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Will the True Working Dog Disappear?
by Fred Lanting (Nov. 2006)

As most of you know, I have been involved with the German Shepherd Dog since 1947 as a trainer, breeder, judge, author, and teacher. My love for the breed is unquestionable and I count it an honor to have fought for its welfare and preservation for all these years. In my zeal for one of God's great gifts to man, namely, the companionship and utility of dogs, I may step on some toes once in a while. But it never from spite or greed or self-aggrandizement that I call a spade a spade, and wish to correct error. Lately I have been railing against the deterioration of character in the show dog and the unwillingness of the working-only faction in the sport to make peace and use "gentle persuasion" in bringing the two communities back together.

For my usual show-and-tour description, look at "Impressions of the 2006 Sieger Show and Tour" on <http://grunfeldshepherds.com>.

In this companion piece, I want to extend those remarks and expand a bit on what the trends are in the world of the German Shepherd Dog. First, I'd like to give my modified definitions of the words type and style. The former word, especially when I capitalize it, refers to those essential, central characteristics that describe or illustrate the breed or an especially good representative of the Standard. The latter connotes the variation within and diverging a little from that ideal. Where the boundary line is between these words, is a matter of individual opinion.

We have already seen the loss of Type in the AKC dog ([great article here](#)) and the old Alsatian GSD's. In England and its satellite colony-countries, this was caused almost entirely by the unfortunate quarantine system. When a species becomes isolated, it develops in such a way as to accentuate certain recessive traits and, by such inbreeding, fix a new type or style. My book, *The Total German Shepherd*, gives a good genetic explanation for this phenomenon. We cannot blame the rabies quarantine in the U.S., but isolation there is partly a matter of distance and cost. The great percentage of dogs do not go back and forth across the ocean for breeding and or competition, so the effect of isolation is just as bad. Maybe worse, since England's proximity to the Continent and, later, the relaxing of those burdensome quarantine times, has allowed the international type to gain a position of prominence there. In North America, the home-bred **AKC-style GSD** is mostly a dog that very few people want. Instead of being Number One as it is in the rest of the world, it hovers closer to the bottom of the Top Ten in popularity. Canada might as well be considered another state in the USA, as bloodlines and clubs are almost indistinguishable.

In the other major quarantine region, Australasia, body style is still largely in the 1970s and `80s rut of the broken or banana-back topline that came about as a side-effect of the emphasis the Martin brothers put on rear drive, and (following their lead) the neglect by many top SV judges of the normal canine topline. It is improving, but the problem that remains is the Australian National Kennel Club, which is their all-breed registry and 1,000-kilo gorilla. The sport and proofing tool of Schutzhund has been banned by the all-breed club and the government, and the GSD Club of Australia has meekly gone along with them.

So, what happens when the powers-that-be in Australasia, the **AKC** and **CKC**, The Kennel Club (UK), and smaller national dog registries have all that power to inhibit the training and competing with protection dogs? They make old Max von Stephanitz spin madly in his grave, for one thing. The breed was developed for the twin purposes of herding and protecting sheep, and protecting their owners and property. This expanded early into using their natural abilities for police and military work as well as Search and Rescue,

and guides for the blind. The herding use has become an anachronism in this day of city growth and Border Collie replacement. Guide dogs are more likely to be Retrievers. Even the military and police dog jobs are being given to Malinois, Dutch Shepherds, and mixed breeds.

In the first 65 or 70 years of the breed, the **German Shepherd Dog** was one breed. The working qualities were stressed almost as much as the aesthetics were. Breeders put almost as much emphasis on training as on conformation. America still relied on imports to keep them reminded about what the GSD was supposed to look like and act like. About the same time that Americans were linebreeding extremely heavily on one dog with weak temperament (the mid-1960s), Germans were beginning to put all their eggs in the one "beauty basket", at least those who wanted the prestige of a good rating at the Sieger Show.

For me, 1967 marked the biggest pot-hole and detour in the road the GSD had been traveling. In the USA, character was being ignored. The (U.S.) GSDCA's Grand Victor of 1966 and 1968 produced a large percentage of "spooky" offspring. The 1967 Grand Victor also had a temperament problem and passed it along, notably to such weak dogs as his son the 1971 Grand Victor, as well as structural problems that became intensified due to unwise excessive linebreeding on him. One of the last German Siegers with really super breed character was 1967's Bodo Lierberg, and he was passed over when he only got as far as Winners Dog (the chief non-champion class) at the American National Specialty that same year. That decision irrevocably skewed the course of the breed in the United States and Canada. After 1967, emphasis in Germany increasingly favored the exciting, driving gait over courage, and several dogs of questionable character strength (or at least, poor character in a large number of offspring) were rewarded with high placing's, even Sieger, such as one notable choice in the mid-1990s. The gap was widening rapidly between working-dog and show-dog Type in this all-important feature.

