

TWIN OAKS: THE CALIFORNIA BRANCH ON THE AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD FAMILY TREE

With Far More Working Trial Champions Than Any Kennel In History, Twin Oaks Has Achieved The Aussies' California Dream

By Sal Manna and Karen S. Russell

"The most consistent, natural stockdogs today, trace their ancestry to a few predominate foundation bloodlines. Las Rocosa, Twin Oaks, and Woods, are the fountainhead of bloodstock that provided the base for the modern working Aussie."

--Carol Ann Hartnagle and Ernest Hartnagle,

The Total Australian Shepherd: Beyond the Beginning (2006)

When Audrey and Muriel Hayes saw their first Australian Shepherd in the early 1950s, the adventurous twentysomething twin sisters were preparing to ride on horseback from their parents' ranch in Lake County in Northern California to work on a dude ranch in Nevada. Thanks to Rita, however, they never made it--and the working Australian Shepherd would be forever indebted to that brown-eyed, natural bobtailed, blue merle with a white collar.

Photo—Audrey and Muriel Hayes, circa 1986.

The day before they were set to leave, they went to the Lake County Fair, where they witnessed Alton Howard Clough, known as Allie, win the Stock Horse Reining Class, though he was in his seventies. After the event, they introduced themselves and told him about their coming travels. Clough, who had been a jockey as a young man but had been operating his Clough Cattle Ranch in Los Molinos in nearby Tehama County since 1912, was fascinated by the grit and determination of the twins.

"He had two Thoroughbred twin fillies and he offered them to us for \$100 apiece," recalls Muriel. "We didn't have that kind of money. So he offered them to us for \$50 each. Then he decided he wanted us to run in some wild cattle and he'd give them to us if we would come up to help him."



Audrey

Muriel

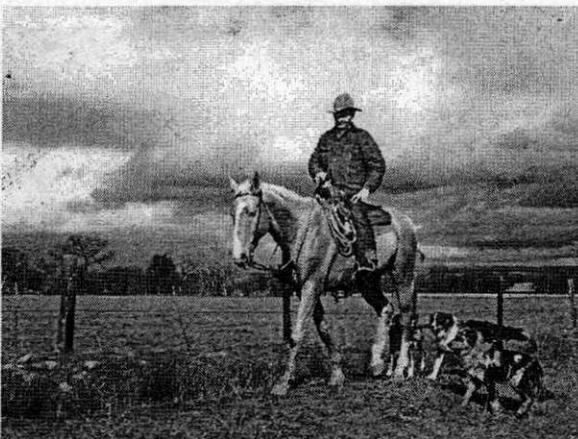


Photo-Allie Clough with unknown Australian Shepherds, circa 1940s.

A few days later, Audrey and Muriel rode into Los Molinos and discovered that Rita, who was around four years old, would be assisting them in the pre-winter round-up. Alongside her was Butch, a dark blue merle cross-bred out of Rita by a hound, and with a hound's voice. Also joining them was an older Aussie, a light blue merle named Chico, who had arrived by boat in the '40s from the renowned Parker Ranch in Hawaii as a gift to Allie in appreciation for his breaking and training polo ponies reportedly for a Mrs. Parker. Chico, who was Rita's sire, had spent most of his years working Clough's bulls and was banged up and cranky. Though Muriel and Audrey would soon win his affection and were the only ones he would allow to feed him by hand, Chico would not be part of the round-up.

Poco was raised around cattle, goats, chickens and rabbits--and worked all of them instinctively, both gathering and driving, without any training with commands or directions. Extraordinarily intelligent, she was able to size up any situation and understand where the stock was supposed to go.

"When the chickens would get loose and go into our mother's garden," says Audrey, "I'd just say, 'Get 'em, Poco,' and she'd slowly wear back and forth and bring them back into their pen." When the goats had to be caught for milking, Poco learned to bay them so Audrey could walk up and guide them to the milking shed. As for the rabbits, Poco would run down escapees and gently cover them with her paws and muzzle until someone would pick them up. "Once, one of our prize litters, just three weeks old, was loose," says Muriel. "We went looking for them and saw Poco walking through the brush with one of the little bunnies in her mouth. We scolded her and she dropped it unharmed and ran to her doghouse--where we found she had the other seven! All safe and sound. She was trying to nurse and mother them!"

The sisters, now accompanied by Poco, continued to work for Allie. Once she was driving some cattle into a meadow, headed for the corrals, when Shorty, an Aussie someone had given Allie to try out, wildly ran in barking and biting at their heels and necks. Allie and Muriel yelled but before they could catch him, the cattle had run off into the brush.

Allie assumed the cattle would eventually return to the road, the Old Lassen Trail, which they had traveled many times before. But when he and the sisters followed that path, there were no cattle to be found. Deer season had begun, and the commotion caused by hunters and Jeeps had apparently kept the cattle off the road.

