

# Evaluation of the work potential of Great Pyrenees puppies for the protection of herds

**Mathieu Mauriès (2011)**

## Great Pyrenees LOF protection of herds: myth or reality?

[The LOF, or Book of French origins, is the register established in 1885 that lists the origins of the French-bred dogs.]

For the last 10 years I have lived and worked every day with about 10 Great Pyrenees dogs that protect my herd with absolute efficiency. Indeed, I have had no loss of animals over the last 10 years while I live in an area with large predators in the Alps of Haute Provence.



I have demonstrated the capability of working registered dogs, not born to my pack, and subsequently their offspring. My dogs have shown a remarkable adaptation to the protection of different species: sheep, goats, alpacas, pigs, geese, deer and ponies. My Pyrenees also participate regularly in pet therapy workshops with autistic children. They are perfect towards humans. Since 2006, I have placed as LGDs 28 (LOF registered) Great Pyrenees puppies, born from my pack. The work of Great Pyrenees LOF is

indeed a reality.

## Testing adult guard dogs

Tests on adult dogs have been studied for several years without tangible results to date on a selection of Great Pyrenees. Three separate tests have emerged in France and are undoubtedly a source of confusion for shepherds using guard dogs. The genetic testing has been obtained by different methods and is clearly problematic. Finally, the practical implementation of these tests is far from resolved. The cost is very expensive at 500 € per dog tested for example by the Alps Regional Department.

In practice, judging dogs on one visit, in unpredictable field conditions remains a challenge. Also the time over which dogs gain experience must not be overlooked. To conduct evaluations over

extended periods of time is impractical for simple economic reasons. Another way to assess the ability of guard dogs is to test the Great Pyrenees puppies before leaving for their new herd in order to keep those showing real working potential.

Testing of puppies has never been explored because the pastoral technicians who run "guard dogs" programs have often never raised guard dogs and even less so produced puppies. The technicians are often interested in "dog behavior" that has nothing to do with "protection". Their approach would completely control the reactions and attitudes of a dog that they must trust. In this sense the objective of the shepherds who use guard dogs is that the herd is not subjected to attacks and not the



fact that dogs are "glued" to the herd permanently. By their barking at night and going through their territory by marking it with their urine and droppings, both male and female dogs establish a security perimeter around the herd. Thus, they mostly avoid direct confrontation with predators to which the message is clearly intended. In this lies the deterrent power of the Great Pyrenees. It is also necessary that the number of dogs is great enough to ensure that mission.

Farmers live in an inescapable reality of 24 hours per day with the herd, with dogs and with predators that make life difficult, not to mention hunters, tourists and city dwellers that are a constant source of worry with respect to the use of guard dogs. They need healthy, stable and effective dogs. The dogs need shepherds who understand their reactions and let them work according to their instincts. Who has never seen the look of a Great Pyrenees amidst his flock does not know what a real Great Pyrenees is. The herd is the natural environment of the Great Pyrenees.

## Testing the guardian dog puppies

The role of breeder is absolutely crucial to the success or failure of the establishment of a young herd protection dog. Although it has been proposed that if a puppy is born in the middle of a herd, with virtually no contact with humans, it will be a success. However, for a registered Great Pyrenees, with known heritage, that the puppy is born in the middle of a herd is neither necessary nor sufficient for its success. The genetics is just a favorable factor among many factors.



I have developed a protocol to assess the "potential" of 3 month old Great Pyrenees puppies before they leave the farm. These tests evaluate the relationship of the pup with animals and their relationship with humans. Today the puppies from my kennel that go to work to protect flocks remain in the pack and live with their siblings, at least until they are 12 weeks old. I start talking to them while they are still in the womb. I handle them every day after birth. They are brought into contact with all sorts of different animals. They also have continuous access to toys. The day of their departure, they can walk on a leash and stay chained without any difficulty.

Between 4 and 8 weeks, the puppies, at their own pace, discover the herd by passing under the fence and joining the goats and sheep.

