



Max von Stephanitz

Bang the Drum Slowly, Requiem for the House of von Stephanitz

Jim Engel March 14, 2026

It is said that all good things come to an end. 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 a decade it became the worldwide foundation of police service and the pride of the German people. The reach of the von Stephanitz influence was ubiquitous—that is worldwide in scope, a century in duration and extending to all police potential breeds.

But in the twilight of the twentieth century men such as Walter and Herman Martin emasculated and then abandoned the Schutzhund trial, repudiated police service and in the effete SV¹ show ring rendered this noble breed as absurd caricatures. The consequence was precipitous decline in terms of working character, street effective physique and ongoing worldwide collapse in registrations. There was a consequent repudiation by a wide swath of the German people. May God forgive them, for no one truly loving this breed or this heritage could possibly do so.

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¹ SV: *Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde*
English: Club for German Shepherd's Dogs
The GSD mother club in Germany, founded in 1900.

The American Experience

The American saga was similar. 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.² 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 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.

European Decline

Such 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

² Putney, William Always Faithful: A Memoir of the Marine Dogs of WWII. Washington: Brassey's, 2001

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 comprehension how these people could be so doggedly blind 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.

Many opine that since companion dogs are ninety percent of sales suitability in this role should rightfully be a primary breeding consideration, and in a certain superficial commercial sense there is an aura of plausibility to it.

But I beg to differ, for this tragically misguided paradigm has been the relentless driving force in the collapse. The German Shepherd—as conceived and promoted by Max von Stephanitz—was a police dog,³ not primarily a companion dog or a play sport dog (read IGP) but in his own words "police trial champions." There is no middle ground, breeding police dogs means relentless selection according to expected police service potential. In this way 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.

So, 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.

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

³ 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.

these two breeds will outnumber the German Shepherds in a very few years, which can be seen as a good thing.⁴

The IGP Stick Ban

Over the past decade the most egregious assault on working dog viability by the FCI establishment has been the elimination of stick hits from the IGP trial. Ironically as is so often the case the enemy within was to emerge as the most grievous threat.

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.⁵ 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. 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

⁴ 2024 German registrations were 6316 for the German Shepherd, 2367 for the Black Labs and 1952 for the Golden Retrievers.

⁵ [Ivan Balabanov Video](#)

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.

The Way Forward

The way forward is obvious, follow the lead of the NVBK Malinois community by breaking entirely free of FCI influence and making breeding selections according to a serious working trial. Unfortunately it has become quite evident that serious selection trials cannot exist within the FCI scheme of things. In this better world dogs for the man on the street can and should be by selecting the right pup from the pool of candidates according to the home circumstances and comprehensive follow up.

To belabor the obvious, IGP 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.

American Dilemma

For the American (USCA) leadership, over the years predominantly steadfast and serious working dog advocates, this 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.

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 each word has somehow been transformed:

- United In the beginning presented and promoted as all-breed as indicated by the absence of the phrase German Shepherd in the name.
- Schutzhund Long gone, replaced by the pathetic IGP play sport.
- Clubs Overtly commercial entities with clients rather than members.
- America Germany as propaganda and distribution subsidiary.

None of this is inherently the fault of American leadership but rather the blatant greed and corruption in the German mother club, that is the SV. The fact nevertheless remains that our fate seems to be to run their pathetic pretend trials and generally serve as underpaid agents for German commercial interests as far into the future as the eye can see.

Resurrection

To reestablish viability the breed would need to be revived as a strong police service dog with an extensive but selected civilian population of carefully screened owner candidates. The prevailing SV paradigm of breeding exclusively for the lowest common pet market denominator leaving the cops to scratch in the crap is inevitably going to be an ongoing failure on the streets.

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 confirmation 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.

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 over half a century of ever more blatant pussification of German breeds and trials—in particular the German Shepherd and the Schutzhund trial—we incessantly insist on paying homage on bended knee at the foot of the SV alter, submissively 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.

Today there is an blindingly obvious alternative, a plan B.

USCA could and should just 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 1980 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 special 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 pomp and ceremony.

USCA has 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 will be provided expedited access as all breed USCA local clubs.

What is holding us back? Apparently a couple dozen dreamers with visions of marching into a German stadium to engage in a pathetic

watered down play sport purportedly related to real Schutzhund in the perhaps mythical distant past.

It is high time for American working dog people to finally take our future in hand and establish our own culture and programs absolutely beyond the reach of onerous European control and manipulation. We have nothing to lose but our chains and impoverishment, nothing to fear but fear itself.

When we build it they will come.

But we live in this real world. As a practical man I know better than to expect to see this promised land emerge out of the mist. But I also know that men who do not aspire to things the conventional wisdom renders impossible must live with what they find rather than what they can bring to pass.

We shall reap what we sow.

Prognostication

So what does the future hold?

The tragic reality is that the house of von Stephanitz, the SV, is in 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.

As a consequence the breeding of wretched pet market pseudo German Shepherds seems destined to persist indefinitely. In addition an ever diminishing cadre of hardcore 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 dancing with dogs and dock diving. The ever diminishing remnants participating in IGP play trials will hardly notice when the grip quietly 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 anything more. Serious people will tend to slip away or move on leaving USCA and the AWDF in the grasp of Queen Anne and the rest of her little old ladies. The SV will go on sucking money, homage and subservience out of USCA until the very end. Eventually nobody will even remember who von Stephanitz was.

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

Jim Engel Marengo March, 2026

Ivan Balabanov Video

Ivan Balabanov Transcript

Background and Reference

[Glossary](#)

[Decline and Fall of the House of von Stephanitz](#)

[Who Owns the House of von Stephanitz?](#)

[SV Power Corrupts](#)

[Canine Organizations](#)

[Supreme Authority of the Canine World](#)

[Animal Rights and Wrongs](#)

[German Shepherd Police Dog Heritage Repudiated](#)

[SV Abandons Work Test for Breeding](#)

[AWDF, Stillborn American Elite](#)

[Emergence of a new Canine World Order](#)

[American Consequences of the WUSV Vindication](#)

[The Way Forward](#)

[Meltdown in America](#)

[Legacy Lost, the Other Breeds](#)

[Temperament or Character Testing](#)

[Jack of All Trades?](#)

[Style and Opinion Sports](#)

[The Commercialization of Schutzhund](#)

[How We Play the Game](#)

[Has Sport Subverted the Schutzhund Trial?](#)

[The Herding Canard](#)

[The Mother State](#) 2016

Web presence:

[Schutzhund America](#)

[Ongoing FCI / WUSV Strife](#)

[Conacts & References](#)

Much more historical detail can be found in the police dog book:

[The Police Dog: Evolution, History and Service](#)