

Finding & Selecting the Right German Shepherd Puppy

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In South Africa, the only German Shepherd Dog registrations that are internationally recognized are those registered by the German Shepherd Dog Federation and the KUSA, with the Federation being the preferred organization registering more than 90%. The Federation's International credentials are set out in the Breeders Section: It is the only South African authority that sets compulsory minimum breeding standards designed to protect the Public. The Federation recognizes dogs bred under KUSA jurisdiction, but these dogs may not necessarily qualify to breed under the Federation umbrella. Potential buyers of puppies who wish to participate in the Federation are advised to check beforehand whether the puppy they intend buying will qualify.

This three-part series explains how to evaluate breeders and how to utilize the various qualifications in order to determine parental quality.

Part 2 – Correlating Puppy Price to Quality

You always get what you pay for?! WRONG!

The German Shepherd Dog Federation protects puppy buyers in two ways: by setting compulsory minimum breeding standards and by providing information. However, the mere fact that a puppy is Federation registered is sadly no guarantee that the buyer is actually getting value for money. This is because some breeders simply set their prices according to what the top breeders are charging without providing the same quality, after sales service and guarantees.

To ensure value for money, it is essential that the prospective buyer do some homework and avail himself of all the information that is available through the Federation system. Not doing so can lead to costly mistakes and the buyer landing up with a problem lasting ten years or more.

The Meaning of a “Guarantee”

If a product is guaranteed, it does not mean that nothing can go wrong, only that the seller or the manufacturer will make good by either repairing or replacing a defective product. The Consumer Protection Act protects consumers by mandating that if a product is shown to be defective within six months of purchase, the buyer has the option to demand a refund of the original purchase price, repair or a replacement. Significantly the buyer cannot demand compensation for indirect damages or costs incurred while the product was in his possession.

The dog breeder is at a much bigger disadvantage than a producer of hard goods as there are many things that can go wrong in a dog's life that was impossible to determine at puppyhood; and thus could not have been prevented by quality control. Dogs are biological entities subjected to host of genetic variables that sometimes only become apparent later in life. Add to this the complication that genetics is only a potential, and that the environment provided by the buyer will in most cases influence the physical manifestation of the genetic potential.

For example, consider Hip Dysplasia (HD), which is by no means a problem confined to German Shepherds: at least 40 other breeds have been shown to be more susceptible to the problem. As manifestation of HD can be environmental and not necessarily genetic, it is always possible that the buyer could have unwittingly caused the problem by incorrect feeding, or the dog may have injured itself. In spite of this, most reputable Federation breeders will guarantee their puppies to the extent that they will replace the puppy if the puppy fails the Federation's HD scheme before the dog is two years old. Note that no breeder can guarantee that a dog is "HD free". This is just not possible.

Most large breeders will offer a replacement guarantee if a puppy they had sold ended up with a disqualifying fault according to the Federation's rules and regulations. Understandably it is not always possible or practical for a small breeder to do the same, and to compensate, he should charge less.

The Quality of the Parents

Buying a puppy is always risky and the way to limit this risk is to only buy a puppy born of parents that actually manifest the traits you require. For example, if you want a beautiful well-constructed dog that will protect you and your family, it is unlikely that a puppy from "G" graded parents who backed away from you when you visited the breeder will fulfil your expectations. If you want to eliminate all risk, you could take the expensive option and buy an adult dog that already have all the qualities and training that you require.

In the Federation dogs can enter various tests and events and qualifications so received are then added to their names as a record of their achievements. E.g. *Akio von Arlette, "a", SchH1, Körkl 1 (For Life), VA(SA). In order to properly evaluate the qualities and abilities of a dog properly, an understanding of these qualifications is required.

The following is a summary of the most important qualifications. For detailed explanations, please refer to the Federation's website www.gsdfederation.co.za for the full article or the Federation's pages of the Breeders Gallery in *Animaltalk* in the issues referred to. It is important to consider all the qualifications of a dog and not just one in isolation.

Part 3: *The Influence of Qualifications on Price* to follow in the October issue.

Qualifications in order of merit:

Sieger: German for Champion. The feminine version is "Siegerin". *Ref August 2012 issue.*

In the Kennel Union of South Africa, as is the case in most All Breed Kennel Clubs, the title of Champion essentially is awarded after a dog earns a certain number of Challenge Certificates (CC's) and/or Reserve Challenge Certificates (RCC'S) over a range of shows. It does not refer to a specific event and the title is awarded for life.

In contrast, in the Federation a Champion is, in line with the SV system in Germany, the winner of one of the major classes at the annual National Breed Show. The title is therefore awarded for a specific event and is awarded for that year only.

In order to avoid confusion with the KUSA Champion system, the German Shepherd Dog Federation awards the title of "Sieger" instead of "Champion".

VA: “Excellent Select” grading a German Shepherd can be awarded only at the German Sieger Show or by special permission of the WUSV. Not awarded in South Africa.

