

The performer beneath the corded coat

Before 1989, my wife, Maxine, and I had never had a show dog, nor did we ever expect to own one. But with both of our children away at college, we decided it was the right time.

Seeing a *National Geographic* picture of a dog riding a sheep gave us the inspiration to own a Puli. I had never heard of the breed, but I did some research and found that, in Hungary, Pulik commonly jump on the sheeps' backs and run across the herd. Visiting several dog shows in our area to see the breed in person was fruitless, as there were no Pulik entered.

One morning in the local classified ads, there it was: Puli puppies for sale! Maxine and I called and that day went to see the litter. The puppies were cute furry balls, and the dam looked to us like a curly Cocker Spaniel.

The next day we decided to purchase our first Puli. We called the breeder, but the puppies were all sold. Several weeks later, we had a call from Foy Cothren, a breeder who told us about a litter in Benton, Arkansas. We made the call and our journey into Pulidom began.

Starting Out

Arriving at the farm we again saw little curly balls of fur—and then the house door opened and we were confronted by what appeared to be three miniature yaks. We had now seen our first full-coated Pulik. Our host, a champion obedience trainer, gave quiet signals to his Pulik and they performed like fine-tuned Marines.

One puppy walked over to us. We didn't wait to see if it was a boy or a

girl. Maxine announced, "We'll take that one!" Sugarbear Anatasha Gold was ours. Back at home, I joined the Puli Club of America and began to study the breed standard. Tasha became a sweet, wonderful, easily trained house Puli. She was too tall, had a thin coat, and a long nose. So, five years later, I was surprised when her breeder asked if she could breed Tasha to one of her champions. "Why Tasha?" I asked. Foy answered simply: "Temperament!"

Ch. Downhome Windsor Allegro sired seven beautiful puppies, and at 3 weeks old I asked Foy, "Which one will be a champion?" She told us to keep the little blue boy, as he was special. That's Barney.

In May 1997, under judge Eileen Pimlott, Barney finished with a 4-point major. That October, he became an AKC Canine Good Citizen®, and in October 1998 he earned his CD in obedience. As a

dual-ring competitor, we showed in conformation and obedience and won multiple group placements.

New Adventures

It was not until 2000 that we met herding judge Nancy Obermark, who encouraged me to test Barney for herding instinct. I casually trained as a stock handler while also training more seriously in agility.

With Nancy's guidance, we earned an AKC Herding Tested title, and in the next trial earned Pretrial Tested. I became a regular at Nancy's farm in Olive Branch, Mississippi, and began to realize just how much both Barney and I enjoyed working stock.

The Puli is prized for his ability to work. He is eager to please and can be taught to respond to verbal, hand, or whistle commands very easily. Pulik do not require much training if they have strong instinct. Puli handlers, however, need a lot!



Barney in flight on the agility course

Unlike other dog sports, herding involves the wild card: the stock. Barney and I stand at the handlers' post, reading the stock. Then we move quietly with purpose and direction until we reach the final penning and I give a simple command: "Barney, hold." I open the gate and say, "Put 'em up!" The gate closes and his tail begins to wag. As we walk out of the pasture, he gets a soft pat on the head.

Recently, as I closed the gate at a herding trial, judge Rachel Vest said, "That was a beautiful outside flank back!" I thanked her but realized it was all Barney's decision. When he saw we were in trouble, he acted instinctively and saved me.

Later, Vest e-mailed me: "The mark of a good team is not defined by how well they do when things go as planned, but how well they do when things don't go as planned!"

Barney has titles in herding from the American Kennel Club, the Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA), and the American Herding Breed Association (AHBA), and was one of the first Pulik to achieve titles from all three organizations. Also, with no prior training, Barney performed all the requirements of the American Temperament Test with a perfect score.

The Busy Puli

While competing in conformation, Barney and I chased shows every weekend. He lived in ponytails and T-shirts. Bathing a Puli in full cords takes about an hour. Drying takes four to six hours. Letting a Puli get dirty—two minutes! So, after drying his coat, and between breed and group-ring times, I put Barney's cords up in about 30 ponytail holders.

It was pretty easy to juggle ring time between obedience and conformation. Then agility came into our lives and we spent hours as course workers to assure a couple of



Don with Barney in his show days

runs per day. But when I made the discovery that I was blessed with such a talented herding dog, my conformation days suddenly ended. Although I loved the ring, herding was now my passion. After multiple group placements and never a Best in Show, I

finally cut his cords back from ground length to six inches.

As Barney was my first show dog, it was an obsession for me to champion him. Now I am just as proud to say he is a Delta Society-certified therapy dog. When we visit hospitals and entertain autistic children we are always champions.

Since its beginning 11 years ago, Barney and I have represented the Puli Club of America in the breed booth at

the Memphis St. Jude Showcase of Dogs. The booth educates the curious public, but our main goal is to educate the judges. The purpose of the breed is to herd stock tirelessly, all day, in any type of weather. Because of the Puli's profuse coat, judges must learn to see with their hands for structure, angulation, alignment, and proportion. These factors account for the Puli's distinctive fast movement and quick turns.

The Next Generation

Recently, my little Puli, L.E., stepped out of Barney's shadow, taking third place at her first herding trial.

In June 2007, Barney earned a new title—daddy! Along with the lovely Irie, he sired two beautiful pups, Zippy and Ozzie.

Barney is a Versatile Puli Advanced through the Puli Club of America, but he will never qualify for the AKC Versatile Companion Dog title because he hates tracking. Nevertheless, I am proud of my Puli and feel privileged to have such a magnificent, versatile friend.

We are now reading a book on mushing. Does anybody know where we can buy a cheap sled? ♦

Don Gold and his understanding wife live in Memphis, Tennessee, with Barney and L.E.

