

Training your dog in the Federation – what's it all about?

To help newcomers it is important to try and put the training of your dog into some perspective and to briefly outline for you what it's all about.

First and foremost it is the role of clubs within the German Shepherd Dog Federation to provide training that meets the needs of anybody who owns a German Shepherd Dog whatever that need might be.

The objective of the Federation is firstly to ensure that we breed dogs that are healthy and of good temperament, and secondly to provide an infrastructure that enables these dogs to develop to this potential.

It's the second aspect that this article attempts to deal with.

Ninety-nine percent of the German Shepherd Dogs that are bred in South Africa are purchased by people as companions for themselves or their families and what they require is a dog that is obedient, manageable, tolerant of children, accepting of their guests, but at the same time protective of their property and the family when required.

People want a dog that is fun to have around but that is not neurotic and destructive of their property. They want a dog that comes when they call it, doesn't bark for no reason and is confident and outgoing.

A small percentage of the people purchasing a German Shepherd Dog purchase a dog for the express purposes of participating in training competitions.

Another small percentage of the people purchasing a companion dog find an interest in training competitions once they start training and become aware of this environment.

Another larger percentage discovers the world of the show ring.

Most join a training club simply because they believe their dog needs some form of training.

So it's very clear that the objectives of the German Shepherd Dog Federation clubs is to provide an infrastructure that enables the development of this type of temperament in the dogs owned by this large proportion of the owners of German Shepherd Dogs.

At the same time it is important to recognize that the German Shepherd Dog has been bred as an extremely versatile working dog and that it is important that we maintain these characteristics.

To achieve all of these objectives training consists of a number of elements.

Firstly, and most importantly, it consists of a **socialization** element. This should start as young as possible and its purpose is to expose puppies to other dogs, people, children, and different situations in a controlled environment where it can be ensured that these are all positive experiences. In this way puppies can grow up self-assured and contented.

During this critical stage of development, time is spent on building a good bond with the owner and teaching the dog basic exercises like coming eagerly when they are called, and sitting and lying down on command. Another emphasis of this training is building a strong desire for a play object which will be used as a **motivation** and **reward** in their later training.

The other elements of the training are **obedience** or **control** work, **protection** work and **tracking**.

To give this training some form of structure and purpose the GSD Federation has adopted the training test framework used internationally by working dog fraternities. These tests are the Begleithund (BH) and IPO tests.

Loosely translated from the German, **Begleithund** means companion dog. The **BH** test consists of a test of a basic level of obedience i.e. walking at heel with the handler on and off a leash, staying in a sitting position when left by the handler, staying lying down when left by the handler and then running to the handler when called, and staying in a down position away from the handler whilst another dog does the other exercises in the near vicinity.

In the other part of the **BH** test the dog is observed walking next to the handler, sitting and lying down in a busy public place. The dog is also left alone tied to a pole in a public place whilst another dog is waked past it.

The overall purpose of the test is to evaluate the dog's trainability and temperament. It has a very **practical** relevance to all owners' needs and therefore ideally suited to the objectives of the Federation's training infrastructure.

It is within the reach of all people and all dogs and therefore everyone is encouraged to participate in these tests. The other beauty of the **BH** test is that it is not a competition and therefore people participate in a great spirit of camaraderie.

Participation in these tests is not a prerequisite for training in a GSD Federation club it simply gives some goal to the training and a means of evaluating progress, apart from being good fun.

One of the other elements of the training is the **protection work**. It is very important to understand what we are trying to achieve with this part of the training and why we encourage all dogs to participate besides the fact that they really, really enjoy it.

The most important thing to understand is that the ultimate objective is to test the dogs' natural instincts to chase and catch (prey drive) and its self-confidence and ability to handle pressure. This is evaluated during the Breed Survey and IPO test and is described as TSB which is the abbreviation for the German, Triebveranlagung (instinctive behaviour), Selbstsicherheit (self-confidence) and Belastbarkeit (ability to cope with stress).

With the correct approach to protection training we help to shape the dogs' self-confidence and ability to handle stress. Given that we are talking about the training of a breed of dog that is naturally protective, it is very important that the dog is self-confident and does not feel the need to protect itself in circumstances where it is not required.

We want a protection dog but at the same time we want a dog that will accept our guests and children's friends into our households and that we can take out in public places. In other words we want a self-confident dog that can easily discern when its protective behaviour is required or not.

This article won't go into great detail about instinctive behaviour, drives, etc. as it is simply trying to outline why we structure our training in a particular way. It also explains why, even if you never participate in any formal test, be it a breed survey or IPO trial, it is useful to participate in this aspect of the training that is provided.

It also explains why it is every Federation club's obligation to provide this for all club members whether they participate in formal tests or not.

The **Breed Survey** is an overall evaluation of a dog's suitability for breeding and includes an evaluation of the dog's desirable instinctive behaviour, self-confidence and ability to handle stress, and the dog's anatomical structure. This is the description you will find under the name of the parents in your dog's pedigree.

Again this is something we try to encourage as many owners as possible to try and achieve. For more details go to General/Constitution/Breed Survey Manual on the GSD Federation website.

For those who have a serious interest in training and competing in trials, **IPO** is the test framework the GSD Federation provides. It includes tracking, control and protection work sections. Together with walking at heel, stay and recall exercises, the control section also includes retrieving and agility exercises. It is ideally suited to the versatility of the German Shepherd Dog and is the ultimate goal owners can work towards. For more information there is a very good article under Training on the GSD Federation website called What is IPO?. You can also go to the Training Ordinances under Training on the website.

Without going into much detail regarding **tracking** refers to the dog's scenting faculties. In the tracking section of the IPO tests the dog's ability to follow the scent path left by a person walking through a field and to identify articles dropped by the person is evaluated. Tracking is a very rewarding form of training both from the dog's perspective and the owner's but is less important from the perspective of shaping the temperament required by the average German Shepherd Dog owner.

In conclusion, the purpose of the training provided by the GSD Federation's clubs is to ensure that the German Shepherd Dogs we train develop to the potential inherent in their genes and are a credit to the breed.

It is not our aim to force anybody to participate in any form of test or competition, rather we want to encourage everyone who owns a German Shepherd Dog to feel free to go to any GSD Federation club and feel comfortable that the training meets their needs.