Between 8 and 12 weeks, playing and chasing are very important stages for puppies with puppies from their own litter, as well as the submission to adults. It is essential that puppies are not deprived of these confrontations within their own species. It was during this period that puppies learn to walk on a leash and are trained to be chained. During this period they begin naturally to follow the flock to pasture surrounded by adult dogs.

In fact, this method of breeding is aimed at both the puppies used for herd the protection of flocks and puppies as companion animals. Puppies that leave as companion animals also benefit from the multiple stimuli that offered by life on a farm.

### **The guard dog: a "tool" or a companion of the shepherd?**

Considering guard dogs as mere tools is ignoring the strong relationship between the shepherd, his flock and his dogs. Reducing protection dogs to only a "mechanical function" is to continue to stigmatize them and make their acceptance more problematic by the shepherds of the Alps. A working Great Pyrenees is doing much more than simply protecting the shepherd and his flock,



he is participating in a true symbiosis. The Great Pyrenees must work with his shepherd and not be left alone to herd.

A shepherd may also feel satisfaction and pride in working with dogs as beautiful as the true Great Pyrenees Dogs. We must not forget that the primary motivation for goat and sheep farmers is their passion ... difficult, very demanding and with very little pay. The beauty of the flock and their dogs that accompany them every day feeds and maintains their soul, despite increasingly heavy stresses that overwhelm them such as the return of large predators.



The employment of a puppy who has not grown up in a herd is quite feasible ... Unnano du Néouvielle, Caya de la Vallée du Bois Doré, D'Hara Soum du Prat d'Ourey and Dune Soum du Prat d'Ourey are living proof in my farm. Their direct descendants are now at work in the 28 herds that trusted me and I do not even talk about their grandchildren where I do not control the destiny!

My LOF registered dogs, not born in my farm, have produced truly exceptional protectors. This is the case of the Bougnette du Hogan des Vents from my very first litter. She is so attached to the goats that I have to force her away from the herd to get her to eat.

This confirms the fact that our dogs are always born protectors. Unlike other commercial breeds, the distinction between working lines and show lines has not taken place in the Great Pyrenees dogs in France. Their genetic heritage, preserved thanks to the great work of selecting breeders, is highlighted in this primary function of herd protection.

### **Testing the Great Pyrenees puppies for the herd**

Each of the seven component testing protocols that I propose take place in minutes. All testing is feasible in less than 20 minutes. The puppies will have been assessed by their breeder, according to this protocol, the week before their departure. A second test will be done the day of departure in the presence of breeder and new shepherd. During these tests, the puppy is, of course, isolated from his pack.

The objective of this approach is to validate the working ability of the puppy and to specify the frequency of its subsequent monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician if necessary, to

correct his behavior or that of his master. The best puppies can be irreparably marred by a bad master. Early intervention is imperative to solve a behavior problem in puppies.

Two sets of ratings are assigned to each puppy, so that a second evaluation, if necessary, has some perspective. Indeed, the puppy may be attracted or disturbed by the smell of cattle and dogs brought by the new owners. These tests will immediately eliminate potentially problematic puppies from the “work” destination.

Before testing, the puppy should have eaten and be quiet and not recently very excited. The tests will not be undertaken in extreme climatic conditions.

In terms of maneuverability of the dog, everything is at play during the first months with the new herd. It is particularly important during this period to strengthen the relationship "puppy-shepherd-flock" through simple and rapid exercises. I also advise the shepherds, who are often reluctant, to let their dogs eat the placentas, stillbirths. Adult dogs partially consume the cadavers that they guard. Great Pyrenees also lick the new lambs or new kids just after birth. All these behaviors are normal. Above all, do not prohibit or, worse still, punish them.

These tests are applied whatever the final destination of puppies, or companion or work, since the tests are actually evaluating a work potential.

