

Letters to the Editor



The Editor,

I would like to give you my congratulations and respect for your efforts and courage in raising the discussion outlined in the article "Keeping the peace with FCI; Embargo lifted on Schutzhund" February 2010. I am grateful that a well regarded institution such as yours has attempted to give a balanced account of this countries handling of an internationally endorsed sport which has unfortunately become the centre of a political football match rather than the centre of informed discussion.

I especially support your comments regarding the FCI sanctioned sport of IPO/Schutzhund and its function as a breed survey tool in assessing both the mental and physical utility of several breeds. It is at this point I wish to also highlight the very real issues surrounding structure, function and health facing the pedigree community around the world, also discussed in the "Brace Yourself" article (same issue) regarding the well known BBC documentary. Whilst the documentary shows an extreme point of view it does highlight the absolute necessity to judge and assess the "total" animal (i.e. mental and physical health and temperament, structure and function etc) and not just focus on the concepts of "beauty" alone. IPO / Schutzhund therefore plays a very important part in our canine community as it aims to provide us with a medium to help assess the "total dog" and its utility.

It is at this point that I wish to discuss my personal experiences. I am a search and rescue dog handler that has been involved with the training, development and testing of both wilderness and disaster search dogs for some 15 years at both State and National levels. Through my experiences and training overseas in Europe, I have first hand seen the benefits IPO / Schutzhund has as a survey tool for the selection of search dogs and also as a training aid in the development of certain breeds of search dogs. Indeed my current search dog was selected because his pedigree contained animals with IPO/Schutzhund III credentials. This gave me an indication that my dog would likely have the genetic potential or foundation to cope with the rigors of search work. Furthermore, I have also undertaken to train my dog in IPO / Schutzhund as the skills learned, combined with its promotion of balanced temperament, mental and physical performance and endurance has meant that it has brought great benefits to my dog's training and development as a search dog (not to mention that it has proved to be a wonderfully challenging and rewarding sport for both my four footed partner and myself).

Without allowing such a valuable sport to exist in its own right, or to be publically recognized for its positive contributions to the community as an aid to the selection and training of tomorrow's service dogs, this country will undoubtedly be all the poorer.

Alex Withers
South Australia

The Editor

Dog News Australia

Re: Keeping the Peace with FCI.

What is most remarkable about the DNA announcement regarding the FCI and ANKC position towards Schutzhund sport is that it should be necessary at all.

Schutzhund trained dogs learn to be obedient and controlled in the face of highly distracting and even combative situations and thus are far less likely to partake in antisocial behaviours. The moment this training commences the risks to public safety decreases. The sport is also a breeding tool to select those animals with the desired traits

for use in breeding programmes, thereby improving the temperament and working ability of future generations.

There are many misconceptions touted about the sport in Australia. However the Australian National Kennel Club did a five year review of the sport and resolved they could not see any problems with the activity but would not administer the sport. Nor do we wish them to, or to make it mandatory for working breeds to obtain a Schutzhund title. We only wish to be secure in the knowledge that Australians are not discriminated against nor put in a position of disadvantage compared to other first-world nations.

The ANKC should have gotten out of the way of the Schutzhund sport decades ago. But despite being an internationally recognized dog sport, for many years the sport has suffered from discrimination by the ANKC and ongoing vilification by an anti-Schutzhund Board of The German Shepherd Dog Council of Australia (GSDCA).

Many readers might not even be aware that there are two National Schutzhund organizations servicing the sport in Australia; the Australian United Schutzhund Club and my own organization, Schutzhund Australia Inc., being the largest and most prolific at Schutzhund titling Australian-bred and trained dogs, as well as sending three Australian teams to international Championship events the last years - these achievements by Aussies overseas have been no thanks to the ANKC and in spite of the GSDCA seeking to stop an Australian entry at the WUSV (World) Championship.

Contrary to commonly dispensed propaganda, it has not been the Government or any anti-dog legislation that has sought to suppress the sport in this country, but the actions of rival canine organizations, the most aggressive being the GSDCA whose leadership seems to perceive the sport as a threat to their Constituency.

