

GRUNFELD GERMAN SHEPHERDS

The Most Distant Shepherds --- GSDs in New Zealand

by Fred Lanting

The most remote landmass of any substantial size is New Zealand. It is furthest from so much of the rest of the world that it seems to fit the old joke, "You can't get there from here". Actually, you can, but it takes a heap of doing, and a lot of time. The country is approximately the size of California and, like that granola state, it is divided between north and south, but in the case of the land of the Kiwis, the separation is not so much cultural as it is physical. The north island is known for its rain forests, volcanic hot springs and geysers, tree ferns, and larger cities (though still much smaller than those elsewhere). The south island has spectacular glaciers in the middle, its tip is close to the Antarctic continent and ice, and it has one of the world's southernmost cities. New Zealand's population is around 2 million people and about 40 million sheep (down from 64 million a few years ago because of synthetics and other factors). I think only Ireland can rival its expanse of green, both being bathed in mist and frequent rain, and having great areas still undeveloped by industry. When I first judged here, in 1991, I thought I had stepped back into the U.S. of the 1950s. It was wonderful, and when I was invited to do another specialty in 2002, I was delighted to return. My wife, who seldom goes to dog events, was eager to see the world's most beautiful country again.

In spite of a low population of people, there is a thriving German Shepherd Dog breed fancy in all the land. Schutzhund is a bit harder to find, partly because of the anti-working-dog attitudes that have drifted over with the waves and air currents from Australia. The big sheep lobby in "Oz" long ago spread the phobias and untruths about GSDs mating with Dingoes to create an insatiable, monster, sheep-killer race that would devastate the economy, and the Kiwis soaked up that fallacy, too. Plus, the British influence (notoriously against dog sports other than activities for foo-foo dogs and border collies) has something to do with it. Thus, the conformation showing of dogs, without any real test of courage or utility being required for top honors or breeding rights, is predominant. There are many shows to go to, but because of the low population density, people have to travel great distances for some, even to the extent of including a 3-hour-plus ferry trip between islands in addition to long driving routes.

New Zealanders ("Kiwis") don't like to be thought of as derivatives or poor step-children of Aussies any more than Sheltie owners can stand for their dogs to be called "miniature Collies" or Shiba people to have their dogs referred to as "little Akitas". There is a lot of rivalry and jokes between the two countries, but they share bloodlines and fairly often compete in the other's shows. When I judged in Australia several years ago, there were some Kiwi dogs in competition. It's at least a 150-minute air trip between the countries, so it is economically risky unless the quality is good enough... and it is! Australia and consequently New Zealand have some of the most beautiful world-class GSDs that you'd want or expect to see anywhere. This is an amazing accomplishment, since many factors have worked against it. For a while, GSDs coming into Oz had to be neutered, and at other times there were other restrictions including a nine-month quarantine that would send some of us to the poorhouse. Oh, I forget sometimes, you younger readers don't know what that refers to. It was a whole lot worse than bankruptcy. Anyway, add to those, the fact that worthy dogs are expensive, and the shipping and other costs are high, and you begin to see why the bloodlines "down-under" have been isolated and different from most of the world.

Still, to turn out an international-style anatomy and gait, plus good temperament as far as can be determined without testing, should earn Aussies and Kiwis a gold trophy for excellence in breeding. Although the number of dogs is far smaller in New Zealand than in "Oz", the average quality is very respectable. As you can see from some of the accompanying photos, a couple of famous dogs who happened to be sables put their stamp of color pattern on a larger percentage of the conformation dogs than we see in Germany, the USA, or other parts of the world. Linebreeding on Australian Sieger Prima Zorba and, further back, on the great Scottish import Dunmonaidh Junker (both of whom you can see in "The Total German Shepherd Dog" - www.Hoflin.com) has given the fanciers here many good sables to use in their breeding programs. My choices for Best Male and Best Female (equivalent to Regional Sieger and Siegerin) at the Central Districts GSD Club in Palmerston-North, were both sables. Many class winners or placers were, also. Of necessity, the anti-sable prejudice America has inherited from Germany has not had a chance to gain pre-eminence here.

There is no schutzhund allowed in association with the conformation shows. As it is in Great Britain, and was in the U.S. until the past couple of years, the all-breed national organization does not permit even the courage test that is such a fixture in almost all of the rest of the world. Those of us who understand dogs

and appreciate the truth of "Form Follows Function" may find it hard to comprehend the ostrich attitudes of such people in power, but we have to recognize the possibility that if specialty clubs would not stand for this separation of tests for character and anatomy, they might lose official (government) rights of ownership! Such is life, whether you call it socialism, tyranny, benign ignorance, or stupidity. The working-sport people in N.Z., Australia, and the U.K. have to exercise their enjoyment of schutzhund under a different aegis, a different club, not linked with the government-recognized ones. Therefore, there were no courage tests or gunsureness tests, which I am used to when I judge in South America or other countries. We have to rely on "reading" a dog's body language and reactions to approach and handling instead, to make sure one with very bad temperament does not get rewarded or recommended for breeding. Not a great way to select, but at least it weeds out the real spooks. However, I did have opportunity to see a couple of "working-line" dogs simply because some sports enthusiasts such as Adrian May wanted to show them to me outside of the ring.