## **Assessment Protocol of Great Pyrenees Puppies for the protection of herds**

**Mathieu Mauriès**

Note : The breeder is defined as the regular caretaker of the puppies from birth to leaving the farm. For every test :

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
GOOD	A
FAIR	B
FAIL	C

### **TEST 1 – Behavior with the breeder**

Scenario: The puppy is placed in the farmyard or a well-known location, alone with his breeder. His breeder is called, takes him in her arms and puts down the returns on the back and scratches his belly.

GOOD : the puppy responds positively and is manipulated easily

FAIR : the puppy is a little reluctant but can be approached and handled with difficulty.

FAIL : the puppy flees and does not allow himself to be approached or handled

### **TEST 2 - Behavior with a stranger**

Scenario: The puppy is placed in the farmyard or a well-known location. In the presence of the owner, a stranger (the future owner) is called, approaches the puppy and tries to catch him and taking the puppy in his arms. The future owner can have the smell of his flock and of his dogs on his clothes which the puppy can detect.

GOOD: the puppy avoids contact and cannot be caught. He has an attitude of distrust but not fearful. He can go to his breeder.

FAIR: the puppy is interested and approaches. The stranger can catch him but the puppy remains tense or struggles.

FAIL: the puppy approaches the stranger without restraint and with gusto. He lets himself be handled without any difficulty.

### **TEST 3 - Behavior with barnyard animals**



Scenario: The puppy is placed in an area of 20 m<sup>2</sup> with a large breed of poultry (chicken, goose, duck, turkey). The breeder may order him not to touch the fowl. Indicate the type of animal used.

GOOD: the puppy is attentive to his breeder and observes the poultry carefully without any sign of aggression or chase.

FAIR: The puppy is focused on the poultry and tries to chase them without harming them. He listens to his breeder who gives the order to stop the chase.

FAIL: The puppy chases the poultry immediately and tries to catch and bite it. He ignores orders from

his breeder to stop.

### **TEST 4 - Behavior with the small animals**

Scenario: The puppy is placed in an enclosed area of 20 m<sup>2</sup> with a small pet (cat, rabbit, small dog breed under 10 kg). The breeder may order him not to touch the animal. Indicate the type of animal used.



GOOD: The puppy is attentive to his breeder and observes the animal carefully without any aggression or chase. He may attempt friendly or play if it is another dog.

FAIR: The puppy is focused on the animal and tries to chase or play roughly with him without hurting him. He listens to his breeder who gives the order to stop the chase or the game

FAIL: The puppy immediately chases the animal and tries to catch and bite it. It can be aggressive and ignores orders to stop his breeder continued.

### TEST 5 - Performance with large animals not including sheep or goats



Scenario: The puppy is placed in an enclosed area of 20 m<sup>2</sup> with a large animal (pig, llama, alpaca, pony, large breed dog). The breeder may order him not to touch the animal. Indicate the type of animal used .

GOOD: The puppy is attentive to his breeder and observes the animal carefully



without aggression or chasing. He is interested and attempts friendly contact. He may be submissive to an adult dog.

**FAIR:** The puppy focuses on the animal and tries to chase or play without hurting him. He listens to his breeder who gives the order to stop the chase.

**FAIL:** The puppy has an aggressive attitude or is timid with the large animal. He avoids contact and tries to find an outlet for escape or hides in a corner. In case of aggression, he ignores orders to stop from his breeder.

### **TEST 6 - Behavior with sheep or goats**

**Scenario:** The puppy is placed in an enclosure of 25 m<sup>2</sup> which he is familiar with three sheep and three goats. Females without offspring were chosen as they should be calmer.



**GOOD:** The puppy is interested, friendly with the sheep or goats. He is attentive and quiet. He can eat poop, smell and lick under the tail of animals.

**FAIR:** The puppy is indifferent to sheep or goats. He tries to leave the enclosure.

**FAIL:** The puppy is aggressive or fearful. When aggressive, he ignores orders from the breeder to stop.

### **TEST 7 - Handling the puppy**

**Scenario:** The breeder puts a collar on the pup and then walks on a leash. The breeder and pup go and return a distance of 20 m on a nearby path.

