



Max von Stephanitz

House Divided

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Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. [Matt 12:25](#)

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Bernd vom Kallengarten 1957

The point of no return beyond which show ring structure became irrevocably detrimental to police service and the incessant emasculation of the Schutzhund trial commenced.

Background:

[Who Owns the House of von Stephanitz?](#)
[Decline and Fall of the House of von Stephanitz](#)
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Organizations

SV	Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde, German Shepherd Mother Club in Germany.
WUSV	World Union of German Shepherd Clubs
VDH	Verband für das Deutsche Hundewesen German kennel club, equivalent to the AKC
FCI	Federation Cynologique Internationale, International Canine Federation
AKC	American Kennel Club
AWDF	American Working Dog Federation
USCA	United Schutzhund Clubs of America
NVBK	Nationaal Verbond der Belgische Kynologen Belgian non-FCI National Ring Trial & Registration Organization
KNPV	Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging Royal Dutch Police Dog Association

Perspective

Throughout history it has been the human experience that even the most prosperous and resilient civilizations—as in long standing Egyptian dynasties or the Roman Empire—eventually come to an end. Yet in time, even if centuries, we arise from the ashes.

When at the dawn of the twentieth century Max von Stephanitz founded the German Shepherd it emerged as by far the most prosperous and predominant breed ever. Within little more than two decades it became the worldwide foundation of canine police service and the pride of the German people. The von Stephanitz influence came to be far reaching—that is worldwide in scope, a century in duration and extending to all police potential breeds.

But today—after a century of unbounded prosperity—the working dog community in general and the German Shepherd in particular face existential challenges demanding fundamental, far reaching reform, an entirely new paradigm.

While this primarily concerns German Shepherd affairs other breeds are to greater or lesser extent also involved. Most significantly the Belgian Malinois has emerged as the de facto standard, emblematic of what a police breed can and should be.

As to the other breeds it is with profound grief that I must take notice that the Bouvier de Flanders, the Doberman Pincher, the Boxer, the Rottweiler and the others have virtually vanished from the street and serious trial fields with very little likelihood of ever again reappearing in meaningful numbers.

This has for untold generations of advocates—men and women alike—been a discouraging ordeal involving much of a lifetime in a vain effort to preserve and protect the integrity of these breeds. Over the decades I have come to have enormous respect for these advocates, now mostly passed on and soon to be lost to history along with the breeds and dogs they bred, loved and trained. May they rest in peace.

The existent purebred establishment—including the SV, FCI and AKC—is akin to a dead man walking, utterly devoid of relevant real world utilitarian selection criteria in terms of structure and stride as well as character. Leadership is so devoid of rectitude, credibility or wisdom that ongoing irrelevance would be a charitable description.

Yet new generations—as in the Belgian Malinois—have already arisen from ashes which were the consequence of German atrocities in two world wars. This was possible because Belgian advocates had the wisdom and courage to break free of the conventional paradigm and establish the NVBK in 1963.¹ As a consequence the Malinois is today so well established worldwide as to be fully capable of providing any number of vigorous police or military candidates as may be required as other breeds falter or expire.

A viable future for the German Shepherd as a serious working dog is dependent on working breeders and trainers being able to summon the wisdom and courage to follow the Belgian example and break free from the SV and FCI to focus on real police dogs.

Jim Engel Marengo, July 2026

¹ NVBK *Nationaal Verbond der Belgische kynologen* See Appendix I



The Gray Wolf

Photo Jaroslaw Miernik

Legacy of the Gray Wolf

On the street or tactical level the primary motivating factor in the adaption of the German Shepherd and similar breeds to police service was the creation of a foot patrol partner capable of providing officer security and adversary deterrence, especially at night. This involved both alerting to the presence of any potential foe—through the acute canine hearing, olfactory prowess and keen night vision—and engagement as necessary. In this era prior to squad cars, radio communication and even street lighting the broad strategic purpose was the projection of authority and respect thus enhancing police street presence. In order to understand how this came to pass we must begin at the beginning, more fully explore the process by which the gray wolf emerged as man's best friend.

Canine evolution from the northern gray wolf as the first domesticated animal is established

scientific fact. The wolf as created by nature is remarkably well adapted to his predatory roll in terms of physical structure and especially a social order well adapted to cooperative hunting, the basis for his widespread success in diverse environments. The original canine herding role was essential to the subsequent domestication of livestock and thus the foundation of agriculture.

In nature there are two predominant apex predatory hunting strategies as exemplified by the solitary big cats and the wolf pack.² The feline strategy is based on stealth, a short burst of speed and the sheer physical power to dispatch the prey single handedly. The duration of the hunt is typically measured in seconds. Although there are important exceptions this strategy is particularly well suited to dense forest or jungle environments.

The wolf pack strategy is based on cooperation, tenacity, long distance speed and endurance with the prey often ultimately succumbing to exhaustion as much as inflicted physical damage. The wolf hunt typically extends over minutes rather than seconds or even longer. This cursorial strategy is well adapted to the more open and northern environments where the dog ultimately evolved as a human partner.

There are important ramifications for the relationship with mankind for each of these predatory strategies which in the aggregate are why we have police dogs rather than police cats. The most important of these are the cooperative nature of the wolf pack,

² Exceptions that prove the rule are the lions and lone hunting wolves.



The Night Watch

the canine emphasis on durability and speed at a distance as opposed to the sprint and the adaptability to more diverse climates, particularly in northern regions. The fact that the big cats typically weigh in at several hundred pounds is also a serious impediment to their practical utility.

Early speculation on the domestication process—at the time seemingly quite plausible—was the capture and taming of wolf pups. More recent thinking is along the lines of primitive dogs evolving as semi domesticated camp followers or on village outskirts where they gained access to a reliable source of second hand food in exchange for among other things discouraging or alerting to the presence of intruders. They may well have served as a reserve food supply as did Eskimo sled

dogs and American Indian dogs. These proto dogs— intermediate between wolf and dog—tended to become increasingly less aggressive, smaller, less well muscled and with much less power in the jaws.³

There are diverse practical ramifications of this modern understanding, especially the fact that tamed wolves as we know from contemporary experience tend to be dangerous and difficult to handle. Rather than transforming in one generation quasi tamed wolves living on the outskirts could gradually evolve novel variants in physique and persona over multiple generations.

Thus over time a relatively wide spectrum of these variants—known as landraces and then later breeds—evolved according to region and local necessity or preference. For the obvious reasons the ideal police dog tends to be near to the wolf end the spectrum in terms of physique and character as seen in the early German Shepherds and the contemporary Malinois.

Thus because of performance based selection—informal in the beginning but later purpose driven—ongoing modification in structure, stride and character attributes have adapted the dog for partnership with mankind in diverse working and service roles.

Less admirably since the advent of the purebred paradigm many bizarre modifications have been perpetuated as novel show ring fashion rather than performance based selection, often with seriously detrimental consequences in real life service.⁴

In comprehending and evaluating the evolution of the German Shepherd it is necessary to differentiate change due to enhanced service efficacy from the whim of effete fashion. This is especially pertinent in evaluating the radical changes in side gait and stride over recent decades.

³ Coppinger, Raymond & Lorna *Dogs: A New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior and Evolution*. Scribner, 2001

⁴ Many breeds have evolved as purely companion or ornamental dogs with no practical utilitarian service—such dogs are beyond the scope of this discussion.

Structure and Stride



The stride of the Gray Wolf, precursor of the dog and predominant predator of northern regions. This photo is especially useful in that the relatively short coat and direct side view of the stride provide a good basis for comparison to canine structure. Photo Wikipedia



Belgian Malinois Photo Jim Engel



German Shepherd

In establishing optimal physical structure for specific canine roles such as police patrol it is essential to examine the structure and stride of the wolf in order to postulate what modifications—if any—are or would be appropriate. The above photos and this video clip are thus provided as a basis for discussion:

The wolf in action

What is dramatically apparent in the video is that even in the most adverse circumstances the physique of the gray wolf is admirably well adapted to the pursuit and detainment of the most athletic human perpetrator over any terrain at any distance. Since the objective is apprehension rather than disablement and the officer provides much of the muscle in the actual apprehension the ideal police dog tends to be less massive and robust than the larger

wolves but retains the mobility and athleticism of the original structure and stride. In the most simple terms since it is not broken there is minimal real need other than effete fashion to fix it.



