

# **The Downfall of the German Shepherd**



**By Koos Hassing**



Leerburg

## Foreword

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[Leerburg Enterprises, Inc.](#) is owned by Ed Frawley.

Ed has owned German Shepherds (GSD) for over 45 years. Since 1978 he has bred over 350 litters of German working bloodline GSDs. His dogs work in law enforcement, as S&R dogs, as competition Schutzhund dogs, and as family companions and protectors.

Since 1980 Ed has produced over 120 dog training videos and DVDs. He was a police K9 handler for 10 years and competed in several dog sports, including AKC obedience and Schutzhund. In addition he has built one of the top dog training supply businesses in the world.

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# The Downfall of the German Shepherd

By Koos Hassing

## After us the “Great Flood”

Please read this critical article with an open mind as I have wrote it in my opinion impartant phrases and offer my conclusion.

Sport organizations and clubs which respect themselves have to aim for continuity and development in accordance with their statutes. Because it is about the fact that we wish that our sport and hobby can be continued by our successors. In our case this means in the broadest sense of the word the leisure time activity with the German Shepherd Dog and his world wide reputed versatile traits.

Now we have to demand a clear understanding of the subject matter from the representatives in the organizations from the very top all the way to the very bottom. They have to show the willingness and readiness to make important decisions when necessary to the benefit and the existence of our breed.

The founder of our breed did make this statement for nothing:

***“Make sure my shepherd dog remains a working dog for I have struggled all my life for that aim!”***

Many developments are naturally subject to social changes, but the principle has to be maintained or better

said, the goal has to remain the same. And that has to be thought about carefully.

## **Why this prelude you may ask?**

Friday evening, after the courage test at the "Hauptzuchtschau" in Ulm was over I got an alarmed phone call from a sport friend who was there and told me that many of the SchH 2 and even more of the SchH 3 dogs did not pass protection.

**Sunday evening I calculated that 63 males and 49 females failed.** Furthermore, we are talking about exclusively KKL 1 dogs here who had received the rating of "TSB pronounced" in their ZtP/Körung.

I doubt that the number of failures had ever been that high. My information showed that protection may have been judged marginally harder but not significantly harder than in years past. I was even told that had the helper work been consistent for all the dogs there would have been even more failures.

There were glaring differences between dogs from performance lines and those from show lines. OK, that may not be such a big deal, but it clearly accentuates how big the differences are.

Only a few years ago I myself was a witness to the way protection was handled at the "Hauptzuchtschau".

**I came to the conclusion that some assessments were at the very bottom of the rating "pronounced," some even below.**

Dogs who came off the sleeve during the attack on handler still got a rating high enough to remain in the competition. In individual cases apparently the manner in

which the dogs prevented the attack (**energetic gripping is desired**) was of secondary importance. Obviously some things had improved somewhat, but it has to be said.

It appears as if the top people in the SV, who got there due to political circumstance, chose this result, and everyone seems OK with that. One would think based on that that the general public is also satisfied with the result! Keep going that way.

In my opinion, this can never be the right solution. The movement in this direction already became apparent years ago. But it is exactly like judging one's own affairs, it is rejected in society and politically lives and no significant improvement can be brought about.

That brings me back to my opening, the preservation of the breed. So, if we analyze what has been developing, and I would like to do that in the broadest sense of the word, one does not have to be a college graduate to come to the following conclusions.

The goals set in the bylaws and the trial regulations as well as the breed suitability regulations are all very clear in their statements. Nobody can argue that. Where things are lacking significantly in my opinion is the putting the written standards into practice and their interpretations.

## **The Chain**

The people who are the main links in the chain of responsibility for the preservation of the German Shepherd Dog should be the first place we look.

- Board members of the WUSV countries
- Breeders

- Performance judges (IPO/Schutzhund)
- Körmeister (breed survey judges)

Naturally, there are secondary links in the chain as well (trainers for example and others). But I want to limit myself to the main group. I am convinced that the leadership is lacking in matters of breed preservation.

## **The Leadership/Board**

In the bylaws and regulations the goals of breeding just like the breed characteristics are clearly defined.

Over the different decades certain individual aspects were pushed aside, but the principles were not altered. On paper everything stayed the same; from time to time some regulations were changed and even improved a bit.

**Almost automatically my thoughts wander back to the time when the Martin brothers used their influence as SV-members/SV-board members/SV Körmeister to create their “own” German Shepherd Dog. In my opinion that was a German Shepherd who deviated significantly from the breed standard. It goes without saying that they could not accomplish this on their own and by themselves. But considering their considerable influence at that time not much happened without them and their input. Their influence on the leadership level was unmistakable.**

**The influence of a Canto von Arminius (W. Martin), a dog with bad temperament and character, and of a Quanto v.d. Wienerau (H. Martin) was praised to high heaven in the creation of a, pardon the expression, artificially constructed (read: modern) German Shepherd Dog.**

Working abilities were hardly if at all talked about.

