

Border Collies

Congratulations! As the proud owner of your Border collie pup, you are entering into a relationship with a dog who will serve you loyally for many years as a companion, playmate, guardian, and working partner. More than most dogs, he will want your active attention, but unlike most dogs, he will repay you by learning anything and everything you teach him - intentionally or not!

Owning a dog requires a pretty common-sense commitment to feed, shelter, and care for your dog's health. If you do normal maintenance, most dogs reward you with affection, companionship, and loyalty. For your border collie, this is probably not enough. Because of their unique heritage, and the fact that they have never been, and hopefully never will be bred for the "show table", border collies want to work. If you do not provide them with something to do, they will probably invent their own job. This has its good and bad aspects. Border collies are fanatically attuned to their people's habits and intentions by nature. You may find that your dog begins "helping" you mow the lawn (by keeping the mower from running amok into the neighbor's yard), hanging up the clothes (which everyone knows will hop off the line and fly away unless closely watched), playing basketball (or hockey, baseball, golf, football, etc.), by keeping the balls under close supervision. These are mostly benign jobs; but remember that cars are moving objects known for erratic behavior unless herded, and this job can kill your dog. Fortunately, border collies are very territorial and very teachable: our dogs run loose but they know that roads and cars are out of bounds - they just needed to be taught both limits.

If you don't own cattle (let's face it, most people don't) what kind of jobs can you give your dog to keep it occupied and a partner in the family business? Here are some jobs other owners have found for their dogs:

- **Small animal control:** ducks, cats, squirrels, chickens, children (other people's) can be watched and contained without attention and worry on your part. Well, maybe a little worry in the case of ducks and chickens, unless your dog is mature and well trained not to actually catch the birds. He won't intentionally kill a chicken or duck, but sometimes the darn things are so wiggly if you try to restrain one that you have to give them that little extra squeeze.....
- **Paper delivery:** get your paper delivered from your driveway to your doorstep, rain, wind or shine. It takes some training of course, because your dog doesn't have any idea that a motionless rolled up newspaper on the driveway is worth his interest. Start by teaching your dog to carry one of those large dog chews made from rolled up cowhide. When the dog learns to carry the leather chew, switch to an old rolled up paper, letting him have the chew after he brings the paper to you. Then ask him to accompany you on your trips to get the paper, and let him carry it (or maybe yesterday's edition) back to the house, and give him his reward when he does. Then teach him to pick up the paper, then to pick it up when you are 10 feet away, then 50, then 100, then when you are on your porch, etc., and always tell him, "Jack (or Rock or whoever)! Fetch the paper". Voila, your personal paper dog.
- **Riding shotgun:** with the usual precautions about leaving your dog in an overheated car in the summer, take your dog with you when you can. He won't chew the car up, or yap incessantly at other dogs, or bark annoyingly at people walking by. Make sure he is trained to see your truck or car as an extension of his territory and you can let him roam around when you stop someplace. People will like him, and he will generate goodwill for you and

yours. Motion sickness may be a problem in young dogs, but they get over it quickly and will love riding.

