

# GRUNFELD GERMAN SHEPHERDS

## Let's Talk Breeding and Training

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(submitted via web March 12, 2002)

The title of this article stems from a discussion list or website group in the U.K. with the name "Let's Talk Breeding". One of its subscribers said she couldn't "sit by and listen to foolishness without speaking up." While the forum is admirably open-ended, "designed to allow all sides of an issue to be voiced", this gives much opportunity for promulgation of ignorance, spaced-out weirdness, incredible claims, unscientific conclusions, and the like. There is always this difficulty of finding our ways between the extremes of total libertarianism (anarchy?) and rigid governmental-type control. Think of a journey down a fairly broad valley with those extremes being the mountains on both sides. Either you allow all sorts of crazies to speak as loudly as reasoned voices (one mountain range) or you disallow any voicing of opinion other than the "party line" (the other mountain range). The latter is how communist and the equally murderous African/Islamic/Latin/third-world regimes have operated all these many years and only a few of these are crumbling, others rising anew from the lava core of human nature. In this valley, there are many changes of scenery and degrees of slope toward one or the other range.

There are many in this valley who attempt to play the role of peacemaker, and say that "the only way for anyone to make an educated decision is by understanding or at least being aware of the opposing views". But they (we) often have rocks hurled at them from those further up both slopes. Sometimes the arguments get downright silly and based on woeful ignorance of canine psychology, which is both my subject and forte in this instance. For example, in the UK, there is currently raging a tempest in a teapot over whether dogs should be crated. Ever. Never, say some. They cry that "the idea of crates [is] evil, spaying/neutering unhealthy, and that anyone who uses any type of force other than a cootchie-coo is inhumane". Of course, many of us have seen abusive conditions in which dogs spend almost all of their lives in crates, and I would side with the activists complaining about that, but the vast majority of dog people using crates (the airlines call them "kennels") do so wisely and effectively. Crates help train puppies in housebreaking, chewing, and other mischievous activities they would otherwise get into when you are busy with something else. Crates give dogs a "safe place" just like the caves their ancestors used to keep from being trampled on or molested while they nap. Crates keep a dog from being bounced around in a car when you have to brake or turn suddenly. They enable you to take more than one dog with you to training, visiting, and other activities and are infinitely safer than tying the dog up to a tree or lamppost while you exercise or compete with the other dog. The problem is that too many who are soft in the heart are also a little soft in the head, and tend to anthropomorphize excessively, likening a crate to being in some medieval, dank, rat-infested sewer of a dungeon.

One apparent voice of reason reportedly has been banned from one UK site due to "calmly, logically and with research refuting statements that are either erroneous, misleading or have no basis." I have experienced the same exile or being placed on "moderation" (probation) on one or two e-mail discussion groups that I had thought and hoped were going to be open to differences of opinion, even if slightly strongly worded. I used to be very impatient, but in my 50s I went through a mellow stage. Now, after continually hearing the same foolishness for far too long, I am growing impatient again. Sometimes I feel like saying "Don't these dummies want to listen or learn?" I believe that is truly the case. In this post-literary age, when TV and Internet and fast-foods and DINKS (double-income-no-kids --- or at least no parental supervision of same) have made instant gratification a way of life in even the flood of information we swim in, people have largely abandoned both logic and listening. When was the last time you heard of a school teaching classes in logic? When was the last time you got the impression in a supposed conversation that the other person was actually listening to you and your ideas, rather than just waiting for an opportunity to speak?

The other topics that, strangely, have been occupying the worry-time of Brits and other Europeans are not world famine or peace, but tail docking and the pros and cons of neutering/spaying. One of my UK correspondents (not corespondents!) said that when it was mentioned in some communiqués that puppies and kittens are spayed at eight weeks by some U.S. vets, "there was an outcry that would make you think the world was ending." Such a reaction is very curious to those of us living in the land of convenience

foods and instant gratification, especially coming from a U.K. citizenry that believes docking tails is cruel and anything more than an instant of pain. I don't hunt with docked dogs, but I have seen many a litter docked, and handled dogs for people who've reported repeated injury to some breeds' undocked tails. I'm not getting into the argument of how damaging it can be to leave the tail on, but I know what I have seen, and the pups that have their tails cut off whether by hatchet, scalpel, or thumbnail (I've seen all three!) are no worse off right away or throughout life than dogs that step on a thorn that is pulled out right away. Even if I did not live in rural Alabama, where hunting is a way of life for many and is a needed way to keep certain wildlife from populating themselves into starvation or environmental disaster, I could not go along with those who decry docking for reasons of suffering - it's a red herring, it's a non-issue. But the extremists want to ban all hunting with dogs everywhere, even to the point of fines "over there" if your dog catches a rabbit or squirrel. Dogs no longer can work as they were meant to do, if such draconian measures are adopted. And they are. Unfortunately, most politicians are not dog owners and I include the few who allow their wives and kids to have a little foo-foo "dog" on their laps, yet politicians love to make laws that infringe on the lives of others. That's the definition of the word politics: power, over other people. It's also the definition of tyranny.

