking fast but square and always in the point of balance, even though he was pushing.



The Year of the Working Sheepdog. Just fabulous - a "must see" for any Border Collie or countryside lover! [More info](#) - or [more DVDs](#).

Aled enthuses about Roy's huge striding walk "you could fit ten strides from a lot of dogs into three of his" but it took some handling. It was a trait Roy inherited from his father, Ben, so Aled was used to it and, besides, though not the easiest thing to cope with, it was the sort of thing he liked in a dog. "A lot of dogs would have run just to keep up with his natural walk," he says. "Whereas some dogs might have to trot to keep up with fast moving sheep, he could cope with just his natural stride. Yes he was pushy, but he suited how I like to work. I don't want to be stopping a dog every second; it's not my way.

With my pupils of course, I have to get them stopping their dogs absolutely, counting to five between commands (or even ten with a pushy dog), but it's not an approach that suits me personally. I like a dog to be taking its commands but wanting to come on all the time. And remember, Roy was an everyday work dog as well. When you're gathering two hundred ewes with lambs, you don't want a dog to be creeping, you want it to be coming on. A lot of my training is done on a flock, so Roy would have been used to that as well. I could stop him, of course I could, but, yes, he was a strong dog".

An all-round worker to start with, though, Roy certainly gave the impression of being a bit too pushy for his own good and Aled was well aware of the comments drifting about suggesting they'd be a short-lived team. Several colleagues have since told him straight out that they thought he was on a hiding to nothing. They were wrong, of course, because Roy gradually started developing into a superlative collie, an all round worker who could adapt to whatever job was required of him.

On the trials field he began to show that mastery of big tough courses for which he will always be remembered, but he could gentle sheep around the small ones to victory too. At home he had the power to shift three or four hundred ewes on his own and the brains to work with initiative.

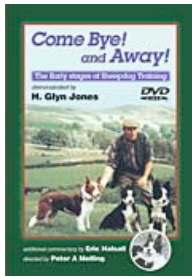
At just under two years old, Roy won his first open trial near St Asaph in North Wales. The following year he qualified for the Welsh Team and he never failed to do so until the year before he died when only his fatal illness prevented the gallant veteran from taking the field. By that time, a spectacular career lay behind him that included over seventy open wins and nineteen double fetch events and finals.

At the big Welsh Open Trial near Aberystwyth (sponsored in recent years by Gilbertson and Page) where three hundred dogs compete to qualify on three fields for a double fetch final, Roy qualified seven times and won four of them.

He was North Wales Open Champion three times.

He was famous for his success on huge taxing courses where his lithe dark body ate up the distances and where his controlled power was a pointer for sheep to mind their manners. His great ability to cope made him a relaxed worker and that, in turn made his master relaxed too.

Sheepdog Training



'Come Bye and Away'. Recommended for anyone who wants to train their first sheepdog. [More info](#) - or [more DVDs](#).

Roy would take to the big courses and Internationals with a confidence that didn't always ride so high with other dogs.

Roy's record at National level was outstanding.

He was in the Welsh Team seven times and Champion twice. To that he added a second, a third, two fourths and a seventh. In 1997 (a year he won fourteen open trials) he was reserve Supreme Champion at Thurles behind Frank Cashen and Jan.

In 1998, however, Aled admits to the one noticeable blip in his career when he behaved quite uncharacteristically in the final at the Lanark Supreme. So surprised was Aled at his recalcitrance, that he even took him for a hearing test (no doubt to Roy's great bemusement). He was back on form with a vengeance the following year, winning the Gilbertson and Page event, the North Wales Championship and the Welsh National.

Then, to set his place firmly amongst the greats of all time, he added the weightiest jewel to a crown already heavy with shepherding gems. In front of his own nation, at Trawsgoed, he became International Supreme Champion and top collie in the land, a richly deserved prize for a truly outstanding dog.

The reigning Champion came out with all cylinders firing in the millennium season and, as well as successes at open level, he took the Welsh National Championship for the second time with a run that Aled rates as good as any he ever had.

It wasn't that everything went like a dream; not at all. The running had been difficult on the Saturday when Aled and Roy were competing, with difficult sheep that were consistently determined to outwit and outpace the dogs. The day was marked by successive retirements and nobody had qualified all day up until the pair took the field, three runs from the end.