The ANKC finds itself between a rock and a hard place: on one hand trying to assure FCI that they are not blocking FCI Schutzhund judges from officiating and on the other hand appeasing the powerful GSDCA anti-Schutzhund lobby at home.

The GSDCA is a breed organization whose Constitution states their supposed reason for being is the "betterment of the German Shepherd Dog." Yet nowhere in the Objectives of these so-called protectors of the "King of Working Dogs" do they mention preserving the breed's working ability!

The German Shepherd Dog lives on and profits off its world wide reputation as a working breed. This reputation was built on Schutzhund; the test developed by the founder of the German Shepherd Dog breed, Captain Max von Stephanitz, as a measure of canine working ability. However, despite Schutzhund's noble and purposeful origins, at every turn the GSDCA leadership has sought to discredit the sport and to deny its very existence in this country. Why?

To understand, we first need to establish some history. In 2010 the current GSDCA President, Bruce Knight, proudly proclaimed in his re-election statement that one of the major achievements of his term was dealing with and resolving the issue of Schutzhund, quote: "Early in my term, this became a major threat to our hobby and I am pleased to say the problem has now been confronted and finally dealt with."

NB: Bruce might pause here to reflect on the words of The Master in the movie Big Stan, "never celebrate too soon."

Even more enlightening of their agenda has been comments by the former GSDCA President, Vince Tantaro, who in 2004 wrote, "It must also be noted that Govern-

ments and politicians are only too eager to enact restrictive dog ownership legislation... any dog activity that is not seen as in the interests of the general public at large cannot be supported. The reality, both politically and socially is that the introduction and or condoning of Schutzhund training and or competitions cannot be supported by the GSDCA."

Mr. Tantaro goes on to make other quite erroneous statements, claiming that, "Guard dogs are closely related to Schutzhund trained animals." He then shakes the big stick directly at the heads of any rebellious elements amongst his own membership, "No Member body of the ANKC shall recognize or approve Schutzhund training activity or conduct Schutzhund Trial competition and any member taking part risks disqualification!"

And lastly, like a wise Uncle he assures us that, "The Australian psyche is that dogs are family companions! They should not chase and or bite humans or other animals!"

Indeed! And who would deny the bleeding obvious?

For anyone with some knowledge of these topics, it is clear from Mr. Tantaro's statements he is either being deliberately deceptive or he simply does not know very much about the sport.

How can the GSDCA manage to reverse the meaning of everything that Schutzhund is NOT?

Schutzhund is NOT illegal to practice in Australia. Schutzhund is NOT guard dog training. Schutzhund dogs do NOT chase and bite humans or other animals, and while about it, Mr. Tantaro's insinuation that Schutzhund dogs are NOT family companions can also be just as swiftly debunked.

WHAT THEN IS SCHUTZHUND?

1. Schutzhund (SchH), also called VPG or IPO, is a sport fully endorsed by international and national canine / Kennel Club organisations (2-6)

2. SchH/VPG/IPO is intended to objectively evaluate the temperament and breed worthiness of dogs that have been bred for working pursuits (2-6; esp. p3 ref 2)

3. Australian SchH/VPG/IPO organisations operate in accordance with international standards pertaining to rules and guidelines. Participants abide by codes of conduct and uphold standards of responsible dog ownership and sportsmanlike behaviour at all times 7

4. SchH/VPG/IPO develops and evaluates desired traits in working dogs, resulting in stable, well adjusted and useful members of society. This is achieved through careful selection of prospective candidates, socialisation and training 8

5. SchH/VPG/IPO is a sport and not to be confused with "protection training"; it does not involve 'attack training'; nor does it result in dogs more likely to engage in bites/attacks on people or animals 9

NB: Working pursuits are defined as Search and Rescue, Police Service, Customs and Correctional Services, service dogs in the Defence Forces, Security, Detection (bombs, drugs, weapons etc).

Only pure bred dogs from recognised FCI working breeds are able to participate in SchH/VPG/IPO. These breeds are the Aire-dale Terrier, Bouvier des Flandres, Boxer, Belgian Shepherd Dog, German Shepherd Dog, Doberman, Giant Schnauzer and Rottweiler.

