

Herding with the Belgian Malinois



[American Belgian Malinois Club](#)
&
[ABMC Herding Committee](#)

Some Resources:

["Herding with Belgians"](#) Facebook Group
Teaching the Rules of the Hunt by Dawna Sims
Hear My Voice by Lynnette Rau Milleville
www.herdingontheweb.com/

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BELGIAN MALINOIS **HERDING CHARACTERISTICS**

INTRODUCTION: The Belgian Malinois was originally the local farm dog of Belgium. The Malinois today is still an enthusiastic and quick worker, bright, alert, and responsive to its owner's direction.

STYLE: The Belgian Malinois' natural tendency is to gather and fetch the stock to the handler. The Malinois usually shows little to moderate "eye".

APPROACH: In the beginning of training, the Malinois usually works fast and quite close to the sheep. The Malinois prefers to trot back and forth behind the sheep while the handler leads the way, often wearing deeply on both sides of the flock. Most Malinois work too close at first, but with experience and training will learn to work wider off the stock and will learn to slow down their movement to better control the stock.

AGGRESSIVENESS: Malinois that are herding should not show unnecessary aggression to the stock. Since the Malinois is fast, it is important for people working with a Malinois for the first time to watch the animal carefully in the first few minutes to get a feel for how aggressive the dog might be. Over eagerness and excitement should not be confused with aggression,

POWER: A Malinois makes his presence felt via his self-confidence and upright-carriage approach to stock. Confidence is fundamental to the overall sense of power the dog conveys.



TRAINABILITY: Malinois are quick and eager to learn. If he perceives commands as wrong or ill-timed, or if he is confused or doesn't understand, he will often appear stubborn in his refusal to work. A Malinois must understand what is being asked of him in order to work at his full potential. It is also important for the Malinois to be able to do useful "work". Malinois are most successful when they can see a purpose in what they are doing.

SUMMARY: Malinois are fast, eager, and often intense when herding. Due to their need to understand what is happening and being asked of them, it's important to have a person knowledgeable about Malinois or other Belgians working with a new handler. If the Malinois becomes confused or frustrated, he may become frantic in an effort to have things make sense to him. This can result in the dog taking out his frustrations on the stock, and the dog being misjudged as aggressive. Although not all Malinois can herd, there is a wide range in abilities of those that do show herding interest.

For dogs new to herding, the use of a long line in small areas is recommended. A long line attached to a harness is quite appropriate for puppies.

EXPECTATIONS IN THE HERDING **INSTINCT TEST SITUATION**

When initially exposed to sheep, most Malinois will almost immediately show interest and move toward the sheep. The tester needs to understand the difference between prey drive and herding instinct. Prey drive, or the desire to chase something that is moving, is generally the first reaction of a Malinois when he is exposed to stock. For a Malinois that will show herding instinct this chase game should almost immediately be replaced by a desire, not to injure or catch a sheep and bring it down, but to bring the sheep to the handler. The Malinois showing herding instinct should circle, attempting to gather the sheep to the owner. It may show wear (moving behind the sheep in a pendulum motion) either naturally or with encouragement. Although either style is possible, the wear is often run well down the sides of the flock rather than in small arcs behind. Even at the first exposure to stock, the Malinois should be encouraged as quickly as possible to wear rather than circle. The Malinois seldom walks straight onto stock without training. "Gripping or pulling wool should not be allowed at this first exposure if at all possible." In the excitement of the new experience, some splitting of the flock may occur, but the dog should promptly attempt to regroup the flock and fetch them to the handler.



It is not recommended that the Belgian Malinois be introduced to stock while restrained on a leash, however, the dog can drag a long line in the event he would need to be controlled. Being restrained on a leash can heighten the Malinois' desire to grab by frustrating the dog to the point of aggressive behavior.