And that gap kept widening. Despite new SV President Peter Messler's stated desire to make it one breed again, we began to see many conformation-VA dogs with character weaknesses, and high-ranking Leistungen (schutzhund-trial) dogs with weak heads, extremely short croups, and upright fore-assemblies. These are OK for galloping, but not suited for endurance herding and therefore not representative of the historic body construction of the breed.

This trend is short-sighted, even suicidal. In Europe and elsewhere, there is a growing bias against the sport of schutzhund (protection and utility proofing) and the civilian and military/police jobs that this activity was designed to simulate. Why? Many causes. Population growth and career evolution has increased city residence and decreased locations to rear and train your dogs, even though Germany still has a club in easy driving distance in most regions. People elect politicians who are city-dwelling, non-dog-owners: in fact, many of them turn out to be actively anti-dog or easily swayed by the dog-haters such as in the Green Party and other pressure groups. Of course, long ago, the need for sheep-herding all-purpose guard dogs like the GSD started to wither and die, with less demand for wool than for synthetic fibers, and not much demand for lamb versus "factory animals" such as pigs, that demand less land. Besides, the wolves had disappeared and with no need to double as protection dogs, Border Collies are cheaper to maintain, and work at least as hard.

Even in the historic, almost sacrosanct use that gave the other nickname to the breed, "German Police Dog", that job is being filled more and more by the Belgian Malinois and cross-breeds of that lithe, agile, and speedy dog. They have much lower incidence of hip dysplasia, which is extremely important when one realizes the great expense of training and the shortened useful life span that HD brings. Police schools used to depend mostly on donated dogs and purchases at reasonable prices, but GSD breeders generally were not willing to give away their best dogs nor sell them for less than a show-dog or sport-dog buyer would pay. Those schools that do not breed their own, can get good prospects from Malinois breeders at much lower prices than GSD's demand. Therefore, because of the SV's famous slow (or no) recent progress in hip quality (in spite of more than two decades of PennHIP data), the inherently better hips and longer useful life of the average Malinois, maintenance costs, effete politicians who are more afraid of voters' bites than that of the breeds they hate, the image of the brave GSD as a police and personal protection dog has been suffering mortal wounds.

That leaves only one small reclusive refuge for the aficionado of the "working dog": the shrinking world of Schutzhund. As a rule, most of these people are primarily trainers, not breeders; they spend their time and energies in the tracking field, working obedience routines, and building confidence and technique in the bite work. A much smaller percentage or total number of this group breeds litters than we find in the world of the show dog and pet market. The size of the BSP and WUSV performance trials, when compared to the Sieger Show, attest to this. As inflation, living in cities, dog-hating politicians, television (yes, this brain-numbing scourge even exists in Europe) and other factors continue to attack the breed and the sport, the true working dog will suffer.

Shows and breeding of show dogs are also down. Attendance at Sieger shows, of both dogs and people, seems to be less in most recent years, so that even the small stadiums (the only ones available in these days of football schedules booking most dates) look relatively empty. BSP attendance is also down. A few years ago, top VA dogs were getting the maximum allowed number of matings, and now they are not reaching that limit. The situation in the sport dog is at least as bad, and since Schutzhund is the "little brother" in the GSD family, this sub-family in the breed will be hurt even more.

The only way out, the only hope of saving the breed, is to re-unite it. Bring back the two wings as they were in the days of Alfred Hahn and Rummel and yes, even von Stephanitz. How? Well, one step would be to require the conformation judges of the so-called "working dog" classes (Gebrauchshund) to watch the courage tests, perhaps scheduled earlier in the week, and have Leistungsrichters advise them when deciding on the choices of the VA dogs, as these are the ones that get the most breedings. Dogs with high IP scores should be spotlighted and these accomplishments taken into account. Maybe have the BSP before the Sieger Show instead of two weeks later as now occurs, with the judges of the Sieger Show required to watch every dog's performance. Other innovative ideas should be employed that would encourage the sport dog to enter the conformation shows. Dogs should be moved up quite a few placing's if they do good work at the courage test that is currently held on Friday of the Sieger Show weekend. It is a real shame that perhaps the best-working female at the 2006 Sieger Show, the Swedish bitch "Space Geanie", was only given an SG; perhaps if the judge had seen her courage test, she would have been awarded the V she deserved. In males, the tremendous work of dogs like **Nando Haus Vorkamp**, a very dark sable sired by **Buster Adelmansfelder**, should have been rewarded, not hidden from the conformation judge.

