

THE WORKING CABEÇUDO BOIADEIRO

Amongst animal species that can perform a specific job for Man, the canine is the only one that can herd, gather, flush, pen, drive and protect livestock. These functions are of utmost importance in the management of livestock. Hundreds of years of mans interaction with dogs and the selective breeding for both dog and livestock have developed into a living, cost effective farm tool, a determined worker and a loyal partner - the stockdog.

The Cabeçudo Boiadeiro, as it was known in some parts of Minas Gerais as early as the 18th century, was utilized as a cattle-driver, herder, gatherer and flusher, as well as a livestock and trooper guardian. This work was mainly done without any herding technique per-se. Many doubled as jaguar hunters, implying they were used as scent tracking dogs to hunt jaguars or other large animals.



Unlike in the United States, where accounts exist of Scots arriving in the American west with sheep and Border Collies (referring to the border of England and Wales) during the late 19th century, Brazilian Cowboys and Ranch Hands did not have an established training

method for managing livestock using dogs, they relied heavily on raw instinct. Also, I'm compelled to suspect they selected pairs for breeding with the strongest qualities for the activities they needed, based on breeding practices used for cows and horses. These cowboys were then as they are today, animal wranglers. Much more so than handlers. In addition, Brazilian forests, jungles and even the plains are extremely rugged and harbor dangers unlike any encountered in other parts of the planet. Only an extreme dog breed could

survive the terrain, the climate, predatory animals, venomous plants and animals and quite frankly, treatment from humans. Brazilian livestock breeds were also developed to be hardy, such as hybrids like the Gir X Holstein, known as the “Girolando”. This is one of the breeds developed to withstand hilly terrain, which is a haven for parasites, while still maintaining a healthy milk supply.

In 2004, while living in Los Angeles, California, I made my first visit to Belo Horizonte with the intent to see these Cabeçudos I had heard of. My intention was to collect information about some bloodlines known for the working Cabeçudo Boiadeiro. I was sadly disappointed that I was not able to see any Cabeçudos actively working with livestock in any capacity at whichever of the farms where I had visited. Most were untrained for herding despite the presence of stock. Many were under-socialized beings that spent their time inside cubicle kennels where they were expected solely to be guard dogs, including receiving rudimentary training for attack of strangers. Nevertheless, I was gracefully taken to several kennels where I visited amazingly beautiful dogs. While visiting kennels, I also was given a plethora of information about their genealogy - factual and anecdotal. Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Raimundo Cruz, Canil Gameleira, Mr. Cristovão Giancotti, Canil Tabayara, Mr. José Edmar Noronha Neves, Canil Começo do Mundo and Mr. Eduardo Camargos Couto, Canil Fazenda das Aboboras, I was able to collect video footage and photographs which I put together in what I called *A Music Dog-umentary*.



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Amongst the vast amount of photographs, articles and videos shown to me, Mr. Cruz had Polaroid pictures of dogs he had bred, actually driving and holding cattle at a Cattle Ranch near Belo Horizonte. Those were taken in the late 80's and the dogs herding were all related to his breeding stock..



During my trip, I acquired a female from Mr. Cruz - Gameleira Gitana dos Tabayara. Her name is the Spanish word for “gypsy”, which is very fitting because she has travelled to the USA and back in the course of her 3 years of age. Gitana is the dog I use today at my farm in Brazil and which I started training for work as a stockdog in



©RaimundoCruz/1989 *Polaroids of cabeçudos*

California. In less than one year of training she had acquired 3rd placement at a trial sanctioned by the USBCHA (United States Border Collie Handlers Association) and today she is actively at work handling 12 heads of milk cattle. Later this year, I will include sheep to her workload.

HANDLING LIVESTOCK MADE FOR THE CABEÇUDO BOIADEIRO

It took a while before I found the correct job for my dogs to do, just the same, I knew they had to have one. While living in the United States, I diligently researched all available training for my 2 dogs. I will not address the importance of socialization and basic obedience training as a fundamental component of learning any working-dog activity. Suffice to say, those are the building blocks for a successful outcome and without them training for a function is nearly impossible.