**GOOD:** The puppy on a leash accompanies his breeder easily without pulling on the leash.

**FAIR:** The puppy does not accompany his breeder easily. His breeder is obliged to pull the puppy. The puppy protests with cries but follows.

**FAIL:** The puppy absolutely refuses to walk on a leash and tries to escape by any means, barking and struggling.

## **Final evaluation of the dog**

**Dogs eliminated automatically for the job of protecting flocks:** If tests 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 = "C", puppy not suitable for protection work as potentially problematic. Socialization to follow if placed closely with a companion dog. Even with a companion this type of puppy, especially if it



is a male, is for people experienced in the big dogs. Therefore they should get a behavioural assessment by a qualified veterinarian or trainer. The pup would be a good candidate for obedience school.

### **Dogs allowed for work to protect herds**

Gradient of the best [great potential] to the worst scoring [very limited potential]

- Excellent potential
- Very good potential
- Moderate potential
- Average potential
- Under average potential
- Very limited potential

### **Score "A"**

7 "A" scores

- Very promising puppy with excellent potential, to follow as future breeding dog.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

### **Score "A" "B"**

6 "A" scores, 1 "B" score

- Promising puppy with excellent potential, to follow as future breeding dog.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

5 "A" scores, 2 "B" scores or  
4 "A" scores, 3 "B" scores

- Puppy with very good potential requiring regular monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

3 "A" scores, 4 "B" scores

- Puppy with moderate potential requiring close monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

2 "A" scores, 5 "B" scores

- Puppy with under average potential requiring a very strict monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- A review of the situation during the first month following the introduction to the herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

1 "A" score, 6 "B" score

- Puppy with a very limited potential - puppy to avoid if possible - requiring very strict monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- A review of the situation during the first month following the introduction to the herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

### Score "A" "B" "C"

1 "C" score, 5 "A" scores, 1 "B" score or

1 "C" score, 4 "A" scores, 2 "B" scores or

1 "C" score, 3 "A" scores, 3 "B" scores

- Puppy with good potential requiring regular monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

1 "C" score, 2 "A" scores, 4 "B" scores or

2 "C" score, 4 "A" scores, 1 "B" score

- Puppy with under average potential requiring a very strict monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- A review of the situation during the first month following the introduction to the herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

1 "C" score, 1 "A" score, 5 "B" scores

- Puppy with a very limited potential - puppy to avoid if possible - and that requires a very strict monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- A review of the situation during the first month following the introduction to the herd.
- To be reviewed within 6 months after the introduction to the herd.

2 "C" scores, 1 "A" score, 4 "B" scores, or

2 "C" scores, 2 "A" scores, 3 "B" scores, or

2 "C" scores, 3 "A" scores, 2 "B" scores

- Puppy with a very limited potential - puppy to avoid if possible - and that requires a very strict monitoring by the breeder and / or pastoral technician.
- Follow regular telephone during the first month in the new herd.
- A review of the situation during the first month following the introduction to the herd.
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## Remote monitoring of puppies sheet

The breeder or technician should interview the shepherd regarding the puppy's behaviour *especially during the first months with the flock which are critical to the success of the placement.*

Questionnaire showing the development of the puppy's behaviour in the flock and towards humans in order to provide a history of the dog's behaviour.

Questionnaire showing development of pup's behavior toward flock and humans.			
Day of Departure "D"	D + 7	D + 20	D + 30
1. Contact with his shepherd			
2. Contact with family of shepherd			
3. Contact with sheep/goats			
4. Contact with lambs/kids			
5. Contact with guardian dogs			
6. Contact with driving/herding dogs			
7. Walks on a leash			

Grade	Comment
A	GOOD
B	FAIR
C	FAIL

A result with 3 ratings "FAIR" and / or "FAIL" should trigger a quick visit on the farm in order to analyze the living conditions of the puppy and its reactions in the herd and to the people.