Klodo vom Boxberg set a new direction when von Stephanitz made him Sieger in 1925. My personal view is that he had set the right type and tinkering by later generations tended to do more harm than good.

In the early years prior to the First World War both the German and Belgian Shepherds retained general structural similarity to the wolf as we see in the photos. Today the Malinois—which has always been primarily bred as a working dog with relatively little detrimental show ring influence—still by and large retains this general appearance and is in ascendance as a police patrol dog throughout the world. The German Shepherd on the other hand has been relentlessly evolved without any real regard for the practicalities of police service to effect the fashionable

extreme reach and slinking, toe dragging trot through the sloping top line and the banana back.

The fact that Belgium is a relatively small and vulnerable nation deeply traumatized under German occupation during both world wars led to decades of a general lack of presence as a fashionable show dog virtually unknown in the world at large was in some ways a blessing in disguise.

The German Shepherd on the other hand had an immediate surge in show ring popularity which over decades produced incessant pressure for the new and different, change for its own sake. The tight rein of von Stephanitz and his early successors kept this more or less under control for early decades but in the 1980s came the advent of the age of the dilettantes with a consequent disinterest in actual working functionality leading to insidious loss of ground on the street.

The fundamental question is how should the structure and stride of the police dog differ from that of the wolf. As may be seen from the accompanying photos and the surge in Malinois street deployment the answer is that police dog structure and stride should be generally similar but less massive to that of the wolf, certainly much closer than that seen in the contemporary SV show ring.

Finally on a lighter note if the scenario in the video could somehow be set up as a repeatable exercise with an active decoy at the far end in plain sight would it not be fascinating to put the top ten from the German Shepherd Sieger show, all of the IGP championships, French Ring, Belgian Ring and KNPV through their paces?

How many of these "champions" or select dogs would prove to be as agile, durable, swift and efficient? My expectation would be that the ring champions, virtually all Malinois, would do fine. Were they to attempt this at the Sieger show with advanced billing as a clown act it would fill up the stadium, and I would certainly be first in line. The IGP champions would perhaps be the most problematic in light of the

incessant watering down of the trial, that is the replacement of the scaling wall with the A frame and similar compromises.⁵



House of von Stephanitz

In the creation of the German Shepherd the most profound and far-reaching von Stephanitz innovation was the establishment of formal working trials as a prerequisite to breeding and subsequent registration of the pups. The repudiation of this foundation by the SV a hundred and twenty years later brings us to the edge of the abyss.

Although original focus was on sheep herding and appropriate trials have always and continue to be available they have never been widely patronized because there is so little need for herding dogs in modern Germany.

Shortly after the beginning focus shifted to police service which in the modern form had been pioneered in the Belgian city of Ghent.⁶ The consequence was the creation of the Schutzhund trial which for more than a century was to be the foundation of the breed, serve as a rigorous certification of suitability for police or military service and thus for breeding.

Yet the fact remains that with a possible exception of brief wartime interludes the vast majority—on the order of ninety percent—of German Shepherds have always gone into civilian homes. A major factor in the success of this was the ubiquitous Schutzhund clubs providing training and discipline support. Yet even in America with the enormous post war popularity there was very little real difficulty in integrating these police bred dogs into family life. (It is likely that American imports—primarily show line—in that era tended to be less aggressive and more manageable because it worked well for all concerned.)

Thus in civilian life as well as police service the von Stephanitz protocol based on police potential selection prospered for more than a century because in the natural order of things the distribution in terms of working character—or any other attribute—is according to the famous bell curve. Not every police dog handler is capable of dealing with an especially aggressive dog and there is wide variation

⁵ This subject is somewhat complicated by the fact that the latter years of the nineteenth century as the German Shepherd as was evolving the descent from the wolf was a controversial double edged sword with some seeking to emphasize the connection in support of the robust persona and others to downplay it for fear of an off putting effect on the more timid portions of the public.

⁶ Focus on police service commenced a year or two after the beginning, likely in response the pioneering program in Ghent, Belgium as von Stephanitz acknowledges in his book.

in the capabilities of civilian owners. This natural diversity in character and other attributes enables breeders and police administrators alike to arrange suitable partnerships and make adjustments when the inevitable mismatches occur.

From the beginning and for generations thereafter the allure of the German Shepherd was and is the police dog persona. Although there had been a gradual but relentless segregation into increasingly divergent work oriented and show populations the German Shepherd was still more or less one breed into the 1980s.⁷ But at that point—the era of the slinking banana backs—the show lines began to deviate much more rapidly in terms of structure, stride and working character which was increasingly detrimental in terms of service potential and street presence.

Decline

Over the past quarter century—the Internet era—the SV has endured grievous ongoing losses in terms of annual registrations, membership, working trial entries and conformation show participation. In response they have repudiated the police dog heritage—the foundation laid down by Max von Stephanitz—in order to focus on the lowest common denominator of the pet market.^{8 9} As a consequence we see before us the dire and distressing situation prevailing today.

From the early 1980s to the mid-1990s registrations continued to escalate because the mythology had momentum even though structure, stride and working character were inexorably deteriorating. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time. The 1995 advent of the Internet burst the purebred propaganda bubble just as the German people were coming to realize that the police persona had to a large extent eroded and that in acquiring a pup they were likely to wind up with little more than an ornamental replica, a pretend German Shepherd.

Thus beginning in the 1980s while a relatively small portion of pups were going to police service the vast majority of the remainder were going to citizens who expected to get a legitimate police potential dog—wanted the police persona—but were being systematically short changed and eventually became disgruntled. That the emasculation of the breed was in response to the evolving propensities of the German people is an absurd canard—those wanting softer dogs were already migrating to British breeds such as the Golden Retrievers and Black Labradors, currently in forth and sixth place in German registrations.

Perusal of the registration archives reveals that while in 1995 the SV was humming along at about 30,000 yearly pups by 2024 they were approaching 6000 and dropping like a rock. There are of course many interacting trends, but one—perhaps simplistic but nevertheless lending insight—way to look at it is to postulate that there were 24,000 Germans out there who might very well have

⁷ Humphrey, Elliott & Lucien Warner *Working Dogs* Johns Hopkins Press, 1934

⁸ Many of the other protective heritage breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher and Bouvier des Flanders have been similarly afflicted.

⁹ **Decline and Fall of the House of von Stephanitz**

been willing to purchase a pup had they believed that they were being offered a serious police potential dog, a real German Shepherd, rather than a watered down replica.

Another likelihood is that many or even most of the 24,000 missing in action may actually have been born and are now living happily ever after with their new families without anybody bothering with the formalities of registration. In other words rather than paying 2500 euros for a registered purebred, that is 500 euros for a pup and €2000 for registration—a piece of paper—they just paid €500 for the pup but not the €2000 for the bureaucratic overhead such as ever more complex and expensive mandatory medical screening.

In this age old process a female is bred to a male of a relative or neighbor and the pups are distributed among friends and relatives or sold locally just as they were for thousands of years. I for one will not cast the first stone, for the mythology of purebred superiority is dead in the water. Most likely both of these processes are ongoing, the difficulty being sorting out the relative proportions among these and other scenarios.

The root causes of this debacle go back to the twilight of the twentieth century when men such as Walter and Herman Martin emasculated and then abandoned the Schutzhund trial, entirely repudiated police service and through the blind pursuit of ever more extreme side gait transformed the legacy of von Stephanitz into grotesque toe dragging caricatures.

The consequence has been precipitous decline in terms of working character, street effective physique and ongoing worldwide collapse in registrations. Further ramifications include widespread repudiation by the German people and for all practical purposes the end of the era, the concluding chapter in the von Stephanitz saga.

This decline has persisted for a quarter century with no end in sight. In this era the SV grievously alienated their historical base, particularly generations of German citizens with a long standing affinity for the working dog ethos. Yet the SV establishment relentlessly persists in denial of this police dog heritage, the existential relevance of which is as obvious as the sun rising in the east or water being wet.

