

# German Shepherd Dog -The Goal

by Amnon Ben Izhak

*Editor's Note: This article was received at The German Shepherd by Design on June 20, 2008. We believe the author is from overseas, somewhere in the Middle East, but we cannot be certain. There was no response received to subsequent emails for clarification.*

*While much of what the author speaks of relates to FCI and IPO, there is some discussion of American show dogs. [Contact us with your thoughts.](#)*

If we look at a short history of this breed, we will find that the German shepherd dog of today is completely different from the German shepherd dog as visualized by the founder of the breed, Captain Max von Stephanitz. This dog is slowly losing its place as the number one service dog in the world, that at the same time is a stable and reliable dog.

Many dogs of this breed suffer from a large number of health problems, such as orthopedic problems, skin problems and more. In addition, dogs of this breed suffer from temperament problems, for instance nervousness, fearfulness and lack of mental stability, and many of them can not function as true working dogs.

A healthy and intelligent German shepherd, possessing the correct orthopedic build and temperament characteristics established by the breed founder, will disappear in the coming years as if it never existed. In other words, if we do not take dramatic and immediate action to "rescue" this breed, the future generations will only be able to imagine how the German shepherd functioned and served man in a wide variety of tasks.

The fate of the breed will be as the fate of many other breeds that were distorted by the FCI standards and fashions of dog showing, for example the English bulldog, which has changed from a medium-sized dog able to run and jump, to a distorted dog that is barely able to move and, for the most part, suffers from temperament and health problems. Or the example of the St. Bernard of today, which can barely "save" itself. In this breed, imprisoned in giant and heavy proportions, no selection for character as related to the purpose of the breed as a rescue dog is carried out, and as a result, it is rare to find a St. Bernard that is capable of doing rescue work.

If you visit the National Museum of Switzerland located in Bern and look at the preserved body of "Bari" – the legendary St. Bernard that saved many lives – you will find a substantial difference between his construction and the construction of the St. Bernard according to the FCI standard.

How many hunting dogs do you know that can really hunt?

Many of you have owned dogs of various breeds. For example, the Dogue de Bordeaux, Bullmastiff, and others. Have you found any relationship between the description of the dog, its purpose and character, as described in the literature on the breed, and the creature that lives in your home? Have you not asked yourselves why it is so difficult to find dogs that faithfully represent their breeds from the standpoint of character and function?

The source of the problem is in the 'ourdays' fashion that focuses on show dogs, and the obsession surrounding them, represented by organizations like FCI, AKC and similar organizations that endorse and encourage the following subjects: limiting of the genetic base, lack of refreshment of the breeds, incorrect selection, and the fashion of dog shows. In addition, there is breeding with the sole goal of profit, and so on. There are breeding coordinators and people in high level positions in organizations and foundations, and even those holding positions in professional 20 organizations (people without any true understanding of genetics, the characteristics of temperament, and the method of correct selection) that interpret incorrectly the breed standard and even serve as judges and advisors on breeding, raising and training dogs. Even worse, these people together give legitimacy to a theory that to my mind is wrong in its foundation.

Check how many dogs bearing the titles National/International Champion faithfully represent their breed (character, health and healthy conformation). I am sure that the results will amaze you. Various clubs functioning according to the FCI standards are proud of their selection for character – for example, the ZTP, Koerung, Israel MHG (examination for suitability for

breeding), and so on, but any true expert in behavior will ridicule them after finding out how the character is really tested in these examinations.

In the last 100 years, characteristics of many breeds have been completely extinguished. The loss of these characteristics and of the purpose of so many breeds, the failure to preserve the functionality of the original breeds for the coming generations, is a highly irresponsible, annoying and sad deed. True dog lovers must do everything necessary to preserve the purpose of the dog. We must not forget that the dog has always been our most true and faithful friend, and that which built the connection between the dog and man throughout history were the legendary temperament characteristics of this wonderful animal.

In this article, I will not deal with other breeds, only the German Shepherd, which I have been raising, training and researching for the last 15 years, and have 30 years of experience in training, testing and selection of working dogs.

The present FCI standard describes the German Shepherd as a trotting dog with the emphasis in breeding for that factor. This is a major change from the original goal that described the German Shepherd as first and foremost a working dog. In my opinion, this change has led to the destruction of the German shepherd breed.

It seems that Captain Max von Stephanitz foresaw this disaster and said: "Take this trouble for me: Make sure my shepherd dog remains a working dog, for I have struggled all my life long for that aim."