"But Poco would go into the brush and give a yip," remembers Muriel. "I didn't pay much attention at first but Allie finally told me to follow her. Poco would wait for me and as soon as I reached her she would yip and take off again. She did this several times and then all of sudden she yipped and dashed off to one side and there were four cows coming at me with Poco right at their heels! She drove them right out to the road!" For several hours, Poco patiently plucked cattle out of the heavy brush--all but one. Finally, she disappeared amid the timber without a yip. They stopped for a rest while Allie rolled a cigarette. "Well, I guess Poco failed us this time," he said as he turned his horse around.

With the movement, they heard a "Yip!" and saw Poco run to the other side of the brush. Out came the wild cow like she was shot from a cannon. Poco had been eyeing her all along. She was rewarded with a Jeep ride back to Lee Camp with Audrey and her new husband, Roger Klarer.

The Hayes sisters were determined to become breeders of this working stockdog. At a time when the Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA) was in its infancy after forming in 1957, the same year as the International English Shepherd Registry (IESR), which opened a separate stud book for the Australian Shepherd, the Hayes sisters through Poco set the ideal inner characteristics for the working characteristics of the breed--direct and forceful when necessary but gentle otherwise; intelligent and independent but also quick to learn and willing to please. Says Audrey: "We only kept dogs that were keen and outgoing but not aggressive. We weeded out any Aussie that wasn't willing to come up to you." Adds Sherry Klarer Baker, her daughter: "Mother has no patience for a dog that cannot learn quickly. In a way, they reflect her character. If they could survive the test of getting along with her, they were kept."



Photo- Cain's Jock, early 1960s. Courtesy Hazel Cain.

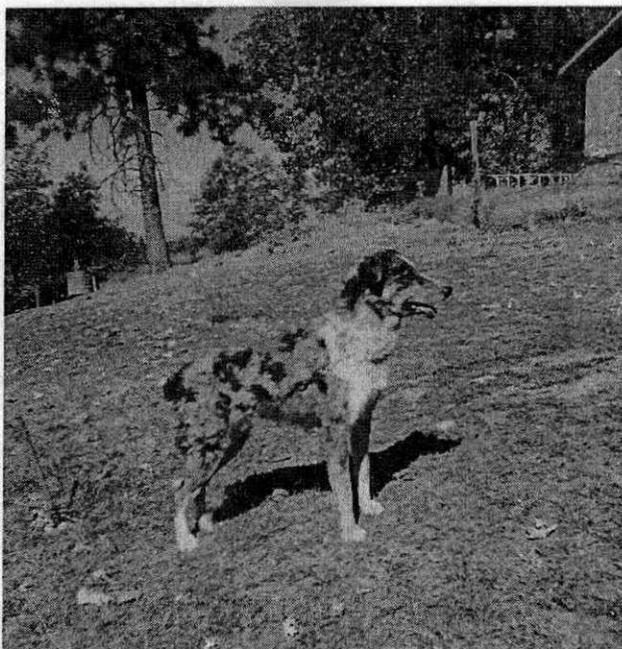
One of Poco's first outstanding crosses was in the early '60s to Cain's Jock, owned by Phillip and Hazel Cain of Burson in Calaveras County. The Cains had bought their first Aussie, Patches, around 1946 when they lived in Livermore, where numerous Portuguese immigrants were ranching cattle and farming hay and had fallen in love with the little blue dogs. So too did the Cains, who now also had a few cattle amid their Calaveras horse ranch.

-that only blue merles would work and were worth keeping. In the '50s and '60s, many of the others were culled.

Photo-Roger Klarer, Audrey, Ralph Klarer, with Poco Lena on deer hunting trip around Markleeville, 1957.

In 1963, Audrey purchased a blue merle bitch from Betty White of Arizona, who had placed an ad in Western Horseman magazine. Klarer's Bug Brush, 22 inches tall, with a bright blue coat and half-blue eyes, was a strong heeling dog, never going to head unless a cow charged her. She had a habit of driving her stock along the fence and then making a wide swing to put them through a gate. Bug was a great granddaughter of Crane's Eli, a large blue merle male found running loose in Scottsdale, Arizona in the early '50s. About a year old and completely wild, Crane's Eli was caught by a horseshoer and eventually ended up with Ted Crane. Beth Griffith of Almostheaven Farm noted that "Eli had such a reputation for working and being a good watchdog, etc., farmers, ranchers and the like brought their bitches to him to be bred. He produced tough working dogs that were extremely protective and mainly one-man dogs."

Bug's first litter produced seven blue merles. Muriel kept a male registered as Hayes's Cloudburst, remembered for his unusual way of relating to horses. He would lie just outside a fence and let a horse try to bite him. Then, patiently, he would creep under the fence until the horse wanted to make friends. Pretty soon, Cloudy would be able to stand under the horse's front legs while the horse nuzzled his back without biting him. Then Cloudy would reach up and lick its nose! "He even did this with the horse that ran Swaps out of the corral," says Muriel. "It was something to see."



Photo—Hayes's Cloudburst, 1967.