The fundamental cause of this estrangement was that the conformation lines became so grievously flawed—in terms of structure as well as character—as to necessitate a ground up rebuild based on existent working lines. Standing in the way of recovery is that after so many decades of palming off pretend working dogs the SV establishment has been emasculated, has not the slightest idea of how to go about breeding and training actual working dogs, that is real German Shepherds.

Thus the primary impediment to reform and thus survival is that the SV conformaion breeders have their heads so deeply in the sand—or up other dark places—that is have no inclination whatsoever to adapt to reality but rather desperately cling to the illusion that they can somehow find a way to hornswoggle the German people into going back to believing that their toe dragging atrocities are legitimate working dogs, real German shepherds. But that cat is long out of the bag.

House Divided

In spite of the ongoing decline of the German Shepherd the fact nevertheless remains that where there is life there is hope. Although the odds are long wisdom and perhaps redemption are to be found in the words of Abraham Lincoln:

A house divided against itself cannot stand.
I believe this government cannot endure,
permanently half slave and half free. And I do not
expect the Union to be dissolved—
I do not expect the house to fall—but I do
expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all
one thing, or all the other.

The United States of America—founded as a nation with liberty and justice for all—persisted for most of a century with a prosperous Southern economy based on the labor of black African slaves. We ultimately had to resolve this existential contradiction on the field of battle. In a similar way we must at all cost resolve once and for all our underlying conflicts on the purpose and reason for existence of the purebred dog in general and the German Shepherd in particular.

There is no alternative—irrefutable reality is that the German Shepherd cannot endure partially a police dog and partially an ornamental dog, it must be the one thing or the other. The less obvious but equally urgent corollary is that the working trial as it exists today—IGP—is so seriously compromised and emasculated as to be useless as a foundation for a serious police breed. Ultimately rectification of these dire straits demands that working dog affairs be firmly in the hands of serious working dog people be it through gaining control of the SV or more likely in alternate organizations.

Although the precise nature of this hoped for better world is beyond what presently can be articulated in any concrete form dialog such as this can hopefully bring focus to the relevant questions and thus eventually to the advent of a viable new police dog world order.

The experience of history is that seeking a way forward in such a crisis necessitates an entirely new approach, the wisdom to conceive and bring forth a new paradigm. This is often a matter of viewing the problem with new eyes—posing the right questions—as a prelude to evolving innovative solutions. When James Clerk Maxwell derived his now famous electromagnetic field equations explaining light and predicting radio waves they were in fundamental ways incompatible with Isaac Newton's laws of mechanics. This dilemma was resolved when Albert Einstein posed questions, such as the relation of mass or time to relative velocity, leading to his theories of Special and General Relativity thus reconciling the work of Newton and Maxwell as the foundation of the modern era of physics.

Although the original concept of the breed was to be an elite realization of a noble utilitarian service—primarily hunting dogs in the beginning—effete fashion and show ring appearance tending to the grotesque rather than service efficacy emerged as the primary standard of excellence, value and prestige. This original sin is the root of the evil bringing us today to the edge of the abyss.

Thus conflicts between working advocates and the show community are existential even though public intercourse tends to downplay them in order to support of the façade, a superficial united front. As is typical of most working advocates of the era my origins

were in AKC obedience which carried on into Schutzhund as it evolved in America. My canine world view was thus irrevocably forged by experience in my original Schutzhund club and in attendance of Schutzhund, Ring Sport and KNPV clubs and trials in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany. From the very depths of my soul I believe that any police breed dog must demonstrate in a serious working trial a strong performance at the senior level in order to be truly admirable and worthy of extensive breeding.¹⁰ In the early years we were quite successful in showing our Bouviers des Flanders in AKC conformation with a number of champions and group placements in short order, but it proved to be an empty, pointless experience soon abandoned.

Although the conformation oriented people generally to one extent or another go through public motions of pretending to comprehend and endorse the necessity of a working dog being capable of the work of his breed it is generally little more than lip service. In their hearts they tend to regard serious working involvement as a quaint, slightly low class vestige of the olden days which today sophisticated, serious people have neither the time, need nor inclination for.

This adversarial relationship is the crux of our problem.

Band aids are not going to fix any of this, the solution is not going to be some sort of course correction but rather a matter of backtracking a half century and rebuilding on a firm police dog foundation. It may not take a genius to perceive and remedy this bleak reality so much as an enormous amount of fortitude and forbearance to implement the necessary corrective measures.

From a broader long term perspective fixing the SV problem, the German Shepherd problem or the police dog problem can only be partial short term remedies because the purebred paradigm conjured up in the foundation of the British Kennel Club in the 19th century is intrinsically and irrevocably flawed in the sense that fashion driven form always prevails over real world function in the service of mankind. At the end of the day the purebred establishment is crashing and burning because it produces nothing of value, nothing more than prosaic ornamental dogs of no inherent utility.

In the cycle of life every man and every culture is destined to die, but their legacy is left as the foundation for the next generation to build upon. Whether we are in the dark before the dawn of a new era or at the end of the heritage will be according to our aggregate wisdom and courage.

¹⁰ For the record IGP as it exists today is not even close to being serious or worthy.

Reality Today

Virtually from the beginning the house of von Stephanitz has been gradually but incessantly separated into breeding lines focused on the effete show ring on the one hand and the real world of street police service on the other. Over the years an enormous amount of ink has been spilled in incessant and often acrimonious rhetoric concerning this separation generating far more heat than light. In my mind much of the difficulty is that this is an overly simplified world view—a more nuanced terminology would perhaps lead to more productive dialog. I find it helpful to think in terms of four deeply interconnected roles:

- Police or military service
- Show or conformation competition
- Home or civilian companions
- IGP play trial competition

Over the past two decades we have seen a dramatic evolution from marginally serious and credible Schutzhund trials to the absurd prancing and dancing of IGP play trials which were stripped of their last shred of credibility with the abandonment of the stick hits.

In the ideal these roles would be served by selected individuals drawn from a single more or less unified homogeneous breeding pool, a situation which to some extent prevailed through World War Two—that is the era of direct von Stephanitz influence—but was from the beginning incessantly exacerbated by the drifting apart of show and work lines. Thus standing before us today are three undeniable realities:

- The German Shepherd show lines and their progeny are inherently useless for police service and beyond restoration or any future real world relevance.
- The Schutzhund trial as a guide to police dog selection and breeding has been replaced by the IGP play or sport trial which—particularly since the abandonment of the stick hits—has become for all practical purposes irrelevant for police dog selection or breeding guidance.
- Serious police level working dog breeding is not in the long term viable where the community of working breeders and trainers do not have ultimate control of registration prerequisites and most importantly working trial rules, procedures and judge selection.

Thus the root of our dilemma is that serious police patrol or military service dogs—real German Shepherds—virtually never come from anything tainted by show line breeding. In other words the separation into two distinct breeds has for practical purposes emerged as the reality.

Prior to the 1980s police service dogs and working trial lines formed a more or less homogeneous common breeding pool. The emergence of incessantly escalating focus on style in the trial—prancing and dancing focused entirely on the handler—has emerged as an increasingly detrimental factor separating play trial dogs and serious police dogs.

On night patrol—the original purpose of the police dog—and still in service today the canine role is to be situationally aware, that is alert and provide real deterrence in the presence of any adversary. The

dancing and prancing dog focused on the police officer would be a serious hazard rather than a useful asset on the street.

Today the unfortunate reality is that the IGP trial has emerged as an absurd parody having less and less to do with real police service. The removal of the stick hits has marked the crossing of the Rubicon, the final descent of the IGP trial into irrelevance. The German Shepherd cannot endure partially a police dog and partially an ornamental dog, and until this principle is perceived and universally accepted no real progress is possible.

Police Trial Champions

Just as the soldier dons his uniform to engender esprit de corps and battlefield identification the police and military service dog must have sufficient uniformity of appearance for non-ambiguous breed identification and to project the gallant persona. Although this has traditionally been established through a written standard the process has proven susceptible to manipulation—at the most fundamental level structure and stride must be defined and constrained by the requirements of utilitarian service rather than the whim of fashion conjured by effete dilettantes.