The first to receive any formal training (besides basic obedience) was the Fila Brasileiro I bought in the US after the sad congenital demise of yet another American Fila Brasileiro. We started out with Search & Rescue training with the Los Angeles Fire Department. It is done gratis, every week-end starting 5 a.m. The process is so difficult that very few people get certified. We did it for a lengthy and painstaking 8 months, yet it takes a minimum of three years to get certified. Certification is only accomplished if all the trials are completed. Those include handler and dog being able enter and ride a helicopter, at least two 25 mile S&R searches on foot, also the handler has to be trained and certified in Emergency Medical Service by the Red Cross or the Fire Department. During the helicopter training and trial, the handler must pick up the dog and take it onto a helicopter that is running.

As my dog grew bigger, exceeding the measures determined in the standard for the breed, I realized it would be impossible to certify him. We learned invaluable information about olfaction, specially about a working partnership. At present, this dog weighs 155 pounds. Although he does not conform to the standard, he's a fabulous trailing dog and we still practice scent detection. He also is living with us at the farm in Brazil.

From the beginning of my interest in the Cabeçudo Boiadeiro, vintage pictures showing dogs in action with cattle attracted and intrigued me. I know now, after training as a stockdog handler, that most of the pictures I saw presented what's known as a Cabeçudo "heading" cattle. In cow-dog lingo that means the dog goes to the head of the bovine and bites its nose or its forehead if necessary, in order to control or change the direction it is going in or simply to enforce its presence in face of an obstinate bigger animal.

Many times we see pictured more than one dog driving stock or one dog at the head and one dog at the heel of a single animal - a very effective technique of

simultaneous control of a large, uncooperative bovine. This is a technique used by American cowboys with Border Collies, Kelpies, Curs (Blackmouth Cur, American herding/hunting dog, recognized by the United Kennel Club) and Heelers; Australian cattle dogs (hence their name) on cattle and sheep, although biting is not accepted in traditional herding trials. In other photographs, more than one dog is circling a herd of cattle - moving it and holding at the same time. That is also a technique used by handlers of Curs and the Louisiana Catahoula Leopard dog.

The following images are very popular CAFIB pictures, published in “O fila”. Those are pictures of a typical bull wrangling situation in a Rodeo style pen



*Pictured here is a typical “head and heel”.
Observe how the animal wrangler is standing at
a distance while the cabeçudo dogs control the bovine.*



In this instance, I believe the wrangler is “getting in the way” of the bovine either because he wants to provoke it to get a reaction from the dog or he simply does not know where to position himself. The Cabeçudo which is further away from the bovine is moving in a circle to get behind the bovine in order to make it move .

The first herding training location I discovered was in Escondido, California. It was run by a couple who had a few sheep and a Trailer Park. It took three hours each way to get there, still I looked forward to going every Sunday. If one is interested in obtaining training for herding, he must be prepared to encounter many prejudices along the way. It's a field dominated by Border Collie enthusiasts.

It is hard to find an instructor open to other breeds. This couple's Border Collies were several times herding title winners. Needless to say they strongly favored that breed and accepted training other breeds and handlers if it were worth their time.

That is precisely what occurred with me. My first instructor was a very bitter man. He was also brutal with the dogs. He was like a drill sergeant, a “good ‘ol boy” who thought of himself as a true cowboy. I took it in stride because I was determined to learn as much as I could, although he was trying hard to

make me hate him. He loved one of my dogs' style and said the dog had finesse in the pen. Meanwhile, he hated the Cabeçudo which barked, because it reminded him of the Catahoulas that he despised. Once he even mentioned that if he ever had a dog like mine he would give it up to the pound! The dogs, on the other hand, loved the training. They had done well on their initial instinct test, and were approved to carry on to Basic instruction.

Ideally, instinct tests are done when a stockdog is a puppy starting from 8 months. Puppies of a stockdog breed are required to show interest in livestock and to exhibit a style or a pattern of work distinctive to the breed. Inherited work behavior patterns include the manner of approaching cattle or sheep, amount of barking, tendency to go ahead or behind stock and other behavioral traits. Clearly among the work behavior traits of the Cabeçudo is heading and heeling as demonstrated in the pictures above. They will also bark, and this is a trait that must be worked on depending on the job it must perform.