In my opinion, the FCI and the SV (the German shepherd Dog Club in Germany) are causing the extinction of breed characteristics. They hide behind tests, like Schutzhund, IPO and others, and declare them "working titles." Many good German Shepherd breeders fall into this trap and breed dogs for these purposes only. Schutzhund, IPO and other exams of this kind are not working tests! And certainly not working titles that testify to the true character of the dog.

In Schutzhund, IPO, and other tests of this sort, the dog and handler perform exercises which are known in advance in sterile conditions. For example, the "defense test" in Schutzhund is not a test of true defense; they do not test the ability of the dog in conditions that are as close as possible to real conditions. This is an exercise and situation that the dog is familiar with in advance and for which he is trained over a period of months. In addition, real control over the dog when there is no attack on the handler is not tested (a real defense dog should not attack if his handler is not attacked and/or gives a command). The "object" in Schutzhund defense tests is a target that in fact cooperates with the dog. Even more, "defense exercises" in these tests take place in a closed field, such as a football field or such, so that the stability of the dog in variable conditions and environments is not tested.

The "Test of Courage" in these kind of trials at best will reveal only the worst dogs. That is to say, a relatively poor dog will succeed in passing the test if trained by a skilled trainer, and no mistakes have been made in his training.

The tracking part of these tests is not realistic; preparation of the track is not natural, the dog carries his nose too low, so that he can not perform tracking in a true manner. I would like to emphasize that I am not against the sport of Schutzhund, IPO and others. However, I am very much opposed to those that claim that Schutzhund is a test of working dogs and/or defense dogs. These tests do not show the following:

1. The mental stability of a dog in conditions of stress.
2. Defense ability
3. Obedience in real life conditions
4. Complex nose work
5. Courage
6. Loyalty
7. Ability of the dog to deal with unfamiliar situations

As said, tests like Schutzhund, IPO and others have no possibility of checking the true character of the dog, how he deals with real life situations, his working ability and behavior in relation to his environment (adults, children, other animals). To claim that a dog with a "Schutzhund 3" title is a working dog would be like claiming that a naked man hiding behind a fig leaf is dressed in a knight's armor.

I would like to say that breeding based on the results of Schutzhund, IPO and other tests is not at all breeding for working ability. Even worse, the distorted animal called "show German

Shepherd Dog," resulting from breeding for appearance, is a dog with a humped back, rabbit legs, and long and low croup that almost touches the ground. Many show dogs have completely lost the temperament characteristics and the correct conformation and, from a health standpoint, many of them provide a good living to veterinarians.

In my opinion, it is completely unacceptable to call these dogs 'German Shepherd Dogs.' At this point, you might ask: "If this is the case, why has the back and hind end of the dog become so distorted, and why despite this are so many breeding these dogs?"

It becomes apparent that this distortion gives the dog a very long stride with his hind legs, which makes possible movement that is nearly floating. It must be emphasized that this construction is not natural to the dog – many show dogs suffer from severe physical and mental disabilities because the breeding is based on the trot alone and all the rest is neglected. There are dogs from show breeding that have the title "Schutzhund 3" and so on, and this is a further example why these tests do not assist at all in selective breeding.

It is worth emphasizing that many German shepherds from this sort of breeding are not capable of performing work, and some of them have very weak nerves. Lately I have become aware that Czech and Slovak breeders (who in the past bred German Shepherds with correct body construction) are lowering the hindquarters of the dogs, lengthening the loin, and arching the back. In not one case alone, I have viewed photos of working Czech and Slovakian dogs where it can clearly be seen how the handler tries by pressing on the croup to lower the hindquarters of the dog. This is like a man trying to sell his car, and showing the buyer photos showing the faults of his vehicle.

With the help of this article, I would like to turn to the Czech and Slovakian breeders and of course the East Germans and say: In the past, you bred excellent dogs – dogs that were purchased by buyers from all over the world because they were different from the dogs from West Germany. I find it hard to understand why you are determined to spoil the quality and uniqueness that made your dogs so well-known. Unfortunately, you currently are losing, step-by-step, the quality. Please, stop the deterioration and breed dogs that are not according to the FCI standard.

I am certainly aware of the fact that many are partners to my deep concern for the fate of the German shepherd, and that until now there was no alternative.

When the goal of breeding German Shepherds is Schutzhund, IPO and so on (or, even worse, dog shows) we will never achieve the true and correct German Shepherd – a working dog that is also a family dog. The FCI and the SV have erred completely from the path of the breed founder and are not focusing on breeding for work and for health, and therefore there are German Shepherd breeders that have gone on to breed other breeds. An additional reason is the great difficulty involved in finding a quality German Shepherd.