VA(SA): “Excellent Select” grading awarded only at the GSDF National Show if an official SV Judge officiates. The grading is awarded to the very best dogs over 24 months of age which conform to the following: Males and females must have passed a Federation recognised HD scheme; Males and females must be Breed Surveyed; Males and females must have passed the courage test with TSB¹ “pronounced”;

V(NBS): “Excellent” grading awarded at the National Show to dogs over 24 months of age which meet the strictest breed standard requirements regarding construction, appearance, temperament and which conform to the following: Males and females must have passed a Federation recognised HD scheme; Males and must have passed the protection work test with TSB¹ “pronounced”; Females must have passed the protection work test with TSB¹ at least “present”;

V: “Excellent” Awarded to dogs over 24 months of age which meet the strictest breed standard requirements regarding construction, appearance and temperament and which have passed a Federation recognised HD scheme, but do not participate in a protection work test.

SG: “Very Good” Awarded to dogs over the age of 12 months and who meet the breed standard in most requirements regarding construction, appearance and temperament.

G: “Good” Awarded to dogs over the age of 12 months with small failures regarding construction, appearance and temperament but that largely meet the Breed Standard requirements.

The Breed Survey

The Breed Survey is a dog’s most important qualification and is divided into three parts:

1. A basic temperament test which includes a gun-sure test;
2. Protection-work in which the dog has to attack and apprehend an aggressive man and
3. A detailed anatomical description, right down to the colour of the dog’s toenails. In this part the dog is also measured and weighed.

The first time a dog passes a Breed Survey, the qualification is awarded for two years and the second time “For Life”. An “*” preceding a dog’s name indicates a valid survey. Until 2010 this was also denoted as “Körklasse” or “Breed Survey Class” I or II (Abbreviated as Körkl I or Körkl II). The two classes were subsequently discarded and a Breed Surveyed dog is today simply referred to as “Angekört” (Breed Surveyed).

The Surveyor also has to identify the dog’s particular virtues and faults and make a breeding recommendation. The final certificate contains a mine of information and serves as a basis for breeding.

The protection-work is the defining factor that determines whether a dog passes or fails. After months of training many dogs fail to achieve a passing standard. It is significant that immediately after biting, at the peak of its aggression, the dog’s tattoo number has to be

checked by a person acting normally: aggression towards this neutral person results in disqualification. The latter is probably mostly responsible for the Breed's innate ability to distinguish when to protect and when not.

Formerly dogs could only be awarded Körkl if they passed the protection-work test "TSB¹ Pronounced". In the present it is still important to note whether a dog is Angekört, TSB¹ pronounced.

Dogs with disqualifying anatomical faults, or which are grossly over-size, also cannot pass a Breed Survey.

Puppies from parents which have both passed a Breed Survey are issued with special (Pink) pedigrees.

The Breed Survey is an excellent temperament test and together with the Show Grading indicates the quality of a dog.

Hip Dysplasia (HD)

"a": Passed the Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde (SV) HD Scheme in Germany. Passing grades can be "Normal" "Fast Normal" (Near Normal) or Noch Zugelassen (Still good enough).

A+, A0 or A-: Passing grades within the Federation's HD Scheme.

Training/Working Titles

Various working titles are recognised by the Federation, but the following are the most common.

AD: Passed the 20Km endurance test

BH: Passed Begleithund (Companion Dog) test. Consists of two phases, a basic obedience test and a relatively strict temperament test done in a shopping centre where the dog has to demonstrate stability in public without the support of its handler. A prerequisite for male dogs entering a Breed Survey.

IPO1, IPO2 and IPO3 (Formerly Schutzhund or SchH1, SchH2 and SchH3): Training test consisting of three phases: Tracking, Advanced Obedience and Protection Work. Over-emphasized in importance by some as these tests are more a measure of a handler's ability to train a dog rather than a measure of temperament of working ability.

Beware the breeder who tries to convince you to buy a "Working dog" rather than a "Show Dog". This is usually a ploy by some to sell you a puppy from inferior quality parents specialising in IPO Sporting competitions. Such puppies are rarely suitable for the public. In essence any dog in possession of a Breed Survey can be trained by a relatively competent trainer to pass IPO3.

Conclusion

The average quality of a litter is almost always lower than the average quality of the parents. Therefore, the higher the quality of the parents, the higher the quality of the puppies is likely

to be. One male can mate 60 to 90 bitches in a single year while a bitch can only have a maximum of two litters. One should therefore always be stricter in the selection of the male.

While bitches may already have a litter at 22 months, which is younger than the minimum age of two years when an animal may be graded V, males may only mate bitches once they are two years old and thus should already be in possession of at least a V Grading.

Always insist on a father who is graded at least V and have passed his Breed Survey "TSB¹ Pronounced".

¹TSB = Trieb, Sicherheit & Belasbarkeit or Drive, Self-assuredness & Stress Tolerance