- **Playing Frisbee:** because of their speed, agility, and motion sense, border collies excel at this game, but interestingly, don't do it naturally which is what everyone thinks. After all, they are not supposed to catch sheep, just herd them. If you throw the Frisbee, your dog will naturally make sure that after it lands it doesn't get away, but it takes some training to get them to catch it and bring it back. Once they get the idea, they are unbeatable.
- **Bus monitor:** if you have school-age children, give your dog the job of making sure the kids catch the bus and get home from the bus. He will not need a clock to tell him when bus time is, and you can be sure that the kids will be glad of the companionship. One caution: dogs take this job seriously. Don't lock them in the house at bus time. We have had dogs go through a screened window to keep their bus appointment. They were contrite later, but I know they would do it again.
- **Finding things:** border collies aren't thought of as tracking dogs, but they are so much more intelligent than, say, a beagle, that they can actually be more useful for "sniffing" out something lost (or hiding). Teach your dog "**find**" and he will be able to locate anything else that he understands, like your hammer, or your cat, or Tommy. One of our dogs, Faith, is an expert at finding escaped rabbits and ducks. My wife need only say, "Find the rabbit" and Faith goes to work, usually with success. Our dogs also know "Find Mommy" or "Find Daddy." I'm sure our children were the ones who taught them that.
- **Doorbell and greeter:** It will be hard to stop this behavior. Border collies are, by nature, very territorial and will want to inform you of incursions, whether by other dogs, neighbors, or the mailman. They have a distinctive bark that always means you have a visitor. Other dogs will learn to avoid your property; friends and neighbors will get used to being noisily greeted and probably "herded" until your dog knows them well enough; strangers will be somewhat uncomfortable and probably not want to approach too closely (Oh dear!) until you have approved them to your dog's satisfaction. Once introduced, most border collies are the soul of bonhomie. Now, border collies are not biters (it is a herding flaw) so if you are looking for a guard dog, you won't want a Border collie - choose a more lethal breed like a Rottweiler or a Doberman. However, unless someone is very familiar with the breed, they will not know that the energetic, noisy, toothy-looking dog rushing down the front walk is relatively harmless, and you can rest assured that if your dog is on the property, everyone else who is will be someone that he knows, or who has your specific approval.
- **Companion:** having made such a big deal about their activity level, it probably sounds incongruous to suggest border collies to people, particularly senior citizens, who want a companion. But, a Border collie at the more laid-back end of the spectrum probably makes a better companion dog than any other breed. Let's face it: the one big drawback to having a dog companion is that, well, it's a dog. In most cases, you will be considerably smarter than your dog and this can limit the relationship. A Border collie companion will not completely remedy this differential, but it is not as pronounced as with a Lab or one of the spaniels, or, God forbid, a setter. Your border collie will learn your habits effortlessly, more of your vocabulary than you would think possible, and will be glad to listen to your stories, walk or ride with you, nap with you, eat with you, and go visiting anyone you like. And, if occasionally you feel like chasing a few sheep, he will be in heaven.

Some other notes on Border collies:

Names: Border collie names are generally short and to the point. Names like Jack, Rock, Kip, Tuck, Bit, Nip, and other one-syllable names are usually good choices. The rationale for this is that long names like Lady ButterCream, or Wainstraight of the Heath, or even the venerable Skippy aren't names that will get a busy dog's attention in the field, particularly if the wind is against you, so working dogs never have fancy names. But, even if your dog is not going to work for his living, remember that he will prefer a short distinctive name – he can hear you calling him better. After all, that's what he lives for.

House Breaking: Border collies are among the easiest dogs to train to use the great outdoors for necessary functions. Dogs from our kennel are usually paper-trained when they leave at 8 weeks, and will quickly develop a preference for the yard. Once they have started going outside they will endure more discomfort than you or I before making a mess inside. Our inside dogs have accidents only if (a) they are sick, or (b) they have been inadvertently locked inside too long. In neither case is it their fault.

Indoors/Outdoors: Among dog owners, this is a no-win argument. My bias will undoubtedly creep through, but with Border collies in mind, here are some thoughts. To those who believe that housing a dog outside (in a cold, dark, lonely kennel, of course) is a criminal offense, I would like to point out that the only dogs who might suffer in these conditions are those breeds which have been ruined by generations of humans trying to breed cute, dependent dogs instead of smart, hardy dogs. Working border collies are very likely to be kennelled winter and summer, and their kennels, if kept clean, dry, and out of the wind, are as much home to them as your bedroom is to you. If you want to keep your dog outside in a kennel, the dog will be just fine. Our best worker, Jo, prefers being in her kennel to staying in the house at night. I assume that being outside allows her to keep an eye on things, and in her case, unless the latch on her kennel is tied down, she knows how to open the latch if she really wants to get out. One of our dogs, Rock, prefers the back room unless Jo is in season, when he will brave a hurricane to sit outside her kennel all night. Jack likes the back porch. If Faith, our diminutive grand matriarch, is inadvertently left out at night, she will remind us that she has been forgotten with periodic little yips that become increasingly plaintive if they are ignored.

On the other hand, if you want to house your dog indoors, Border collies are excellent housemates. Other than a tendency to shed, they are polite, respect off-limits areas, and are not generally going to chew the furniture. But whether kept outdoors or indoors, the one thing to remember is that you are the most important part of your dog's day: if you leave your dog cooped up alone a lot it will suffer, probably becoming reclusive, apathetic, overweight, eccentric, and cranky. The same thing happens to me if I am left alone too much.

Chaining: please don't buy one of our dogs and keep it chained up. Thank you.