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The American Fila Brasileiro “Cherokee” in a well positioned flank

Any person aspiring to utilize dogs to work with stock should first acquire some knowledge about cattle or sheep behavior and reactions to challenges.

One must also have up-dated knowledge of dog behavior and handling. Determination and patience regardless of initial training results are skills necessary to achieve success. Also important is the ability to follow instructions and learn from knowledgeable trainers and handlers.

Lately, there has been a sudden surge in interest of the Fila fanciers towards demonstrating instinct for working with stock. Unfortunately, most have no knowledge of all the necessary components for the formation of a stockdog and end up inadvertently prejudicing the dog or hurting the stock.

I have seen photos of events promoted wherein dogs, are secured by a leash while introduced to stock at a so called Instinct Test. That is not only dangerous in the case of the Cabeçudo, but it is unacceptable as a test for instinct. If a dog is only interested in killing stock it is not a stockdog. If a dog is distracted by anything while he should be either attempting to move or chase stock at an initial test, then it is not a stockdog. Stockdog handling simply put, is a form of managing instinct by taking advantage of behavior that exists already.



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Learning to handle dog and stock



©LigiaMorris/2004 *on my own*

It is unfair for a stockdog to be instinct tested and not be given continuity in the activity, specially if the dog is found to have proper instinct and correct behavior traits. Anyone taking a dog to an instinct test should be seriously considering proceeding with training.

A rancher should consider what type of tasks the stockdog needs to perform and the type of stock to choose the breed accordingly. The Cabeçudo Boiadeiro fits in very well to the type of terrain and the Girolando breed in the South of Minas Gerais where my farm is located.



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circling - a work behavior characteristic of the Cabeçudo

An excellent example situation in which Cabeçudo would fit in perfectly is one where the dog works along with the rider in large brushy pastures to locate cattle by scent or sight. It will gather them up by circling and barking and hold up the herd by barking in front. Riders and dog(s) can then drive the herd while it is being held by the dogs into the pen or corral. Another example is when dogs are used to move cattle between growing feedlots or to push a herd through alleys or from pens. Gitana excels at pushing, flushing, gathering and driving, while Cherokee is an optimum holder, he can hold down a calf or a sheep with his mouth without puncturing.

I would have never learned this vital information if I had not changed instructors. At the the Drummond Ranch, in Acton, California (<http://herdingusa.com/aboutus.shtml>). I encountered a knowledgeable and compassionate instructor that possesses and intrinsic understanding of animal behavior. Trainer Janna Duncan and her partner Paul Hackett train all breeds and also compete in cowdog and sheepdog trials.

At present I have over 20 hours of video footage of much of the work I did in California, to which I am adding footage from the work on my farm in Brazil. Since I was introduced to the sport I have been a zealous enthusiast. To such an extent that I have acquired a farm in Brazil so that I could practice with my dogs free from the breed persecution occurring in the US. Even owning a Ranch in California would expose my dogs to the Animal Rights influenced legislation.

I feel it is necessary to inform the Cabeçudo Boiadeiro owners of all the components involved in stockdog training to the best of my ability. It is my contribution to a breed that has given so much to me and I hope to prevent more damage than what has already been done. It is also important to develop a training language specific to the Cabeçudo Boiadeiro. Also, slowly re-introduce the Cabeçudo to its original function and environment.

I'd like to continue with a second part to this article and address the following elements pertinent to stock dog training:

- 1- Important Commands
- 2- Aspects of Canine and Bovine Behavior
- 3- Methods of Moving Cattle
- 4- Acquiring a Stockdog

Along with detailed explanations I will include photographs from the video footage I have.

Lastly, I'd like to thank CAFIBE members and most importantly its president Ines Van Damme, which has entrusted me with such an important task. I hope I have delivered to expectation.

I'd also like to thank and acknowledge the non-for-profit ONG Clube dos Preservadores-OCP, without whom I would have never been able to commence this amazing journey.

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