The Regional Sieger (from the Open Class) was a mature and handsome dark sable linebred on Junker, named Envahisseur Freeman, bred and owned by A. and M. Wardle. The only import was from Sweden, a very nice son of Mischaland's Kwai, but given 7th place because of tougher competition. I recognized many names of parents when I got the catalog, as I had seen dogs from those kennels in Australia, Jamaica, Trinidad, England, and Germany: Bedwins, Wienerau, von Batu, Noricum, Schwarzen-Zwinger, van Noort, vom Lechtal, Hohen Erle, and Spellbinda. An import that was not shown but who was represented by many progeny including the 6-12-month winner Sonnenstrahl Xano, was Ingo v Frankengold. A striking young male named Ingolsta Ghandi, son of Bedwin's Paddy, won the Intermediate (2-3 years old) class.

In bitches, the Regional Siegerin was also a well-pigmented sable named Beameister Moondust, a 6-year-old daughter of Tolpan van Noort, owned by B. Smith and B. Crewe. There was only one in this large class that had an obvious temperament problem, and I was asked to give it a rating of "Ungraded".

Interestingly, she was a half-sister (by Paddy) to several other entries in the show. Three others were Very Good, and the rest were Excellent. Moondust was the dam of the Puppy bitch winner Beameister Young Hilda, also sired by Ingo. Intermediate Bitch winner was the Spellbinda Ali Baba daughter, Ingolsta Farrah, owned by G. & D. Ingham. Ali Baba is a son of Iwan v Lechtal, a German dog that was sold to Australia and has proven himself to be one of the most important studs in many years there. Best of Breed went to the Regional Sieger.

In the decade since I had judged here before, I have noticed an improvement in topline, at a faster rate than I have seen in the other major quarantine-isolated part of the world, the U.K. During the 1970s and '80s, there was so much emphasis on front angulation and rear drive, that the overline was neglected. Hence, Germany developed (and exported) many dogs with atrocious-looking backs - strong, but ugly. It has hurt the image of the GSD in North America and much of the rest of the globe to the extent that people started believing that all German dogs had "boomerang" or "banana" backs, erroneously called "roached". This came at a time when the AKC stereotype dog was also turning off the general public because of neglect and subsequent structural defects of different types, as well as character faults. With nowhere to go (they thought) for a normal dog, many turned to other breeds. Why the Aussies and Kiwis could make the improvement faster than did the Brits is a matter for conjecture at another time. Many thanks to the organizers of the event, Maureen and Mike Mullany, for the invitation and the winery tours, to Don Wright who gave us his house to use for several days, to Barry Hardy who showed us magnificent vistas on the South Island, and to all the fine folks who trusted me with their dogs and made our visit so enjoyable.

I already remarked on how remote this country is, but what makes it seem even further are the many hours that we have to spend in layovers, early arrivals for security lines, and time to get to and from the airports. The return was even more grueling than the flight over there, because we were both sick. We had almost no sleep for the three nights before our departure, having contracted a really miserable virus. Then, to make it even worse, we had to get up at 3:45 a.m. for a 6 a.m. flight from Wellington that lasted 3 hours and 40 minutes. A 5-hour layover in Sydney was no fun, because security measures would not allow us to exit the terminal to visit friends in Australia during the interval... we had to remain in the facility where the bags were. A 14-hour transit over the Pacific to LAX, then another 3.5 hours sitting there before a few hours to DFW and a six-hour layover there! Again, no chance to do anything except memorize the CNN Airport News. After three hours getting to Huntsville, Alabama, we arrived at midnight, and at our home after 1 a.m. All told, 40 hours travel time, with almost no sleep. But do it again? You bet! I got a chance to see my cousin whom we visited over a decade ago (after a 35-year separation), we saw the south island this time, with a small-aircraft flight over the glaciers, toured a part of the north island we had not seen before, and met some wonderful people. I had a chance to chat at length with some schutzhund enthusiasts who came to this show specifically because they knew of my dedication to the

"total" dog. What might well be the most beautiful country in the world may be far away, but worth the trip.

[ed. note: Fred Lanting offers tours of Germany including the Sieger Show, as well as seminars on orthopedic disorders, anatomy, and training. He is the author of "The Total German Shepherd Dog" (www.Hoflin.com) and of many articles appearing on <http://www.gsdring.com> and other websites.]



(Best Intermediate Female)



(Best Male & Female Puppy 6-9 month)



Best Male



Best Intermediate Male

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