

IPO/SchH: A great sport, but is it good for German Shepherds?



In South Africa we have had to seriously evaluate the benefits of Schutzhund as a breeding requirement for our dogs. What became clear is that the public were not interested in the qualification and we lost many members who did not see their way clear to train their dogs for this.

When Capt. Max von Stephanitz, the founder of the breed, wrote his famous, and oft misquoted, statement “*To breed a German Shepherd Dog is to breed a working dog*”, he was actually referring to **herding** dogs. He never equated man-work with working dogs, and regarded sheep herding dogs, guide dogs, tracking dogs and rescue dogs all as working dogs.

Von Stephanitz was what we would today regard a “Breed” man. He judged the first SV-Bundessiegerzuchtschau (SV Sieger Breed Show) in 1906 and the Open Male class every year thereafter up to and including 1935. He then fell ill and died during 1936.

He never ceased to promote the importance of anatomy in the breed and in particular concentrated on the anatomical requirements of a trotting dog, which he considered of paramount importance to a herding dog, which for him was the most important of all working dogs.

Around 1920 von Stephanitz became increasingly anti at what he regarded as competition or sport dogs. In this category he placed all dogs that were not actually doing **real** work out there, and included dogs that were only bred for showing as well as dogs specifically bred for the various “working” competitions that were in vogue all around the country. In

order to counter this, the Breed Survey was introduced in 1922 as the norm whereby breeders should breed. Although a form of man-work was included in the test, it was conducted “on-lead” and the aim was to evaluate whether the dog was afraid or not, rather than its ability to bite or to apprehend a criminal.

There was no IPO/SchH test that included protection work in the time of von Stephanitz. The only test available that entailed aggression and protection-work was a police dog test developed in conjunction with a nearby police-dog unit, and civilians were not allowed to participate. Protection work as part of a test open to civilians was only introduced well after World War II, some 15 years after the death of von Stephanitz.

IPO/SchH as a selection tool for breeding **real** working dogs has no creditability outside of the IPO/SchH sport fraternity. All the institutions in our own country, including our Police, Armed forces and Correctional Services, have all investigated the test and could not be bothered to implement it. The situation is the same the world over. Ironically, many Police and Armed forces, including Germany, are ditching the German Shepherd in favour of the Belgian Malinois or a Malinois-cross, the so-called Dutch Malinois: large dogs (65 – 70 cm high and males at 45 Kg plus) with no history of IPO/SchH in the background whatsoever. I believe the main reason for this shift is a general disillusionment with IPO/SchH sport dogs marketed as “working” dogs.

Shepherd people themselves are our biggest enemy, continuously discrediting so called “show dogs” in favour of IPO/SchH sport “working” dogs. In my own company we have built one of the most successful dogs units in the world and deploy over 150 normal German Shepherds (yes, what some would call “show dogs”) to guard banks every day. It would take a number of articles to cover all our successes over the 10 years life of the company. And IPO/SchH? Of no value whatsoever!

Don’t get me wrong, I am not anti-IPO/SchH as a *sport* and participate myself. Let’s just not get our wires crossed. It is difficult enough to breed a VA dog, and to get its DNA, HD, AD, BH, Körkl 1 **and** pass the man-work on the day.

To quote Harold Green: *“It is an immutable law in business that words are words, explanations are explanations, promises are promises -- but only performance is reality.”*

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