Things looked bleak as Aled sent Roy out to the right and, as he settled in at a nice distance behind them, the sheep were already cantering down the field. With masterful control, Roy had them on line thirty yards from the fetch gates and walking nicely through them.

It was at the peg that a potential disaster loomed when one of the sheep took off like a mad thing for no apparent reason, careering towards the visitors with kamikaze intentions. It was then that Roy's innate shepherding skills triumphed and he collected her without any fuss or malice and coolly returned her to her four companions who, fortunately, had stood like proper ladies on the spot.

The packet now realising they were in resolute, foolproof hands did the rest of the course in style with a shed, pen and single that zipped Aled and Roy to victory. In Aled's mind, the run had proved the skill and sagacity of the dog and he was delighted that he had won the day on sheep that had been no better than anyone else's.

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"Goat Mode"

The outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 precluded any sort of competitive shepherding and Roy was in his eleventh year when he came out for the 2002 season.

He was still the dog he had always been, a strong, positive worker who didn't know the meaning of giving in. He remained a valuable worker on the farm and, when Aled set up Ewe-Phoria, his Agri Theatre and Sheepdog Centre he was a popular and much admired performer.

At the Centre, Aled had introduced a bunch of Pygmy Goats as a visitor attraction and Roy was adept at keeping them in order. This wasn't always easy, as the goats, true to type, were great escapologists.

One day, the truants were reported half a mile away and Aled had to hitch up the trailer and take Roy to gather them up. It wasn't easy but, eventually, all were recaptured except one, which had mastered the gate to a neighbour's field and was heading up on its steep incline towards his flock of grazing sheep.

Aled knew this was going to be a tricky one and could only think of putting Roy on a come-bye and hoping for a miracle. You might say he received one because Roy went right out round the sheep and down through the middle of them to meet the little miscreant on it's way up.

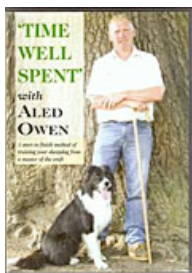
Aled and another handler who was with him, were incredulous. "It was amazing", he says. "He must have been in perfect goat mode because he ignored all those sheep, came down through the middle of them, and brought that goat all the way to my feet. I've seen him bring a single lamb to me out of a flock of ewes, but to do it with a goat is something else."

"Never knowingly let you down"

In May 2002 Aled took Roy to the vet after he very rapidly lost condition and looked unwell. An operation ensued for the removal of a cancerous spleen and Roy quickly began to get better, pottering about the sheepdog centre where he managed to delight spectators by performing simple, undemanding demonstration

exercises.

Sheepdog Training



Time Well Spent. After making this DVD, Ex-World Champion Aled Owen's student ROY (266416) became 2007 ISDS International Supreme Champion!
[More info](#) - or [more DVDs](#).

But in November Aled could see that his great champion was again unwell and, even though the vet reported a normal temperature and sent him home with tablets, he had a strong sense of foreboding.

Three weeks later, Roy was taken in for an exploratory operation. "I left him there and was on my way home when I suddenly thought I should have taken some pictures of him because I had a feeling I wouldn't have another chance. So I rushed back to the vet and asked if I could take him home for a while and I bought a film for my camera on the way.

Whenever he was loose around the yard, Roy would go to the shed s and just sit inside, watching the lambs; he wouldn't try to work them, he'd just sit there quietly watching them. And my last pictures of him are like that."

Aled has had some fine dogs but he unhesitatingly states that Roy was the finest.

"Because he was a wonderful all round dog. Because he always gave a hundred percent and would never knowingly let you down. A strong dog with plenty of power but clean in everything he did. A great dog, and a good friend. I'll miss him."
 by Austin Bennett

Postscript.

On a personal note, Andy and I were privileged to watch Roy working at home just a few weeks before he died. We were both transfixed by his kind, relaxed, easy style and the almost tacit sense of power over his sheep and talked about little else on the way home!

It is our lasting regret that, because of the terrible rain (this is Wales, after all!) we didn't seize the opportunity to photograph Roy. We promised ourselves: "We'll do it next time". Of course, there wasn't one. Roy's probably the greatest dog we've been lucky enough to meet . . . Gillian.

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