Given this insight let us now look to the words of Max von Stephanitz with new eyes, a truly open mind:

"The ideal of the Society was to develop **Police trial Champions** out of Exhibition Champions, our shepherd dog therefore, was further developed by dog lovers as a working dog. The **Standard** by which he would be judged and approved was this, namely:—**utility is the true criterion of Beauty**. Therefore our dogs exhibit everywhere to-day (in a fittingly developed frame, and never as the caricatures of Nature, the greatest of all teachers) a build of body, compacted and designed for the highest possible efficiency, spare and powerful, with wonderfully well-proportioned lines which immediately attract the connoisseur, who soon recognizes that it imparts to its owner a swift, easy gait, a **capacity for quick turning** and powers of endurance."

*Max von Stephanitz (1925).
The Shepherd Dog in Word and Picture
(English Translation) Anton Kämpfe, Jena. Page 163*

Building on the words of the founder we proceed one irrefutable logical step at a time:

"The ideal of the Society was to develop Police trial Champions"
Max von Stephanitz

It thus follows directly that the definitive modern purpose of the German Shepherd is police patrol.

*"The **Standard** by which he would be judged and approved was this, namely: **utility is the true criterion of Beauty**."* Max von Stephanitz

Thus the definitive conformation standard—the ultimate and binding criteria of excellence in intrinsic structure and stride—is street level police performance **as validated in the police dog trial**.

It thus follows that since this is and must be the definitive standard any written document or description is by irrefutable logic derivative and only valid according to the extent that it produces uncompromised excellence on the street.

Thus ultimately preservation of proper conformation must be adherence to the principle that form follows function rather than any sort of written standard which must always be relegated to a secondary and derivative role. Within these broad constraints—which must be scrupulously respected—there of course remain secondary aspects, such as coat color and texture, which can contribute to breed identity and commonality of appearance through conformation ring selection.

In stepping back and taking a wide view of working dog evolution the Belgian Malinois has in the broad sense evolved according to these principles while the German Shepherd has in recent years evolved at the whim of tinkering dilettantes such as the Martin brothers with minimal knowledge of or interest in real world street service or indeed any aspect of practical canine physique. The consequence is the unmitigated disaster—the repudiation of the legacy of von Stephanitz—we see before us today.

Quick Turning

Von Stephanitz makes an emphatic point of agility—the **capacity for quick turning**—but what does this mean on the street? Something akin to this video clip provides a concrete real world example: [**Canine Agility in Action**](#)

That the extremes of the show ring have rendered the modern German Shepherd anything but agile cannot be denied; specimens from the winning conformation lines attempting a "quick turn" would likely as not wind up sprawled on the ground. Indeed one prominent international judge has commented that the winners at times experience obvious difficulty in jumping up onto the podium to receive their trophy. Is it not a sad commentary that in the surrealistic world of the SV show ring—the legacy of the Martin boys—police service level agility has for all practical purposes become a virtual disqualifying fault?

Since the Belgians were first on the street with police patrol and the Belgian Malinois—generally capable of the performance in the above video clip—is making deep inroads in both sport and street service perhaps we need to take a serious look at the Belgian and French Ring Sport programs, particularly those aspects where the decoy is expected to take vigorous evasive action to avoid the grip, thus more realistically replicating the real world.

Original Sin

In spite of the fact that the Schutzhund trial was created by von Stephanitz as the ultimate and definitive physical as well as moral standard virtually every modification to the rules and procedures over the past half century has been an accommodation to festering physical or character deficiencies in the show lines.

This is absurd, an abomination. When dogs fail to live up to the physical performance or police character standard then inherit flaws must be ruthlessly eradicated to bring compliance with the necessities of the street rather than tolerated and propagated by the

ongoing inadequate rigor of the trial. Reform will necessitate return to 1970 era Schutzhund or something very similar and vigorous enforcement of rules and standards.

In order to restore breed credibility and virility every dog eligible for select designation at a Sieger show should be required to pass a preliminary, public Schutzhund III trial with a vigorous decoy previously unknown to the dog and an elite presiding judge for all select eligible candidates. This working judge would either be or stand in the ring with the judge—with trial records in hand—making final selections and rankings.

The preliminary protection tests featured and often shown as internet video clips at these major conformation events featuring a supposed "attack" on the handler and a short "courage" test are a farce and an embarrassment. The helper typically slides sideways or even slightly backwards, rather than driving directly into the dog, gently feeding the sleeve while waving the stick low and behind out of sight rather than overhead in a truly threatening manner. Yet rather than embarrassed silence the audience reaction is more often than not applause while those present with real knowledge of and concern for the breed are torn laughter and scorn.



Home with the Troops

In the aftermath of the First World War German Shepherds came home with the troops and were so commonly referred to as police dogs that the terms would remain synonymous for the rest of the century pending the emergence of the Malinois. By the mid-1920s they were hands down the predominant AKC breed in terms of registration and as the foundation of American police service. Civilian ownership, the vast majority, was driven by the perceived police dog persona, the desire to own and live with a robust dog of overt protection potential. This paradigm prevailed worldwide.

In the 1930s the Doberman Pincher arrived in a second wave for those seeking a more elite and exclusive persona. These Doberman advocates were promotional spin doctors par excellence and as a result this breed became the predominant United States Marine Corps patrol dog in the South Pacific Theater of World War Two. The moniker "Devil Dogs" was coined by these promoters, but does not appear in the book by Captain William Putney, the Marine Corps officer who led the program in initial training and deployment. Putney virtually single handedly created a War Memorial for these Dobermans, but recommended that in the future the German Shepherd should be preferred.¹¹ The spin doctors had come up grievously short as serious working breeders and trainers, which was not entirely their fault in a land bereft of any sort of practical police or military working culture.

There is a pattern here. As the German Shepherd became increasingly common and prosaic those seeking to be perceived as more elite first sought out the Doberman and after the Second World War it was to be the turn of the Rottweiler. Aggressive Molosser

¹¹ Putney, William *Always Faithful: A Memoir of the Marine Dogs of WWII*. Washington: Brassey's, 2001

breeds such as the Dogo Argentino were taken up in smaller numbers by those with an especially urgent need for the propped up macho persona.

But not every Joe Sixpack was equipped to deal with a real police dog. Clever breeders with an eye to the bottom line quickly adapted the strategy of breeding soft dogs for the soft people with the desire but the lack of the ability to deal with such dogs. Sort of like painting racing stripes on prosaic Detroit sedans and palming them off as track ready race cars. The problem was of course that Mr. Sixpack's sons and daughters tended to see through the ruse and go looking for something "real" in a new breed.

USCA

The United Schutzhund Clubs of America (USCA) was founded in the late 1970s as a unified, comprehensive all breed entity to bring order out of the chaos of the fledgling American Schutzhund movement. Today it is by far the largest, most influential and predominant American working dog organization. Unfortunately over the intervening half century the words have somehow been transformed:

- United From the beginning presented and promoted as all-breed. Had it actually been a German Shepherd club those words would most certainly have appeared in the name. The reality is that it was later hijacked by the SV for commercial purposes.
- Schutzhund Long gone, replaced by the pathetic IGP play sport.
- Clubs More and more overtly commercial entities with non-voting clients rather than voting members.
- America Run by and for Germany as a commercial propaganda and distribution subsidiary.

None of this is inherently the fault of American leadership—for we were still young, idealistic and incredibly naïve—but rather the avarice and venality in the German mother club, that is the SV. The fact nevertheless remains that we had been hijacked as unpaid agents in their commercial dog marketing operation—which would not be quite so onerous if we were primarily promoting actual working dogs rather than show line replicas.



Thus although in the beginning an all-breed working dog sport organization over time USCA was hijacked and shoehorned into the SV image and likeness thus inheriting the overbearing cost of micromanagement of the bloated infrastructure and ever proliferating medical certifications and other breeding requirements.

But unlike Europe where there seems to be a Schutzhund club in every other neighborhood in America after a half century of pulling up our bootstraps clubs are still far apart and often commercial enterprises with paying clients rather than members.

