

That Dog of Flanders

Throughout Bouvier history, this dog has held a job.

The Bouvier des Flandres originated in Belgium and northern France as a working farm dog, managing stock and protecting the home and its inhabitants.

“Cattle dog,” by name, the Bouvier helped drive livestock to market and worked by body blocking and managing the lead cows. The Bouvier also was a carting dog, pulling cheese and milk wagons as well as turning millstones.

During World Wars I and II, Bouviers proved their courage by carrying supplies to the front lines, delivering messages, detecting wounded soldiers on the battlefield and doing military tracking.

With the wars devastating its homeland, the valiant Bouvier des Flandres nearly became extinct and it was through the efforts of a few dedicated individuals that the breed survived.

With the decline in farming, the Bouvier’s job changed and it became valued in police, army, and personal protection work. In Belgium, the Bouvier may not hold the title of Breed Champion until it has also earned a working dog title.

The first Bouviers arrived in North America in the 1930s, and they have easily proven their prowess in police work and herding, as well as guardian of home and business.



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What is suitable work for today's Bouvier? Protection Sports

If the Bouvier has an ancestral sport, it is, according to Edmee Bowles of Belco Farm fame, Belgian Ring Sport: a test of wit and nerve unparalleled in any other sport. Belgian Ring is in its infancy in North America. Instead, many are practicing its first cousin, French Ring Sport.

Both Ring Sports, and the newer Mondio Ring, have agility, obedience and protection done without pause on the field.

NAWBA offers a French Ring trial at each championship held in the vicinity of a sponsoring North American Ring Association club. The French Bouvier Club offers a Ring trial at its annual specialty.

Although the sport of Schutzhund was designed as a breed suitability test for German Shepherds, the Bouvier has distinguished itself well in the sport.

Schutzhund clubs are more plentiful in North America than any other protection sport. NAWBA holds an annual schutzhund trial at its championship event.

The sport itself is comprised of three phases: tracking, obedience and protection. In order to earn the title, each phase must be passed at a trial.

A preliminary title, called the BH, tests temperament and basic reliability. It is required before entry for a title that includes protection.



Herding

Herding, or perhaps more accurately livestock work, is part of the heritage of the Bouvier des Flandres.

Bouviers started as farm dogs and their responsibilities included working and protecting cattle and other livestock in the Flanders area of Europe. They can occasionally be found on farms and ranches of North America, where they help manage livestock.

Many of the breed have retained the strong herding instincts of their ancestors and, with training, are noted as having a powerful presence with livestock. In the U.S. and Canada, they may be tested on cattle, sheep and ducks.

Within NAWBA, herding titles are on a par with protection titles for the purpose of determining breeding suitability, and NAWBA is committed to helping preserve and develop this facet of the modern Bouvier des Flandres.

Agility

Think of an “obstacle course” for dogs, one that dogs and handlers have to negotiate together within a time limit. That’s the sport of agility.

A-frames, tunnels, jumps, teeters, weave poles, etc., all at top speed and with no two courses the same!

Bouviers are out there competing successfully in agility.