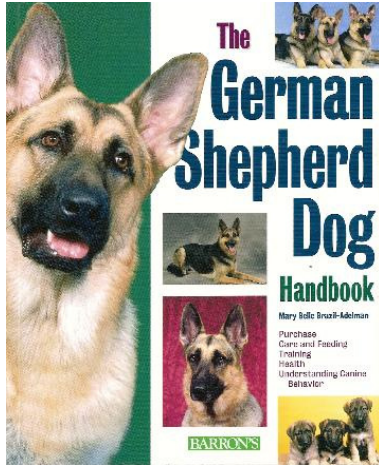


By Design Book Review

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The German Shepherd Dog Handbook
by Dr. Mary Belle Brazil-Adelman
Published by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., Hauppauge, New York

When asked if I would be interested in reviewing Dr. Mary Adelman's book for The German Shepherd by Design, I was delighted. I collect and read dog training books and videos, so this was a real treat. I want to start off by stating that this is an excellent training manual. It was a joy to read, as the text is extremely well written. Not only is the information valid and worthwhile, it is beautifully presented.

No wonder. Dr. Adelman is many things. She holds advanced degrees in education and psychology. She has an extensive background with dogs, including German Shepherds and Australian Cattle Dogs. Dr. Adelman's impressive background includes AKC judging in conformation, herding, tracking, and obedience. She has also trained dogs for police work, rescue, and scent work. Notably, she was the first Chairman of the GSDCA Herding Committee and judged their first national herding event. Also, she bred four AKC Champion German Shepherds. Currently, Dr. Adelman is the AKC Gazette correspondent for the Australian Cattle Dog Club of America.

Dr. Adelman touts that her Optimum Placement Technique (OPT) is "the only truly different approach to dog training on the market that has been researched for *dogs* not dolphins or chickens, etc." In summary, OPT begins through foundation building- conducting simple, consistently performed activities. If constructed properly, the foundation will support progression into many performance exercises. Once the foundation is firmly in place, exercises are taught in individual segments, or concepts. The trainer then works the dog on each concept before linking them all together to complete the exercise. All training is conducted using positive reinforcement (primarily food). Little or no compulsion is required to achieve success. As an additional aspect of OPT, some exercises are initially taught off-lead, which is non-traditional.

As is often advised, OPT should begin at the age of two to four months to achieve results efficiently. The OPT is, however, completely appropriate at any age. The idea of training without force is not new, nor is the use of food as behavior reinforcement. However, Dr. Adelman begins puppy training with some fairly advanced exercises early on. For example, OPT starts out in the first lessons by laying the foundation for recalls and go-outs with the dog off-lead. Dr. Adelman recommends using food to get first response in all units of an exercise to build bonding and lay a strong foundation for subsequent advanced training, as for agility or Schutzhund.

Now, I am not certain that OPT is a truly unique training technique. Foundation building and the gradual blending of concepts into a full exercise is has been readily employed in most in training techniques, positive or otherwise. It is highly probable that the combination of this technique along with all positive reinforcement and the initial off-lead work is distinctive. I will say that it may be the first dog-training book of its kind that explains the technique so clearly. [The OPT training library also includes Instructional VHS Videos and Lesson Plans with emphasis on formal obedience, tracking, and Schutzhund I.]

The sections of the book that address retrieving and tracking are alone worth the cost of the book (a mere \$11!). The retrieve training is through inducement, and the instruction on each individual step is nicely presented. I am currently employing it with my own shepherd, and it is working quite nicely. I have not trained a dog in tracking, but I am very interested in employing the method described in this book as seems to make perfect sense. And the author promises it will go quickly and smoothly!

I could take argument with some of the author's suppositions about dogs and their psychological abilities. For example, the author discusses the pit-falls of continual correction of an unwanted behavior. The author offers that "Continued corrections that the dog perceives as inconsistent and unfair will also cause gradual erosion of the dog's faith in the handler's judgment." I would argue that this is placing some pretty high expectation on a dog's perception of inconsistency and fairness. However, I would agree that the dog would lose its trust but primarily because there is nothing positive to be gained.

The author attempts to explain the many potential aspects of owning and training a GSD. I would have liked to have read more expanded sections on herding and showing in conformation. I still found the book informative and valuable, and would recommend it for those enjoy performance sports. It is not the only dog-training book to own as no single book is the be-all-end-all. Specialty books, such as tracking, herding, and agility, are essential for addressing particulars for that sport. And I would qualify that this book is for those who are not completely new to dog training. The German Shepherd Dog Handbook is a good launching pad for those already started in dog sports. It is written with the GSD in mind, but it is certainly not exclusive I would recommend it for anyone with an interest in dog training.

Dr. Adelman's The German Shepherd Dog Handbook can be ordered directly from her. Just visit her website at <http://www.glendhenmere.com/>.