Each year, in the tour that I conduct prior to and following the Sieger Show, we visit a variety of kennels and training clubs: some show dog-oriented, some strictly competition performance. Most of my tour participants hold "the total dog" as their ideal, but all of them appreciate seeing both styles or specialties in the breed. As an SV conformation judge (Zuchtrichter) as well as having put schutzhund titles on numerous dogs, I want to see probable functionality reflected in the anatomy of a beautiful dog, but I also demand that character be the number-one trait for dogs allowed to breed.

In 2006, we were fortunate to meet with the breeders and trainers at **Tiekerhook**, **Karthago**, **Pfalzerheide**, Willems' Reprade, and a KNPV (Dutch Police Dog) club close to Amsterdam. Some of my group bought pups from a couple of these, as often happens. You can read about the whole tour on sites such as those listed above, but in this article, I'd like to give, as an example, a kennel that specializes in the working dog. That is, the work that would be suitable for police as well as personal protection and enjoyment. Koos Haasing of **Tiekerhook**, in the southeast corner of the Netherlands near Eindhoven and the German border, discussed his philosophies and methods over lunch and at his home, where we saw his latest litter and his super dog, **Max**. Later, he joined us at the training demonstration and practice at the Limburg club about an hour away, where his top dog was one of those demonstrating their abilities.

Koos is a semi-retired police officer, and the principal leader of a club where very difficult challenges are given to dogs in training, so that they would be prepared for anything they might encounter on the competition field and in real life. I have selected several photos of his Max v. Tiekerhook to accompany this article, as well as a couple of examples of poor performance by "show dogs" in the so-called "working" classes at the Sieger show we saw a few days after the visit with Koos.





No Courage...

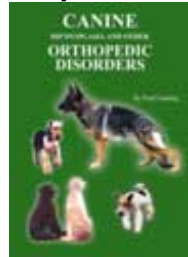
Somebody's in trouble...

Fred Lanting is an internationally respected show judge, approved by many registries as an all-breed judge, has judged numerous countries' Sieger Shows and Landesgruppen events, and has many years experience with SV. He presents seminars and consults worldwide on such topics as Gait-&-Structure, HD and Other Orthopedic Disorders, Anatomy, Training Techniques, and The GSD. He conducts annual non-profit sightseeing tours of Europe, centered on the Sieger Show (biggest breed show in the world) and BSP. Check out his website: www.MrGSD.com



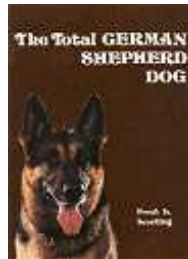
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Canine HD and Other Orthopedic Disorders by Fred Lanting.



It covers all joints plus many bone disorders and includes genetics, diagnostic methods, treatment options, and the role that environment plays. This new Hip Dysplasia and Other Canine Orthopedic Disorders\' book is a comprehensive (nearly 600 pages!), amply illustrated, annotated, monumental work that is suitable as a coffee-table book, reference work for breeders and vets, and a study adjunct for veterinary students, for the dog trainer and the general dog owner of any breed.

The Total German Shepherd Dog by Fred Lanting



This is the expanded and enlarged second edition, a "must" for every true GSD lover. It is an excellent alternative to the "genetic history" by Willis, but less technical and therefore suitable for the novice, yet very detailed to be indispensable for the reputable GSD breeder. Chapters include: History and Origins, Modern Bloodlines, The Standard, Anatomy, The German Shepherd in Motion, Shows, Showing, and Training, The Winners, Nutrition and Feeding, General Care and Information, Health and First Aid, Parasites and Immunity, Diseases and Disorders, The Geriatric German Shepherd, Breeding, Basics of Genetics, Reproduction, Whelping, The First Three Weeks, Four to Twelve Weeks, Trouble-shooting Guide

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