**The Kennels in Viernheim were sometimes jokingly referred to as the breeding factories of beauty.**

Some even dared to say that they (Martin brothers) did great damage to the breed. You can read Walter Hoffmann's original report on the topic. I agree with that entirely.

It was a very single minded direction for which the German Shepherd they created was set as a standard. Ego, prestige, and profit dominated, especially when the Asian countries became part of the picture. That the working traits and abilities were reduced to a minimum seemed to be acceptable. During that time I watched trials in Germany where dogs got their Schutzhund trial "stamp" (for breeding) in ways that I would prefer to forget quickly. But at the time it was a reality.

That was a dangerous development, because the chances that one "breaks through the thin ice one skates on" become very real (as we have seen since then). But the whole world followed the SV (read: Arminius and Wienerau) because their rules had to be followed if one did not want to be thrown overboard.

Even the boards of foreign clubs (Holland, Belgium, etc.) followed suit along with many breeders. If one wants to see a silver lining in this cloud, one could say that for some breed fanciers this movement was a wakeup call (at least in Germany) to breed better working dogs.

It was a necessary evil if one wanted to preserve the working abilities. Police, military, and customs could not find a sufficient numbers of suitable German Shepherd Dogs. People were fed up, and I was around to witness this development first hand.

Alfred Hahn, from the kennel "vom Busecker Schloss, was very clear. He told me: "Koos, if you want to improve the German Shepherd Dog, and I know that is your goal, then consider this for the future. One can improve the anatomy of the German Shepherd in only a few generations. But to improve, temperament, character, and the necessary working abilities take much much longer. Good males will always be around, so focus on the quality of your brood bitches!" In my opinion, the pure truth, spoken by a very experienced breeder and Körmeister.

Another one of his favorite sayings was:

"During the hold and bark in the blind you can see and hear the soul of the dog!! But as a judge one has to be ABLE to see it."

His two males Greif zum Lahntal and his son Sagus as well as many others gave the performance world definite boosts (read: working abilities).

In reference to improvement or at least preservation, the results of an American study are also very interesting. It was stated that the traits that determine "beauty" appear to be on the same gene as the traits responsible for temperament and character. If that is in fact the case, then we certainly have an additional problem.

One has to talk about these lines and their existence very openly, but on a factual basis. Then their discussion has value.

But at this time the leadership is still more show and beauty oriented and for the benefit of the breed things have to change, and soon.

Indecisive board members, maybe for selfish reasons, holding endless discussions driven by emotions and not fact are not helpful and should be eliminated.



The times when trees grow to heaven and everybody is nice to one another are over. The time has come for serious changes, not only in regards to how things are structured but also in regards to decision making.

Included in those changes should be the sitting in important leadership positions for too long. In the long run that is bad not only for the organization, but also for the individual in the position (one becomes complacent, wants maintain the status quo, and after a while simply operates on auto-pilot).

In that case new ideas and developments are threatening (to one's own office). New enthusiasm (read: new board members) should be given a chance to implement their ideas for the preservation of the breed. In order to accomplish a goal, decision making has to encompass everything when it comes to goal setting.

Many sports friends feel the sense of injustice from the people at the top when important decisions are passed just like during the judging of their dogs. This reminded me of a slogan of an equal rights group:

***"Mercy for the wolf means injustice for sheep!"***

## **Breeders**

As always, breeders who follow the regulations set the standard of the German Shepherd of today. Their creativity should not be limited. The breed suitability regulations are very clear about that.

A different Aspect

In show line circles many breeders and owners send their females to Germany to be trained for SchH 1 and to get

e Kör-rating ( I am sure only because of circumstances). In principle there is nothing wrong with that if there are good reasons for it, such as knowledge, skill, or time. But at times there is something wrong with the way it happens.

For me it is unbelievable that dogs who have not mastered a single exercise can achieve SchH 1 and a Körung in the time span of 2-3 months. Considering the existing trial rules almost impossibility. To achieve that in some cases there has to be a tight chain of accomplices starting with judges, helpers, clubs etc.

In that context I have seen examples of dogs who returned to their regular clubs. But that is how things are, it happens, it is accepted, it gets paid for and then on to breeding.

## **Dear Sport friends I wanted to ask you this;**

Is this yes or no corruption by a cartel of handlers-judges-helpers and clubs?

I am convinced that this sort of thing certainly contributes to the high failure rate. Please don't forget that females are the most important factors in the preservation of the breed. And to continue like that we are not doing the breed any favors.

## **The performance judges ad Körmeister**

One expects from a judge that he is impartial due to his knowledge, that he exudes integrity, and that he judges a dog without looking at the person who is handling him. He is held to that standard by the trial rules which are in my opinion clear and unmistakable. Naturally the

rules give him some discretion and that is how it should be. Günther Diegel, the training director of the SV, is very clear in his view of the SchH 1 category. IT is the cornerstone for the foundation and development of the breed. When judging dogs at large events one should set as a goal that at the top of the results list are dogs who are of such quality that they could be utilized to improve the breed. I am perfectly in agreement with that, but in reality it often looks a lot different.