Selection for breeding must focus on examination of the dog and not examination of the level of the handler and/or level of training. A true temperament test is one that neither the dog nor the handler knows in advance. A true test examines the temperament of the dog in a wide range of situations and stimuli, and focuses on characteristics, responses and drives of the dog.

Tests of character, health and suitability – as carried out by the SV and other German Shepherd clubs that are members of the FCI – are carried out in a superficial way and do not provide enough information about the true character of the dog. In addition, these tests lack "language" describing conformation and character, so that not much possibility of interpretation based on the amount of information provided is left for each "professional."

For example, in the Israel German Shepherd Club, member of the Israel Kennel Club (which is a member of the FCI) the judge of the examination is the breeding coordinator who does not have any experience as a dog trainer or a dog behaviorist. The dog is examined at shows and in sterile areas. The judge observes the dog in movement and static, takes interest in the dog's weight (there is no scale present), shoots a starter pistol, and with this completes the character test for a German Shepherd in the Israel German Shepherd Club.

In other countries, the helper is dressed with a sleeve (which serves as an objective for the dog) and performs a simple exercise which the dog is familiar with in advance. In this exam, the dog is tested for courage, toughness, persistence and so on. The dog must grip the sleeve of the helper and then it is written: "Released sleeve on command/Did not release sleeve on command." From a distance of 15 steps, a starter pistol is fired and the reaction is written down. It is important to emphasize, that this is not a reaction to shooting but a reaction to noise! Is the dog

who does not release the sleeve a bad dog? Maybe his trainer didn't do his job properly? (And what are we checking here? The level of training or the temperament of the dog?)

If an immediate and dramatic change will not take place in the interpretation of the standards and in breeding examinations and working tests, in the method of awarding titles, and in the essence of the breeding of German Shepherds, this wonderful breed will disappear as if it had never been. If the correct goal is defined, then in the end it will be achieved. But, if the goal is not correct, then the desired goal will never be reached. Therefore, a change is urgently required to save the German Shepherd breed.

Before I get to the solution, I will mention in short the major problems:

- It is very difficult, if not impossible, to find German Shepherds that are capable of coping with new circumstances successfully, and that are healthy and intelligent.
- The standard and essence of breeding of the German Shepherd according to the FCI have veered away from the true goal of the breeding of these dogs.
- The SV has diverged from the path of the breed's founder, and some of the dogs can't even be called "German Shepherds," according to the definition of the founder, Max von Stephanitz.
- Breeding that is based on the results of Schutzhund and/or IPO tests is completely mistaken and not breeding for work.
- Titles are awarded to dogs that do not correctly represent the breed both in temperament and conformation.
- Orthopedic problems (hips, etc.)
- Diseases such as hemophilia, skin problems, etc.
- Selection and suitability for breeding examinations that do not consider the temperament and health of the dog.
- Many temperament problems (in show breeding) and breeding based on Schutzhund, IPO and such.

I am completely aware of the fact that my article may cause resentment in certain clubs, but I am sure that those that recognize the importance of the German Shepherd breed will agree with my words. As I have said, we must act as quickly as possible lest it be too late.

For these reasons, I have founded the **International Working German Shepherd Club**. I have written a new standard for the breed. I have also developed selection tests, breeding regulations, a working test and regulations for working titles and conformation titles.

The goals of the club:

1. To breed German Shepherd Dogs that are true in character, health and performance.
2. To promote and encourage work with the German Shepherd.
3. To encourage private owners of German Shepherds to work with their dogs.
4. To educate to correct, trustworthy and honest cynology.
5. To define an international language relating to character and conformation. (I have developed a ranking that includes the important temperament characteristics and drives, and a scale to describe the degrees precisely.)
6. Refreshing of bloodlines in the breed.
7. Competitions
8. Registration of German Shepherd Dogs in one stud book.
9. International cooperation for the promotion of the breed.

Amateurs or professionals – if you agree with my opinions and want to be part of the most important cynological process in the last 100 years, I call to you to join us.

Breeders, trainers and judges that are active or that have left the system because they don't agree with the FCI, AKC, SV, etc., handlers and trainers of Army and police dogs, groups that are interested in establishing clubs acting according to the regulations of the IWGSDC – come and participate in the preservation of the German Shepherd Dog.

Contact me at [iwgsdc@gmail.com](mailto:iwgsdc@gmail.com).

We promise to answer anyone who is a partner to our thoughts and directions and who is interested in assisting and supporting, for our own generation and the generations to come, the German Shepherd Dog. Please be patient, there are many requests.

*Amnon Ben Izhak can be reached at [iwgsdc@gmail.com](mailto:iwgsdc@gmail.com).*