The GSDCA are aware of these facts. Yet they persist with their scare mongering and their lobbying against the sport. When Mr. Tantaro noted that, "Governments and politicians are only too eager to enact

restrictive dog ownership legislation" he failed to mention it was GSDCA and its un-Australian lobbying of these self-same Governments and politicians that were the ones seeking to enact restrictive dog legislation - against the sport.

In 1998, in the case of Burns VS the City Council of Casey, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal of Victoria dismissed the City's attempt to declare a Schutzhund trained dog as "dangerous." Instead, the Victorian Court found that Schutzhund was, "far removed from training undergone by security or guard dogs" and that, "Schutzhund training has not rendered the dog more likely to attack or bite a person, but rather, if anything, less likely."

After the court had looked at all the evidence and dismissed the charges, the GSDCA still maintained their rigid opposition to the sport. The then President, Vince Tantaro, claimed the failed attempt was only a minor setback, tweak the wording in the legislation a little and Schutzhund in Victoria would be put back on the back foot.

Confidential sources that tell that Mr. Tantaro still sits on the Management Committee in Victoria and liaises with the Victorian DPI for Management, certainly explains a lot. And the creative efforts to instigate anti-Schutzhund legislation in that state is no doubt ably assisted by yet another GSDCA Executive employed within the DPI itself.

The current GSDCA President has voiced amusement at Schutzhund Australia's petitioning of the Victorian DPI while the GSDCA had their agents inside the Department. The draconian wording of the current legislation does not specify Schutzhund, but can be interpreted to target the sport as well as anyone who plays with their dog holding an object in their hand. (i.e.: ball on string.)

When Victorian law criminalizes mainstream dog owners for engaging in harmless activities with their dogs, we can thank the GSDCA, whose mouthpiece, Vince Tantaro, reminds us that, "The State of Victoria, as far as enacting controls on the keeping of companion animals, is the torch bearer with many other states modelling their legislation on theirs."

This comment should send shivers down the spine of any dog owner in Australia.

The height of GSDCA hypocrisy has been their 2009 clandestine meeting with Dr. Tate and the Victorian DPI, whereby, under the auspices of improving their gene pool, they asked the DPI to exempt their own Schutzhund-titled import dogs from the effects of DPI legislation! While still urging Australians titling Schutzhund dogs should face legislation, and showing a complete disregard for other working breeds in the process. The fact an exemption was actually granted to this selfish minority, whose only concern is to protect their own private commercial investments, underlines the discrimination going on.

What we have is a small, biased group, unrepresentative of the sport, presuming to have the competency to present the sport (in a negative light, naturally) to the Victorian DPI. The plotting and politicking is all supposed to be for "the good of their breed" (if selling out can be considered good for any breed) but in actuality it is a far more mundane and self serving agenda than that.

Namely, the GSDCA is a member of

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the World Union of German Shepherd Dog Clubs (WUSV). The WUSV Charter, which the GSDCA signed on for, requires its member clubs to support the sport and to encourage their members to participate in it. In most WUSV member countries, including Germany, it is mandatory for a German Shepherd Dog to attain a Schutzhund title before it is deemed breed worthy or eligible for an Excellent Grading. If Schutzhund is available in Australia then logically there is no reason why the GSDCA could not meet its obligations under the Charter. If this occurred, then the Piper would need to be paid, because one result of a System that promotes dog showing as a primary pastime is the degeneration of inherent working abilities.

In order to be exempt from the terms of WUSV Charter, the GSDCA set out instead to deceive. Originally they told the WUSV that Schutzhund did not exist in Australia. Better international communications soon put paid to that lie. They then claimed that Schutzhund was illegal in Australia; desperately illogical in the face of the existence of numerous operating clubs.

They really needed to convert their original lies into realities. So they propagandized their membership, lobbied Government and the ANKC, blocked invitations to international Schutzhund judges, worked against Australians entering international events, vilified the sport as a menace and patronized the people practicing it as irresponsible.