In the U.S., another storm that is always roiling is between the "show lines" and the "working lines" in what is supposed to be the same breed. In the U.K., Australia, and one or two other countries, "schutzhund" is a dirty word, but in Germany, the U.S., and the rest of the world, it is a major facet of both the dog sport and the proofing of character. Unfortunately, the dichotomy persists despite the efforts of many to bring the two camps together. In the U.S. we have a vociferous and active schutzhund movement domineered by what I call the "scores-only" mentality. It doesn't matter greatly to them if the dog looks like a Malinois, coyote, Dutch Shepherd, wolf, or GSD; only how well it performs on the schutzhund fields is important. On the other extreme is the "show-only" crowd, most of whom are concentrated in the far-out, non-mainstream GSDCA. For the benefit of my overseas readers, I must interject an explanation of these two particular groups before continuing. In the U.S., there are two breed clubs purporting to speak for the breed. Both are members of the W.U.S.V. The voting member unfortunately (by dint of negligence on the part of the rival club) is the GSDClub of America, which is a member club of AKC. The AKC in turn has a "working relationship" with FCI, similar to that of the UK's "The Kennel Club". The other breed club is United Schutzhund Clubs of America, which as the name implies, started as a sports club; it held its first conformation Sieger Show in 1990, if I remember rightly. They prefer the acronym USA, although the SV refers to them as USCA. The GSDCA does not adhere to or even acknowledge the international (WUSV) breed standard, while USA follows in almost every footsteps taken by the SV, in all matters. It does not have any relationship with FCI (the FCI works with only one national club per country, as if all countries were socialist in which government "ownership", control, or sanctions is necessary for validity). As a result, GSDCA leadership, or should I say lack thereof, has caused a noticeable shift in average phenotype in "AKC-Shepherds" away from the international look, the dog that is seen almost everywhere else in the world. This slide started in the late-1960s, when we still had many great-looking but "standard" examples of the breed, but also were seeing many unrepresentative examples being given easy championships (and thus breeding status) at shows judged by an AKC coterie of unknowledgeable judges; these were selected from the ranks of Poodle and Bulldog breeders and others who knew how to read the Standard and pass a written test. Today, the stereotypical AKC Shepherd is anything from a last-place finisher to a laughing stock when it is seen competing in international-type shows under knowledgeable, apprenticeship-trained judges.

Anyway, a current flap in USA/USCA circles is over whether a person should be permitted to breed according to his knowledge and experience, or meet certain artificial prerequisites laid out by "the breed police" (most of whom have an abysmal lack of experience in anything other than training a dog or two toward a schutzhund title). A controversy on at least one e-mail "list" has been over some members of their community breeding dogs that are untitled (by which is meant the schutzhund affix). Some of the novice upstarts have gotten all bent out of shape because a few more experienced people have occasionally bred a bitch or dog without the SchH title. Yet some of them would have no objection to breeding a dog that could only place in the last third or tenth, etc., of its conformation class, as long as it had those magic letters after its name. Even if it could only manage a Koerklasse-2. As long as it had good scores in its trials, especially the bitework part. I know of older, well-versed breeders who are much more qualified and able to make good decisions regarding pairings, and who are castigated for using dogs that would certainly be able to earn those titles, but for good enough reasons have not. Some owners feel the rigors of training late at night in all kinds of weather are not worth the effort and would not tell them anything more about their dogs than they can see in daily life. Some of us live too far away from training

clubs (I know of some who drive 4 hours one way to go to training!) and others do not have a decent protection-phase "helper" to work with. But just let a wealthier "scores-only" compatriot send his dog to Germany (whether for minimal training and a "midnight trial" or not), and that dog is accepted by this group!

My argument with the fringe element in the working-dog community is based on the fact that I do train the dogs I keep, but I am not averse to using an untitled dog if it contributes to the breed and my program. I also make sure they have great character, hips, breed surveys, and anatomy. The only person I have to prove anything to is myself. I know what I see, am a darned-good dog psychologist and trainer, and a consultant in canine behavior. Nobody is forced to buy my occasional puppies, but those who do have their own option as to titling. Titles are but tools and proofs, but preserving the breed is done by preserving the best genes and combining them wisely. The titles are merely clothing and badges worn by the genes. I use them, but I do not put them above the dog's inherent qualities. The important thing is the essence of the dog: the genes, not the uniform, medals, ribbons, accessibility to helpers and training clubs, or other paraphernalia. I get pleasure out of producing good representatives of the breed. Any that I sell and claim to be good schutzhund potentials will indeed be so. Whether my co-owners or customers actually put the titles on them is secondary. Nice, but not necessary. Titles do not change the dog. Repeat: titles do not change what is in the dog's character or genes. I have competed & trained intensively since 1966, and have won in conformation with clients' dogs that never should have won because of character or other flaws, and I likewise have seen innumerable working-titled dogs that should never be in the gene pool. I know how to preserve the breed, and it isn't by using those fakes.

The author has had years of experience as a conformation judge for AKC, SV, UKC, and many other registries, and regularly trains his dogs in schutzhund, trying to live up to the title of his book "The Total German Shepherd Dog" (available from [www.Hoflin.com](http://www.Hoflin.com)). He consults as a behavioral analyst and training coach, and gives seminars on canine anatomy & gait as well as orthopedic problems (he is the author of the book on HD). Lectures can be scheduled by contacting him at [Mr.GSD@Juno.com](mailto:Mr.GSD@Juno.com) or phoning 256-498-3319.

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