Unlike Europe where clubs tend to be working or middle class in America today they are all too often more akin to polo clubs made up of rich dilettantes. Increasing numbers are employing overtly commercial trainers rather than holding an amateur club affiliation,

which is incessantly eroding the amateur spirit of comradery which is the century old foundation of the movement.

Over my half century of involvement American Schutzhund participation has become increasingly beyond the reach financially and logistically for the vast majority. The underlying problem is of course that we are so thinly spread out that the time and expense of travel becomes an overwhelming burden.

But another deleterious factor is the burden imposed by SV micromanagement and their ever increasing need to extract revenue to support the bureaucrats in a collapsing market. The failure to grow because of incessantly escalating cost has produced an ever more tight downward spiral to oblivion.



Germany

Absurdity was not unique to America or any specific breed. In Germany the endemic irrationality of the Doberman community precipitated the collapse of this breed to the current 400 yearly registrations. (Incredibly stupid incestuous breeding leading to rampant heart defects and other debilitating ongoing genetic issues also played a role.)

The German Shepherd establishment—preoccupied with their effete banana backs—entirely abandoned even the pretense of police potential in openly pandering to the lowest common pet owning denominator. This turned out to be the mother of all stupidity as the German SV mother club saw annual puppy registrations collapse from thirty thousand in 1995 to six thousand today with no end in sight.

Try as I might it is beyond my ability to comprehend how these people could be so doggedly obtuse for so long as to not perceive that the police persona is the wellspring of the allure driving the vigorous popularity of the breed and that the ongoing emasculation was and is the proximate cause of the relentless decline.¹² This self-defeating paradigm was by no means preordained. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union world class working German Shepherds were bred in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, a paradigm which should have prevailed universally.

To Be or Not to Be

Rightfully respected men of much experience and senior service opine that since companion dogs are ninety percent of sales suitability in this role should rightfully be a primary breeding consideration, and superficially in a certain commercial sense there is an aura of plausibility to it.

Yet even after meticulous reflection I must respectfully beg to differ, for this misguided paradigm has been the relentless driving force in the collapse. The German Shepherd—as conceived and promoted by Max von Stephanitz—is a police dog, not primarily a companion dog or a play sport dog (read IGP) but in his own words "police trial champions." There is and can be no middle ground, the

¹² [Herding Roots of Police Service](#)

German Shepherd must either be a police dog without reservation or not be a police dog at all—breeding such dogs means relentless selection according to expected police service potential.

It seems to me that at the root of this problem is the perceived nature of the German population likely to consider the purchase of a pup, the primary market in the nation of origin. Is, as I tend to believe, such a person likely to be a traditionalist who expects nothing less than a good dog with credible police potential in a home protection role as he recalls from childhood experiences in the homes of parents and grandparents and a century of tradition as the penultimate police patrol dog?

Or is he—as seems to be the SV perspective—some sort of new age pacifist who abhors violence in any form, resonates with a dog indiscriminately friendly regardless of circumstance or provocation, similar perhaps to a Cocker Spaniel or Beagle? But why would such a person seek a German Shepherd with the century long tradition of police and military service when there are so many overtly pet oriented breeds? If this is in fact the reality why do sales incessantly plunge in spite of the ongoing emasculation? It is clearly impossible to fulfill both sets of expectations and trying to be all things to all people is the road to perdition, and we are far down that wrong road and not enjoying the scenery.

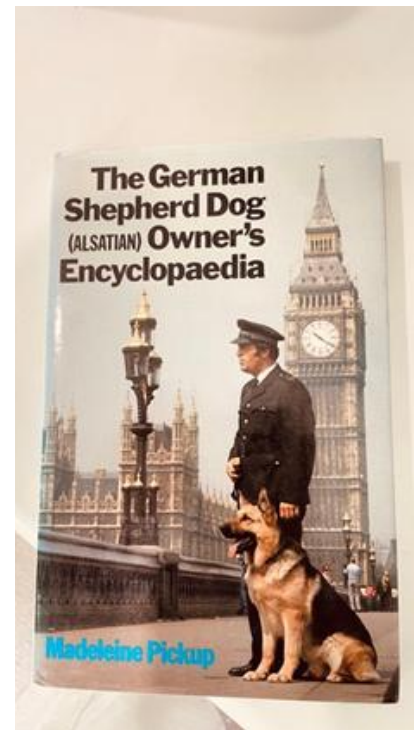
In particular the fact that 90% of pups go to civilian homes has been put forth as justification for the ongoing emasculation of the show lines. But my conviction is that this is blatantly disingenuous, ignores the reality that the allure of such dogs is the police persona, that by and large those who seek a German Shepherd are looking for a dog of legitimate police or at least credible home guard potential.

Failure to comprehend this is why 80% of the SV market has evaporated over the past 30 years. The ongoing collapse will continue unabated until this fundamental question of whether the German Shepherd is to be a working dog or a pretend working dog is resolved once and for all.

All in the Family

Since to be a police dog the German Shepherd must be bred by selection to expected excellence in that role, where are the civilian dogs to come from? In the natural order of things some pups do not make the cut—just as many almost good enough football players do not make the team—but can go on to serve other, less demanding roles such as the various play sports or as companion dogs.

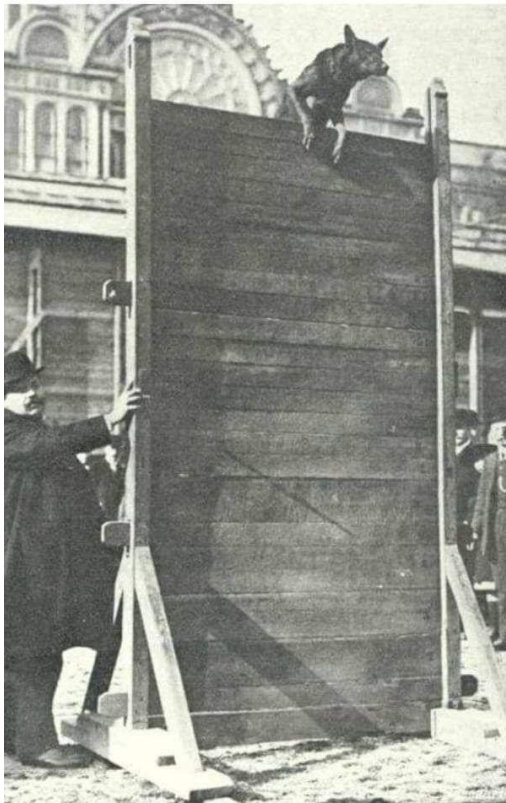
But we must not allow these secondary roles to be considerations in selection, have an independent place in breeding. In order to maintain the integrity of the breed, the legacy, we must relentlessly and exclusively select for police potential. To shirk this obligation, to select softer dogs for a softer market—for vainglory or the love of money—prostitutes the heritage and brings shame upon the breeder, even when it prospers in a Sieger show ring.



The British perception of the German Shepherd as a police dog

German Shepherd Jump

Amsterdam 1913 - 3.50m



Scaling wall prior to the candyass era

There is a great middle ground of police bred pups with the potential to prosper in the civilian environment with a serious dog smart owner or the typical police role. There are also many situations where a supportive breeder can make a potential owner dog smart enough to make it work. And finally there are many inept people out there who should never be sold a large dog with even a residual aggressive potential, but some breeders will just not turn down the cash.

Thus an ongoing program of police level breeding can and has historically produced a diverse enough pool of candidates to serve many roles such as search and rescue, guide dogs and home companions. The key to success is breeders capable of and willing to match the right dog to the right situation and stand ready to make adjustments in the inevitable instances of a mismatch. In order for this to function every breeder must have personal commitment to and hands on familiarity with the protective role, be committed to and in support of the inherent

aggression necessary in a police breed.

The key to making this work is recognition that some civilian situations are not realistic for a real police level candidate and encouraging the prospective customer to seek a more appropriate breed. Immediately obvious alternatives include the Golden Retrievers and Black Labradors, which are fine dogs for those in need of a moderately active household companion. If current trends persist these two breeds will outnumber the German Shepherds in a very few years, which can be seen as a good thing.