To become better informed the GSD Club of Germany (SV), which heads the WUSV, sent a representative to Australia, despite protests from the GSDCA, in order to evaluate Schutzhund Australia Inc.'s administration, trials and infrastructure. The result was a positive written report

that approved Schutzhund Australia Inc's structures as up to international standards. Unbeknown to the wider GSDCA membership at the time, the GSDCA President was winging his way to Germany at their expense to reiterate the lies supporting an exemption.

In 2007 the GSDCA leadership finally put up two well scripted motions to a vote; to allow Schutzhund a specified number of (2) SV judges each year and for Australian teams to be able to compete overseas. There were a number of caveats attached to both the motions, amongst them their right to refuse granting approval without showing cause.

The process hardly mattered, because GSDCA leadership had no intention of delivering anyway. The bone they'd thrown to the WUSV took the heat off and the wording was fixed so they could cop out anyway, without even having to justify their actions.

It came as a surprise when the membership voted in favour of the sport. The leadership lobbied the ANKC to intervene to overturn their member's vote - so much for democracy and respecting the will of the people. The ANKC obliged, writing to threaten affiliates with disaffiliation for involvement in the sport - an expedient piece of bluff and bullying which any lawyer would dismiss as un-enforceable.

(NB: Most interesting since has been the attempt to erase all evidence that vote ever took place. At the 2009 AGM a motion to have all records of the vote removed from the club's official Minutes was defeated.)

Gross duplicity has occurred at the highest levels, in both the GSDCA and the ANKC. Despite a show of accommodating the sport, the GSDCA never negotiated with genuine good will. It's been a charade for the benefit of their members and placating



the WUSV. The most recent piece of re-election preening from the current President, Bruce Knight, aptly demonstrates this fact. In 2007 Mr. Knight cast his vote in favour of the sport. In 2010 he is congratulating himself for dealing with this "threat" to their hobby. Clearly his earlier vote was a bit of grandstanding for benefit of the SV / WUSV watching on.

If the GSDCA are so firmly set against the sport on principle, then they should resign from the WUSV, an organization which requires Schutzhund to be a central platform for breeding GSDs. But the leaders of the GSDCA want their cake and eat it too. They want to swan around the international stage, to rub shoulders with the famous and network with the powerful, be able to accept international invitations and to invite German conformation judges to service their hobby with their dogs. They want all the thrills and frills but don't want to comply with their responsibilities under the Charter. Thus, if maintaining their own comfy status quo means trashing our hobby and vandalizing our investment in our dogs, they do it because they can.

In the name of "for the good of the breed" they've torn down the Palace to get material for building hovels, assembled in line with their own withered vision of the breed's potential.

Former SV President, Hermann Martin, wrote that it is a very large breed with enough room for a lot of interests. The demonizing propaganda has segregated and impeded the education and development of

members have ignored the lies and joined Schutzhund clubs to develop and learn about the true nature and purpose of the sport.

The GSDCA leaders do not understand there is something inherently degenerate in breeding animals that cannot fulfill the functions the breed is supposed to exist for. If their tokenistic "breed surveys" produced anything of value, then why is there no demand for their show dogs from the Australian Armed Forces, the Police and other services using dogs for working pursuits? The elephant in the room is that the services don't want them. They preference dogs coming from Schutzhund backgrounds.

This is the case all over the world. The American Kennel Club (AKC) had the same attitude towards Schutzhund as our ANKC. After 9/11 the AKC approached their Defense Department to ask them what they could do for their country. The AKC representatives were given a tour of the Service Dog Flights at the Lackland Air Base, in Texas. The AKC reps asked why there was no American dogs being bred with or used on the base, as they were all Euro-bred dogs from Schutzhund backgrounds. They were told that dogs from the AKC show lines could not do the work. Consequently, the AKC dropped all opposition to Schutzhund. They endorsed a USA Schutzhund-identical program as part of their curriculum and run by the FCI affiliated Working Dog Association (WDA).

Schutzhund will keep on keeping on in Australia. The process is an evolution, not a revolution. And the misguided spoilers will find they can fool some of the people some of the time but not all of the people all of the time.

Alison Kollenberg

Editor's note:

References to sources were provided with this Letter.

