

# A Visit to Karthago and Tiekhook Kennels

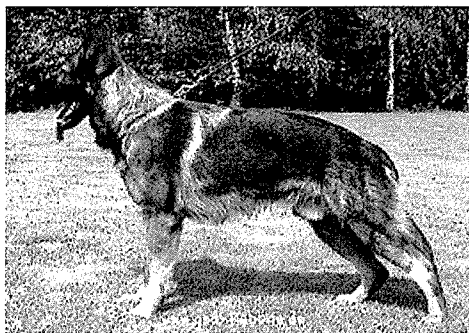
by Chee-chiu Joseph Wong, Ph.D.

*Zwinger von Karthago and Zwinger van Tiekhook are two of the most well known working kennels in the world. The breeders of Zwinger von Karthago are Artur and Ursula Kemmer.*

*The breeder of Zwinger van Tiekhook is Koos Haasing. While both are successful as breeders and trainers in their own right, Artur considers himself more of a breeder and Koos more of a trainer.*

*There is much to be learned by visiting with them, and our discussion focused on bloodlines, temperament, training and selection of puppies.*

**Zwinger von Karthago**  
 Located in Erkelenz in Germany, about 50 km west of Dusseldorf, the Kemmers began breeding in 1974. For the past 20 years, many top-level dogs at the BSP, WUSV World Championship, and FCI Championship have born the Karthago kennel name. The long list includes Fado, Xando and Okar von Karthago, among others. Fado was Weltmeister in 1989 and Vizeweltmeister in 1990; Xando was Bundessieger in 1990; and Okar was Bundessieger in 1993, Mannschaftsweltmeister in 1994, and Weltmeister in 1995. Despite their success, the Kemmers are a modest pair, and Artur attributes much of the kennel's success to Ursula.



*Fado Karthago - 1989 World Champion  
 1990 Vice World Champion*

The most important breeding criteria for Zwinger von Karthago are hips and elbows (ZW under 80), pedigree, and temperament. The Kemmers like Fero vom Zeutener Himmelreich and his offspring including Troll and Timmy von der Bösen



*Xando Karthago - 1990 Bundessieger*

Nachbarschaft, Yoschy von der Dollenwiese, and Aly vom Vordersteinwald. Recently, they added Asko von der Lutter to the list, not surprising since Asko's mother is Haska von Karthago.



*Okar Karthago - 1993 World Champion*

The Kemmers say their criteria for choosing puppy are similar to those of most breeders: descended testicles in males, bite, and character. For older puppies, the dog should also demonstrate character, good structure, and the attributes of working dogs. While many want the "pick" of the litter, the Kemmers feel that some good luck and a very good trainer are more important. For example, Fado Karthago was placed fifth out of the eight males in his litter. Xando was placed as the last puppy in his litter at 11 weeks old, and Okar was placed as the third male in a litter of many males. None of these well-known dogs were the "pick" puppy in their litter.

When asked what is the ideal age to begin protection work, the Kemmers explain that there is no pre-determined age to start; instead, they like to wait until the dog shows that he is ready for protection. Some puppies might start at 12 weeks old, and others at eight months. A good trainer should be able to recognize the right time to begin. Success also depends on the ability to read the dog and determine, for example, when the time is right for a puppy sleeve versus an adult sleeve.

## Zwinger van Tiekerhook

Zwinger van Tiekerhook is located in Reithoven, The Netherlands. Koos Haasing has been breeding since 1973 and enjoys worldwide recognition. The name Tiekerhook refers to his birthplace, located in the east of The Netherlands. As a young police officer, Koos was unable to find a suitable German Shepherd Dog for his work. This triggered him to start breeding, and to date, he has bred more than 150 litters. Besides breeding sport dogs, he occasionally breeds dogs for the police.

For breeding, Koos explains that the parents must have good expression, hardiness, drive, good health, and proven bloodlines. Conformation is emphasized, although not to the extent that it is in the show lines, and Koos feels that conformation is important for the future of the breed. Koos usually uses Tiekerhook bitches in his breeding program. This way, the good, the bad, and the working ability of the dam is known to him. The criteria he uses to select breeding female puppies for his kennel are stringent. For example, Koos feels a full grip cannot be taught, but can only come from genetics. Although some feel they can teach the dog a full grip, he says the problem often resurfaces when working under pressure and engaged by a real helper.

His preferred bloodlines are Fero vom Zeuterner Himmelreich, Sagus vom Busecker Schloss, and Greif zum Lahntal. Above all, Koos likes Nick vom Heiligenbösch, although he says this line is very handler intensive. Koos goes to the Fero line for prey drive, and the others for balance and hardiness. To preserve the genetic traits he desires, he sometimes line breeds closer than other breeders might. He feels that, typically, there are at least two different kinds of dogs: one that is bred for high Schutzhund scores, and the other for work. The former has high prey drive and often focuses on the sleeve in the protection work. Koos feels a "real" working dog should focus on the person. He says that selecting a stud solely based on high Schutzhund scores will bring little value to the breed. He also points out that achieving high scores is not an individual effort, but the collective result of the helper, club members, and the right dog at the right time.

When I asked Koos what his secret to training is, he said training is a matter of drives, knowledge, and being creative. He adds that a lot of people want hard dogs full of drives. While this is good for the breed, he explains that this can lead to problems unless the handler, helpers, and training directors can handle this type of dog. To be successful in training, Koos says there must be a plan in place, with important milestones to identify progress. It is important to learn both from your own mistakes and those of others, to continuously improve, to solicit ideas from others for cross-fertilization, and to think about problems and possible solutions.



Max v. Tiekerhook

Koos begins evaluating pups from the moment of birth. He feels a pup must be fast from the moment he is born—he must show drive to reach the milk. Koos often stays with the mother during whelping and observes the puppies' first reactions. Sometimes he picks up a puppy and places him away from the mother to see the reaction. He looks for a healthy puppy with strong drive (towards food at this age). When the puppies are four weeks old, he separates them from their mother, and the puppies must learn to be independent. At six weeks old, the mother only stays with the puppies during the night. The puppies must show drive, wrestling with each other as much as possible. Six weeks old is a good time to see a full grip. When a full grip is observed, Koos may apply a little pinch to see if the pup stays in drive. This also shows how the puppies handle pressure.

During my visit, Koos showed me how he begins working with his six-week-old puppies on the grip. A puppy that refused to 'aus' was given a pinch on the mouth, so I asked Koos if this would hurt the drive, especially since some trainers believe a puppy should not be disciplined until it's six months old or older. Koos told me that a puppy should experience both the pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life, even at this very young age. It seemed the correction did not deter this puppy and he came back with a nice grip and 'aus' upon command.

One of the highlights of my visit to Tiekerhook kennels was the opportunity to see Max van Tiekerhook in training. Max is a powerful dog with strong drives and hardiness, yet totally under control during all phases of the training. His engagement of the helper is amazing, as demonstrated by flying catches.

The author would like to thank Artur and Ursula Kemmer and Koos Haasing for their hospitality during his visits with them.

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