The IGP Stick Ban

Over the past decade the most flagrant assault on working dog viability by the FCI establishment has been the elimination of stick hits from the IGP trial. Although there have been many deleterious compromises in the trial over the years as in replacing the scaling wall with the A frame and the elimination of the attack on the handler the removal of the stick is in many ways the most egregious. The primary reason for this is that the stick is increasingly the nemesis, the Achilles heel, of the show dogs.¹³

In the absence of a stick hit young dogs can be prepared for a club trial by teaching them that the stick is not a threat but rather a harmless object that happens to be carried by the helper. Since they are never struck with the stick they have no reason to fear it. In this way the training session and eventual trial become more or less a game of tug of war with the sleeve. This of course requires a very cooperative helper rather than a serious adversary and an understanding judge, but the SV show folks have a half century of experience in providing such lenient and friendly venues.



Photo Brian Aghajani

While opposition in the working community at large is virtually universal a few eccentric or politically correct outliers—perhaps seeking to provide cover for weak dogs in the hands of friends in high places—have come forward to claim that the stick is superfluous, that judges are perfectly capable of evaluating protection dog character and potential without resorting to such brutality.

But numerous men of much greater stature and credibility—as in Ivan Balabanov—have spoken out eloquently and passionately for restoring the stick, arguing that it is essential for evaluating true character, fight drive and threshold for pressure.¹⁴ Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of this is how anyone with a level of experience that should know better can be so obtuse as to not comprehend the necessity of a real stick test. The question would seem to be whether to attribute this to cognitive impairment or political motivation, that is accommodating the needs of the SV show breeders.

It is highly likely that for several years most dogs on trial fields would be successful even if the stick were to be applied. But this is because of the decades of diligence of devoted breeders and trainers and the aggregate vigor and courage of the existing breeding stock. In the short term this may seem to vindicate those claiming that the stick is not actually necessary, but in reality this is a malignant canard.

Going forward the temptation to trial a stick shy dog to get another title—but of course never to breed such a dog—will be ever present. In the normal course of events some of these tractable dogs will go on to much success, even win major championships.

¹³ [The Stick Saga](#)

¹⁴ [Ivan Balabanov Video](#)

Eventually some of them will inevitably be bred, letting the cat out of the bag to spread the cancer. It is only a matter of time.

It may be claimed that such concern is overreaction, that we must have faith in and respect for the establishment authorities. And the decline has indeed been gradual, incremental, making it difficult to know where to draw the line, what hill to die on. But this stick hit ban is not a minor point but rather an egregious emasculation of trial integrity, an elimination of an existential aspect of any valid protection dog trial.

As I was becoming involved in working dog affairs in the 1980s a legitimate Schutzhund title would render a dog a bit more than just a plausible candidate in the eyes of police and military acquisition agencies. Although this has substantially eroded over the years as real Schutzhund has given way to play IGP abandonment of the stick is likely the final nail in the coffin, for me at least a melancholy ending for a century of partnership in mutual growth and cooperation. Somehow it seems to have been forgotten that it was military service in the First World War that launched the German Shepherd into high places in American and indeed worldwide police and military service as well as civilian protection or companion homes.

Much of the ultimate responsibility for this state of affairs must fall on the shoulders of the SV, for had they not abandoned their own Schutzhund trial over which they had absolute control in favor of the FCI IGP program this crisis need never have arisen. I find myself among those who believe that this was the intention in the first place, that the ultimate source of the desire to remove the stick was to be found in the effete cabal running the SV and their need to accommodate the fragility of the show lines.

At the end of the day the overriding consequence is that the SV show breeders are the primary beneficiaries of the removal of the stick from the IGP trial. Perhaps this will be the bridge too far, cause working breeders and trainers to finally realize that enough is never enough, that having sold their souls to the SV there can never be an end to the relentless shame and humiliation of betraying the legacy of Max von Stephanitz. The ultimate irony is of course that the real enemy is not the FCI but rather the SV.

To belabor the obvious, IGP as it exists today is not in any sense a serious breeding qualification trial but rather an emasculated venue suitable only for the most effete pet owner or self-deluding dilettante. Those of us drawn into Schutzhund in the 1980s era have been subjected to a malicious bait and switch scam on the part of the SV and must now make the bitter choice between living the lie or seeking another venue.

For the American (USCA) leadership, over the years predominantly steadfast and serious working dog advocates, the stick ban is a Gordian knot, an insoluble dilemma. On the one hand if they repudiate and replace the IGP nonsense they will most likely lose WUSV membership to be replaced by a new and corrupt group of opportunists. On the other hand their national trial program retaining the stick is for many practical reasons little more than a virtually useless and unused fig leaf. As an advocate of the 1980s era this is a deeply distressing state of affairs a half century into our Schutzhund movement, a demoralizing personal failure.

Schutzhund Abolished

The Schutzhund trial as the German Shepherd breeding prerequisite was the foundation of the Von Stephanitz legacy, the essence of his genius. In the year 2012 the SV abruptly abandoned and abolished their century old Schutzhund program, adopting the FCI IGP play trial in its stead as a watered down program for the show dogs. This was just stage one of the plan, for within a decade the other shoe would drop, they would abandon the working title requirement for breeding.

By 2021 the show lines had for decades been in incessant, humiliating decline in terms of structure, stride and particularly working potential. This was so serious that the BBC was running television specials mocking them.

This finally came to a head when the SV solved the problem by the brilliant strategy of collectively sticking their heads in the sand and dropping the test, that is eliminating IGP—the emasculated FCI version of Schutzhund—as a breeding prerequisite.

This long and drawn out emasculation process—years of obfuscation and bureaucratic track covering, decades of connivance and self-serving machinations—begin with abandonment of Schutzhund and the adoption of the FCI IPO program. The initial purpose of this was to allow the SV to avoid the heat of the ongoing emasculation process; but ultimately the intent was to deflect attention from the term Schutzhund with the von Stephanitz association when the time came for the final betrayal, the abandonment of the working trial breeding and registration prerequisite, the bedrock of the von Stephanitz legacy.¹⁵

To complete the farce they conjured yet another lame character test—the pathetic "Breeding Predisposition Test" (ZAP)—where feckless show breeders take turns in the backyard certification of each other's dogs, reminiscent of the secret midweek breakfast table Schutzhund trials from a few years ago. Von Stephanitz would surely turn over in his grave.

The breed itself will of course muddle on indefinitely as competition for the Golden and Labrador Retrievers. The bloated SV bureaucracy will carry on becoming increasingly onerous as activity continues to dwindle and the membership inexorably diminishes and ages.

To the everlasting shame of the SV repudiation of the performance trial as a breeding prerequisite marks the end of von Stephanitz era and the beginning of the end of the German Shepherd as a serious working dog.

¹⁵ [**SV Abandons Schutzhund Breeding Requirement**](#)

Police Dog Market

Over the past several decades the decline of viable German Shepherd candidates has played an important role in the increasing American importation of police titled Dutch KNPV dogs, mostly Malinois and many or most without pedigree. As a consequence a pedigree has become increasingly irrelevant in the police dog market. In addition it is becoming increasingly evident that any trace of credibility or deployment of breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler or Bouvier des Flandres is most likely gone forever.

Those breeding and training German Shepherd police dogs have been increasingly handicapped by the necessity of jumping through all the SV hoops in order to obtain registration which has made the breed much more expensive than the Malinois in many instances. The decline in physical agility and power imposed by the SV and the general intrusion of banana back type is seriously eroding police or military potential. A likely long term ramification is the abandonment of SV registration, which over time would greatly increase the commonality of appearance among German Shepherd and Malinois police dogs.

In the world at large all of this is a manifestation of the general decline of the underlying purebred paradigm as for instance exemplified and popularized in the emergence and glorification of so called rescue operations, that is used dog markets. While many of these emerged as unselfish amateur efforts today many more have evolved into blatantly overt large scale for profit commercial ventures.

This has been driven on the one hand by cost, that is the enormous escalation in the expense of conformation showing, the incessant proliferation of medical screening and the cost escalation of veterinary care in general. Beyond these generic factors are the enormous costs of ever proliferating SV certifications and requirements.