None of these Aussies had any formal stock training. Hand signals might be used to send them but, once out of reach, the dogs would work on their own. For example, Little Echo, who arrived in 1967 from Tamra Henry of Sebastopol, was a bright blue merle about 21½ inches and with a powerful eye and strong fetching and gathering instincts. "There were many times we would come home late at night to find Echo holding stock backed up in a corner in the yard," says Muriel. "We were never quite sure whether they got loose on their own or if she got them out. She seemed to just want to keep them in a corner."

One Echo breeding was to Heard's Cactus of Flint-ridge from Colorado. Audrey kept Twin Oaks Cholla and Muriel kept Twin Oaks Cactus Bud, whom she calls "the greatest dog I ever owned, barring none." Cactus could work fighting bulls but nevertheless was gentle with children and puppies. While he was in training for conformation and obedience, a litter of puppies ran into a corral to bark at some horses. The puppies were about to be trampled when 9-month-old Cactus ran in, growled and snapped at the pups and then heeled the horses away from them. In the process, he was kicked and suffered a broken leg, but the pups were safe and there was no doubt about his intentions.

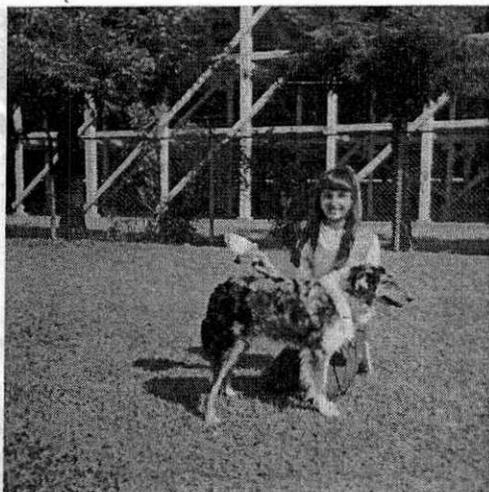


Photo-Sherry Baker and Concha taking First Place in Novice Obedience, 1970.

A nine-year-old Sherry first competed with Bug in 1968, in conformation. Concha became her first true competition dog in 1970, in obedience trials. Then later with Spinner, a daughter of Concha and Cactus Bud, she showed in conformation and, for the first time, stockdog trials just as they were getting organized. Named for her spinning in circles, challenging other dogs to catch her, Spinner inherited many traits from both her sire and dam but had a characteristic of her own still seen in her offspring. A blue merle with heavy black markings, down the center of her face was a perfect straight line separating black on one side and blue merle on the other.

Photo-Twin Oaks Windsong, handled by Kathy Hoyt Warren, 1970.

While she performed very well in the breed ring, Spinner's heart was in being a cattle dog. Also importantly, she was the sort of stockdog who was always trying to figure out how to get the job done. As it turned out, part of her job was helping to teach Sherry about stockdogs. In the late '70s, when Spinner was about three years old and Sherry was in her teens, they decided to train for herding trials, which were then judged Most Promising Young Dog and Open. Thankfully, Spinner also had another teacher--her mother Concha.

Spinner wasn't too fond of heading a bull or a fighting cow but she still worked right beside Concha. Concha could bite a bull so hard on the head that it would drop to its knees. Spinner would wait until Concha had turned him and then heel him in perfect rhythm, stride for stride, hitting hard each time a leg stretched back. During one of their working sessions, Concha hung on a little too long and too hard and broke the top of her jaw. But she finished the day's work without complaint and Sherry, after realizing what had happened, had her jaw wired back in place before nightfall.



Photo-Sherry and Spinner winning Best of Breed at show in Placer Co., 1980.

Photo-Muriel with Cactus Bud, Sherry Baker with Spinner, Maureen Hayes with Paiute and Audrey with Cholla, in Grass Valley, April 1984.



Some 30 years earlier, Rita had inspired a pair of twin sisters to breed Australian Shepherds. A great deal had happened since and much more would happen in the years to come, including Sherry becoming the winningest handler in Stockdog Finals history. The rest of the story, telling the tale of the breeding and training that has elevated working Aussies and trialing Aussies to new heights of achievement, deserves an article of greater length than available here. This statistical summary will have to suffice:

Of the first 96 Aussie WTCHs, eight were bred by Twin Oaks. Of the first seven Aussie WTCHs, #5 Twin Oaks Windsong (granddaughter of Cactus Bud and Bug Brush) was the dam or grand dam of three (#1 Windsong's Shenanigan, #2 Windsong's Raisin' Cain and #7 Windsong's City Rhythm). Of the first 75, she was the dam or grand dam of 13. A dozen more boasted her further back in their lines.

To date, Twin Oaks has been the breeder of two ASCA Supreme Champion Stockdogs (The Bull of Twin Oaks and Kit Carson) of the three in history, one Supreme Versatility Champion, 25 Hall of Fame sires and dams, 26 Stockdog Finals Championships, and 52 Working Trial Champions (more than the next two kennels combined). Twin Oaks was honored as ASCA's Hall of Fame Kennel #6 in 1991. When