

dog's handler from the opposite end of the trial field. The dog is sent after the decoy who is threatening the dog with a stick and charging at the handler. All grips during the protection phase are expected to be firmly placed on the padded sleeve and stopped on command and/or when the decoy discontinues the fight. The protection tests are intended to assure that the dog possesses the proper temperament for breeding.

For More Information

Here are some links for more information on the sport of schutzhund:

- United Schutzhund Clubs of America for the German Shepherd Dog (USA): <http://germanshepherddog.com/index.html>
- American Working Dog Federation (AWDF): www.awdf.net
- DVG America (Deutscher Verband der Gebrauchshundsportvereine): www.dvgamerica.com
- Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde (SV): www.schaeferhund.de
- Federation Cynologique Nationale (FCI): www.fci.be
- WUSV Breed Standard for the German Shepherd Dog: www.workingdogs.com/standard_fci.htm
- For information about or to order the book, *The Sport of Schutzhund: A Photographic Essay*: www.bjspanos.comThe_Sport_of_Schutzhund.htm



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www.dogpro.org

The Sport of Schutzhund

Triathlon for Working Dogs



Photo by Charlie Snyder

Trish Sansbury and her dog Jax

“A dog in training improves gradually over time. His reliability and attitude get better the more you practice. You can smile inside knowing that your dog is getting better with each exercise. The great athletes do not get that way by magic. They spend time each day training. In the end, it pays off with excellence. “

What is Schutzhund?

Schutzhund is a German word meaning “protection dog.” It refers to a sport that focuses on developing and evaluating those traits in dogs that make them more useful and happier companions to their owners. Schutzhund work is comprised of **three phases**. Many familiar with the obedience work of the American Kennel Club’s affiliates will recognize the first two phases, tracking and obedience. The Schutzhund standards for the third phase, protection work, are similar to those for dogs in police work. While dogs of other breeds are also admitted to Schutzhund trials, this breed evaluation test was developed specifically for the German Shepherd Dog. Schutzhund is intended to demonstrate the dog’s intelligence and utility. As a working trial, Schutzhund measures the dog’s mental stability, endurance, structural efficiencies, ability to scent, willingness to work, courage and trainability. This working dog sport offers an opportunity for dog owners to train their dog and compete with each other for recognition of both the handler’s ability to train and the dog’s ability to perform as required. It is a sport enjoyed by persons of varied professions, who join together in a camaraderie born of their common interest in working with their dogs. Persons of all ages and conditions of life—even those with significant disabilities—enjoy Schutzhund as a sport. Often, it is a family sport.

The Value to the Breed

Any registered German Shepherd that has earned a Schutzhund degree has demonstrated sufficient ability as a working dog to qualify for breed evaluation. The breed evaluation is a very detailed examination of the dog’s structure, temperament and pedigree and requires both a certification of good hip joints and sufficient performance on an endurance test (the AD). Dogs that do well in the breed evaluation receive a Koerklasse I or Koerklasse II. This is a recommendation and evaluation by a trained and recognized expert Judge as the worthiness of the dog for breeding. Dogs rated Koerklasse II are “suitable for breeding” and dogs rated Koerklasse I are “recommended for breeding”. By thus screening dogs in order to select the suitable specimens for breeding, Schutzhund helps to maintain the quality of the breed at a very high level. Thus, there is a very high level of assurance that puppies born to Schutzhund dams and sired by Schutzhund dogs are more likely to be of reliable temperament, high intelligence, steady nerves, extreme endurance, great strength, and sound structures.

History

The first Schutzhund trial was held in Germany in 1901 to emphasize the correct working temperament and ability in the German Shepherd breed. Originally, these dogs were herding dogs, but the industrialization of Germany encouraged breeders to promote the use of their dogs as police and military dogs. The Verein fur Deutsche Schaferhunde (SV), the parent club, became concerned that this would lead to careless breeding and undesirable traits such as mental instability, so it developed the Schutzhund test. Since then, many other countries and working dog organizations have also adopted Schutzhund as a sport and a test of working performance in dogs. International rules have been established, and they are administered by the Verein fur Deutsche Hundesport (VDH). The first Schutzhund trial in the U.S. was held in California in 1970. Today, several American Clubs and Organizations sponsor trials in all parts of the country and choose teams in open competition to represent at the WUSV World Championship. More than 25 countries send teams of competitors to the World Championship for Schutzhund dogs from the World Union of German Shepherd clubs.



Peter Spanos & his dog Eli

Photo by BJ Spanos Ink—publisher of *The Sport of Schutzhund: A Photographic Essay* by BJ & Peter Spanos

The Three Phases

The **tracking phase** includes a temperament test by the overseeing judge to assure the dog’s mental soundness. When approached closely on a loose leash, the dog should not act shyly or aggressively. The track is laid earlier by a person walking normally on a natural surface such as dirt or grass. The track includes a number of turns and a number of small, man made objects left by this person on the track itself. At the end of a 33 foot leash, the handler follows the dog, which is

expected to scent the track and indicate the location of the objects, usually by lying down with it between its front paws. The tracking phase is intended to test the dog’s trainability and ability to scent, as well as its mental and physical endurance.

The **obedience phase** includes a series of heeling exercises, some of which are closely in and around a group of people. During the heeling, there is a gun shot test to assure that the dog does not openly react to such sharp noises. There is also a series of field exercises in which the dog is commanded to sit, lie down, and stand while the handler continues to move. From these various positions, the dog is recalled to the handler. With dumbbells of various weights, the dog is required to retrieve on a flat surface, over a one-meter hurdle, and over a six-foot slanted wall. The dog is also asked to run in a straight direction from its handler on command and lie down on a second command. Finally, each dog is expected to stay in a lying down position away from its handler, despite distractions, at the other end of the obedience field, while another dog completes the above exercises. All of the obedience exercises are tests of the dog’s temperament, structural efficiencies, and, very importantly, its willingness to serve its owner.

The **protection phase** tests the dog’s courage, physical strength, and agility. The handler’s control of the dog is absolutely essential. The exercises include a search of hiding places, finding a hidden person (acting as a decoy), and guarding that decoy while the handler approaches. The dog is expected to pursue the decoy when an escape is attempted and to hold the grip firmly. The decoy is searched and transported to the judge with the handler and dog walking behind and later at the decoy’s right side. When the decoy attempts to attack the handler, the dog is expected to stop the attack with a firm grip and no hesitation. The final test of courage occurs when the decoy is asked to come out of a hiding place by the



Tracy Betenbaugh works Leah Gangelhoff’s dog Vigo

Photo by John Tompson