On the other hand there has been the general realization that the hunting dogs no longer hunt, the herding dogs are no longer on patrol on meadows and fields and the protection dogs are akin to sedans with painted on racing stripes. The purebred is no longer perceived as an elite realization of a noble breed defining service but rather has devolved in service of a lowest common denominator market for insipid and patently pathetic replicas.

Abraham Lincoln's principle that "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time" applies here. In the purebred world some of the time turned out to be a hell of a long time, but the advent of the Internet in the 1990s finally and precipitously initiated the ongoing collapse of the purebred establishment. This is ultimately the consequence of the unrelenting compulsion to evolve ever more grotesque style while utterly abandoning any shred of the original breed defining function.

To summarize, emerging in the early 1980s the emasculation of the show lines began to escalate as a consequence of a gradually increasing, implicit belief that character or the police persona no longer really mattered. This turned out to be the mother of all slippery slopes as the special more or less private trials with increasingly soft helpers and understanding judges were incessantly

further compromised as character diminished, just as the drug user requires ever increasing dosage. Eventually this led to the elimination of the Achilles heel—the stick hits—and ultimately the abandonment of the working title requirement.

But it turns out that police persona does matter, is and always has been the founding allure of the breed. For a time resentment festered as the rank and file did not quite grasp what was transpiring. The period of rising tide from the early 1980s through the mid-90s was in reality the quiet of the gathering storm which—pushed over the edge by the emergence of the Internet—burst as the century turned.

Plan B

Over most of a decade I have been relentlessly advocating that American working dog affairs can and should be run by and for Americans. Yet after half a century of ever more blatant emasculation of German breeds and trials—in particular the German Shepherd and the Schutzhund trial—we incessantly insist on paying homage on bended knee before the SV alter, obediently proffering torrents of adulation and cash.

The elimination of the stick hits in the IGP trial is the most blatant and debilitating episode of this absurd saga, the ongoing European emasculation of the police breeds in terms of breeding, deployment and most especially working trial rigor. This is finally a bridge too far.

But there is an obvious alternative, a plan B. USCA could and should turn the clock back half a century, sever relations with all other entities including the SV, the WUSV, the FCI, the AKC and the AWDF and reinstate the 1970 Schutzhund we signed up for in the first place.

In this new world order we would do nothing more than issue universal all breed registration and score books, run hard core, honest, aboveboard Schutzhund trials and an annual World Schutzhund Championship, to which Europeans would have access through qualification trials either in Europe or America. We would recognize no other score books and would maintain scrupulously honest and accurate public records of all trials and dogs.

Period. No frills. No ups. No extras. Emphasis throughout will be on affordability rather than elite privilege, pomp and ceremony.

USCA has a lock on clubs, trials, judges, infrastructure and credibility. AWDF will be dead in the water because their score books will overnight be invalid at 90% of North American trials. Orphaned AWDF local training clubs would of course be provided expedited access as all breed USCA local clubs.

What is holding us back? Essentially a relatively small but very influential cadre expending an enormous amount of time, obsessive determination and much money in relentless pursuit of "a place on the team," of marching into a German stadium to wave an empty tin cup, to engage in a watered down play sport purportedly related to real Schutzhund in the perhaps mythical distant past. While a generation ago this had serious relevance, was instrumental in establishing the American working dog culture, today it is an increasingly irrelevant ritual that we need to grow up and let go of.

It is time for the American community to finally take our future in hand and once and for all establish our own culture beyond the reach of onerous European exploitation. We have nothing to lose but our chains, nothing to fear but fear itself.

When we build it they will come.

As a realist I am of course aware that we cannot expect to see this Promised Land just emerge out of the mist. But I also know that those who do not aspire to things the conventional wisdom labels impossible must live with what they find rather than what they can envision.

Way Forward

Although the dog has played a key role in human evolution, been a faithful companion and served in diverse roles for more than 10,000 years, the formal concept of the purebred is a quite recent development, that is much less than two centuries old. Although show breeding and exhibition experienced a surge of late twentieth century popularity registered purebreds have always been a relatively small portion of dogs in general, being about 5% in the United States today.¹⁶

Since the turn of the century purebred popularity as reflected in AKC registration statistics has been in precipitous decline to approximately one third of the 1992 peak.¹⁷ Possible reasons for this, in no particular order, include:

- Decline in belief in the relevance or validity of the purebred paradigm in general or the rectitude of the AKC or European registries in particular.
- Escalating cost in terms of purchase price, food and veterinary care.
- Competition from so called designer dogs—unregistered mixed breeds as in Cockapoos
- Competition from rescue dogs, that is commercialized used dog markets.
- Perceived purebred fragility, lack of vigor and health issues because of predominant incestuous breeding.

Factors specific to the larger more robust police potential breeds:

- Perception of liability or difficulty in handling.
- The expense of feeding a larger dog.
- A more risk adverse, docile and timid general population.

Although it is difficult to quantify, my perception is that in the case of the police breeds a significant factor is loss of public confidence, an underlying sense that they are somehow being hornswoggled, receiving pretend working dogs.

In an ideal world each working breed would consist of a robust breeding pool with a spectrum suitable to the most demanding police or military service at one end and those not quite making the cut—inherently unsuitable for utilitarian service—but viable in less

¹⁶ See Appendix II: [AKC Registrations](#)

¹⁷ Approximations are necessary because the AKC ceased publication of registration statistics in 2011.

demanding companion roles at the other end. This was to a significant extent the prevailing reality into the early 1970s but because of incessant show dog trends to ever softer and more manageable breeding stock is much less true today.

The decline of the dog show as a sport—as an end in itself—will be no more of a loss to mankind than the decline of thoroughbred horse racing, professional bowling or any of the other diversions which come and go over time. These are inherently entertainment venues with no intrinsic long term relevance. Purebred dogs with little more than pretend working potential—as in SV show dogs—are of no inherent value, are detrimental to the extent that they distract from the vigor and prosperity of actual working dogs.

There are at least two practical and in my view viable alternatives before us today. In Germany there is RSV 2000 founded by Helmut Raiser, which has struggled to gain real traction. This was in many ways due to the fact that head-to-head competition with the SV is a very difficult undertaking. Perhaps the ongoing internal SV crisis will eventually bring real change.

In the United States the program founded by Debbie Zappia in the mid teen years—American Schutzhund—is in my view a realistic and practical evolution of the original Schutzhund program adapted to twenty first century realities. This would be my choice among conceivable alternatives, but it is a very long row to hoe.

Neither of these or any of the other programs launched over the years as alternatives have been able to gain any real traction. The FCI and AKC monopolies, although rotting away from within, for the time being remain entrenched and powerful, very difficult to intrude upon. But the entire purebred paradigm is in a gradual but inexorable death spiral.

Thus the alternatives before us are to reform the existing establishment or establish alternative organizations. A half century of strenuous effort has demonstrated that while dying the existing establishment is going to take a long time doing so. Those finding themselves unable to embrace the programs of Raiser or Zappia need to propose viable alternatives.

Prognostication

It is the common human experience that all good things eventually come to an end. The last thoroughbred track in the Chicago area is gone. Big time professional bowling is but a distant memory. Who can recall the current lightweight, middleweight and heavyweight champions of the world? Yet in the 1950s—well within my memory—all of these things seemed enormously important, permanent aspects of modern life. Why should the passing heyday of the purebred dog or the Schutzhund trial be any different?

The Industrial Revolution brought many people to cities and towns with significant time for evenings and weekends of diverse avocational activity. In the early European era Schutzhund could well be the center of one's life without ever owning a car or traveling 20 miles from home, at a cost little more than that of the after training beer. It was the canine era of the common man, seemingly gone forever.

This lifestyle seemed enormously attractive to pioneering Americans, so much so that many of us spent decades trying to

replicate it. Yet rather than recreating a European like venue we saw Europe gradually trending toward an American like persona, the camaraderie of their local training clubs transforming into just another money driven rat race. Much of this money came from American dilettantes seeking a shortcut to the podium, the opportunity to through the purchase of successful European titled dogs stand on a decorated wooden box and wave an empty tin cup. Much of our early success was like a grass fire, bright and impressive but gone in minutes.