### **For example:**

The length of the tracks at the WUSV in Kefeld can't contribute to such a goal. But who speaks up about it?!

But it can't be that a dog passes a trial, gets a certificate, or gets a Körung based solely on criteria that an individual judge makes up on his even own if he does not deserve it. A judge who does that does not only shame himself, but does not really do the sports friend a favor either, and he in no way helps the breed. But what the hell, he is popular and gets to judge a lot.

Another aspect the so called training lines have to live with is the fact that through much improved training techniques (in itself a very admirable accomplishment) dogs who do not have any social aggression or the necessary hardness of a working dog anymore can still be trained excellently by experts with any number of training aides.

If this practice is elevated to **an art**, AND is promoted by awarding high points to dogs who are the product of this, then we have a different serious problem, namely the reliance on the innate talent of the dog. At this year's BSP I save many examples of this.

In principle I do not think this kind of training is wrong. BUT, if a judge is not able to see through all of that and still places the dogs at the top, then we will quickly end up on a slippery slope which will have negative consequences in breeding and therefore for the future!

Because I am firmly convinced that the working abilities of the German Shepherd Dog should originate in his genetics. If dogs can only perform exercises to a large part because of the help they had through technical aides, then we are truly on the wrong path.

The German Shepherd is not a Malinois with different appearance. Aficionados know what I mean by that!

The wrong path applies to all three phases.

More and more dogs quit on tracks when the conditions become too difficult. That has a lot to do with training too of course, but MORE the genetic predisposition (the desire to find something).

Tracking only on food, more food and complete focus on food give more and more stress finding the articles.

Therefore tracking is also of great importance and an important part of the whole program. A Körmeister should be able to assess the genetic talent and judge the dog on that basis.

Like I mentioned earlier: The length of the tracks on the WUSV 2009 in Krefeld did nothing to accomplish this goal.

Here of course refer to the males and especially the females who are trained in such a manner AND who are also active in the breeding scene. Otherwise the value

of working ability, or what is left of it, becomes nothing more than a big technical game. In other words: The 100 points are not passed on to the offspring. Not in tracking, not in obedience, and certainly not in protection.

It is common knowledge that after the trial certification the second hurdle on the way to breed improvement is the breed suitability test or the Körung. Or does anyone dispute that? Because people had concerns over the low working value of the dogs out of show lines the rules of the breed suitability test were tightened some years ago. The dogs had to be handled off leash, they had to out and guard, etc. That was very promising! But in praxis many Körmeisters interpreted and applied the rules much differently and according to their own standard here and abroad. In other words, they did what they had always done, and that is where things went wrong.

Rules have to be followed. Or what is the point of making them? Don't you agree?

In these breed surveys dogs have to be examined all over again for the crucial elements of what is necessary for the preservation of the breed.

It simply can't be that at a breed suitability trial, in which I myself participated, two dogs come off the sleeve at least twice during the pressure phase and only came back on because the helper helped them still got the rating TSB "pronounced". And that was not an isolated incident!

The Körmeister commented that the dogs in question had after all proven themselves under a **performance judge**. Otherwise how could they have been titled?

The helper who carefully helped these dogs on the bite was praised. Sadly, this young helper showed that he

could also do different kind of work. But it is unfortunate that he gave such a performance, or maybe he had to perform in such a manner. If he hadn't, it is probably likely that he would not be seen again anytime soon!

During this trial two very different reactions could be observed on the sidelines. For me it was crystal clear that in this case the rules were grossly breached. But whatever I may think, the result was a lot of smiling faces on the sidelines. And one got the license to breed, especially since one of the females had already been bred by a top rated V-dog.

The next step on this slippery slope is that a dog shows himself affected during the gun fire sureness test. We accept that because the dog has proven himself under a performance judge?

Wrong!! Wrong, and more wrong!

But who can criticize a judge or call him on the rules?

The way I see it, and I have said this often, it is wrong that board members who have held the same office for years remain in that office even longer. Any individual sports friend would not accept that for himself. But in praxis is apparently quite different and it is accepted.

When I think about all of this I come to the conclusion that many of the fact I have mentioned above have led to the decline of the German Shepherd Dog as a working dog.

I am now, as I have always been, of the opinion that we have to try to improve the organizations internally, but in a democratic way and on the basis of a true majority.

If that can't be accomplished members are forced to take their own initiative like in the case of the RSV 2000.

Instead of prejudging such initiative it is better to engage in dialogue and to look whether common ground can be found.

I hope for the future of the German Shepherd that people will not disengage further because of some of the things I said above, or worse give up on the German Shepherd.

Right now we need every single member. But if we acknowledge that we need the individual member they also have to be listened to.

Who will take this challenge?

With greetings in the sport,  
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