In recent years the prevailing SV paradigm of heavy—almost exclusive—focus on the lowest common denominator of the pet market leaving the cops to scrounge in the crap for the crumbs is inevitably going to be increasing absence without leave on the streets and the collapse of the civilian market because—today as well as yesterday—the German citizen seeking a pup typically wants nothing less than a good dog with credible police potential in a home protection role as he recalls from childhood memories in the homes of parents and grandparents.

Because of the ongoing four decade catastrophe in SV leadership the German Shepherd is in dire straits, on the brink of irrelevance if not outright extinction. Reestablishment of credibility and renewed working relevance would require across the board restoration in terms of working willingness, vigor, courage and hardness—that is dogs capable of a credible performance on a public Schutzhund field with an unfamiliar decoy and a scrupulously correct judge. In other words there would be an end to cozy, private home field trials for breeding certification.

Hypothetically the way forward would be to emulate the example of the NVBK Malinois community by breaking free of FCI influence and making breeding selections primarily according to a serious working trial—but this is for obvious reasons unlikely to come to pass. Unfortunately alternative national clubs as in RSV 2000 do not appear to be a viable or practical solution.

So what does the future hold? To put it straight up this is a dire state of affairs which may well prove to be terminal as it is difficult to envision a realistic way out. Any even remotely viable solution will require far reaching measures that will be vigorously resisted by the existing establishment as they in desperation cling to their power, money and imagined prestige. Redemption would require broad renewal of SV leadership and bureaucracy with an overriding commitment to police service in terms of structure, stride and serious working character. The number one priority of such a new leadership would be immediate restoration of hard core 1970s style Schutzhund trials. This also is of course unlikely.

When all is said and done the unfortunate reality is that the House of von Stephanitz, the SV, has fallen into the grasp of a cabal of feckless, befuddled little old ladies who among other things pull the strings the USCA leadership must dance to, thus preordaining ongoing collapse in Germany, America and the rest of the world.

Thus the ongoing breeding of these wretched German Shepherd replicas for the largely imaginary pet market seems destined to persist into the foreseeable future. In addition an ever diminishing cadre of steadfast police breeders is likely to endure at least in the short term. The SV Sieger show will carry on and some may even be able to pretend that the glory days persist not noticing that the

venue had somehow become a neighborhood school playground because of the paucity of entries. The so called work of this once noble breed will focus on things such as agility and dancing with dogs. The ever diminishing remnants participating in IGP play trials will hardly notice when the bite finally disappears.

In America USCA will see people and dogs growing ever older and softer together as the younger generation will by and large see no point in it and go on stumbling through life fingering their iPhones and girlfriends, never even dreaming that there could be more. Serious people will tend to slip away or move on leaving USCA and the AWDF in the grasp of Queen Anne and her little old ladies. The SV will go on extracting money, homage and subservience out of USCA until the very end. Eventually nobody will even remember Max von Stephanitz.

Although far from utopia the implementation of plan B in which USCA would relinquish all connections with other canine organizations and return to the original meaning of each word in the name, that is revert to a truly amateur all-breed, old style Schutzhund venue run by and for Americans where affordability would be the highest priority.

As for the rest of the world I see no practical way forward that would be a real improvement. Although a very complex situation my take is that it is fundamentally a European political problem which fortunately does not for the moment really exist in America.

The crux of the German enigma is that the SV has somehow convinced itself that the German people have become so timid and docile that any vestige of canine aggression is inherently evil and thus to be eradicated. My conviction is that human nature in general and the German people in particular do not change that fast and the age old human and canine aggressive propensities still have a place in the modern world.

In the broad view the heritage of Max von Stephanitz is withering away because we cannot or will not muster the requisite courage and hardness to preserve it. As this century long golden era draws to a close—for better or for worse—a new world order with predominantly emasculated protective heritage breeds and a vastly diminished purebred footprint is upon us.

Ultimately this divided house cannot stand. The only possible basis for the recovery of the German Shepherd as a serious working police dog—preservation of the von Stephanitz legacy—would be absolute and exclusive control in the hands of working breeders and trainers, which to a large extent prevails for the Belgian Malinois and accounts for the gradual emergence of overall preference.

Time moves inexorably on and the heyday of the purebred—the SV and rest of the existing world order—has come and gone whether we like it or not. To continue the cycle of life we must rebuild from the ashes.

We shall reap what we sow.

Appendix I The NVBK

NVBK Dutch: *Nationaal Verbond der Belgische Kynologen*
English: *National Federation of Belgian Canine Enthusiasts*



The founding of the *Nationaal Verbond der Belgische Kynologen* was an act of revolution and a declaration of independence on the part of the Belgian Ring Sport community and the advocates of the Malinois. This new organization arose because serious trainers and Malinois breeders chaffed under the restrictions, control and manipulation of the conformation orientated, FCI affiliated SRSH organization. Not only did NVBK take

control of their Ring trials, they began their own registration book, making independence complete.

NVBK was founded in the province of Antwerp 1963 and began competition in 1964. It is today the most important and significant of Belgian Ring national organizations, both in terms of numbers and support, but most importantly it is a working dog entity conducted by working dog people for working dog people. Approximately 100 dogs receive level III certification each year, compared, for instance, to 800 to 1000 yearly KNPV titles. While numerically relatively small this is enough for a viable, ongoing breeding and training community. There are approximately 50 NVBK ring judges, in contrast to the half dozen, mostly older, listed for Societe Royale Saint-Hubert. St. Hubert continues to conduct annual Category I Ring championships with an entry of twelve or fifteen, but aggregate activity and participation is small compared to the NVBK.

Today, most dogs participating in NVBK ring trials are Malinois. Other breeds are theoretically permitted but most do not participate. Malinois from other registries must obtain NVBK papers in order to enter an NVBK trial, which is relatively easy to do. NVBK puppy registrations were 359 in 2006, 430 in 2007 and 454 in 2008.

Historically NVBK is primarily a Flemish organization, which in Belgium, deeply divided between the Flemish and culturally French regions, is a deeply significant fact. Currently the administrative districts are: Antwerp, Brabant, Limburg, East-Flanders and West-Flanders, all in the Flemish region to the north and west. As of 2007 there were more than 100 NVBK clubs in Belgium and more than 1600 members. By 2013 membership had risen to 2600 Belgian members. Current reality is that the practical demise of St. Hubert and Club Belge Ring Sport activity and credibility has compelled serious Ring enthusiasts to gravitate to the NVBK.

More recently the NVBK seems to have become interested in building bridges to the French speaking Belgians, is gradually including use of the French language version of the name: *Fédération Nationale des Cynophiles Belges* (FNCB)

Appendix II AKC Registrations

The numbers tell the story. There are approximately 90 million dogs in the United States, and based on a ten year lifespan that would translate to roughly 9 million replacements per year. Although AKC registrations have been a deep dark secret since 2011, estimates from registration fees in annual AKC reports, required by law, indicate that there are between 400 and 500 thousand purebred dogs registered with the AKC every year. This of course does not mean anything at all about the individual dogs, because all you do is send the AKC the forms and most importantly the money and the registration happens, there is no mechanism for inspection or verification.

So only about one in 20 dogs in American homes are AKC registered. There is no doubt some dogs eligible for registration but not registered because nobody bothered to send the money, the most important thing; but these statistics are also a deep dark AKC secret.

AKC registrations peaked in 1992 at 1,528,392 and have been in decline ever since. Today they are at approximately 30 percent of this number, an enormous decline.

The long and the short of it is that the brand is tarnished, the American people have increasingly seen through the pretense. AKC registration and their purebred concept has nothing at all to do with quality dogs, it is as simple as that. It is nothing but one huge con game, a scam.

USA Dog Registration Statistics:

89.7 Million	2017 total Dogs in USA
90,000,000	Round
9,000,000	Yearly Replacement based on 10 year life
1,528,392	1992 AKC Registrations
563,611	2010 AKC Registrations
484,482	2015 Projected AKC Registrations

Thus when you do the math each year there are approximately 9 million new dogs in America of which approximately half a million or 5 percent are AKC registered purebreds.

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