

The Schutzhund...

The Sportdog...



Some 150,000 members in different working dog clubs in Germany alone, and many, many more thousands of enthusiasts in other countries, including Australia, are training their dogs at Schutzhund. This brochure will give you an interesting insight into better understanding the dogs' drives and instincts utilised in the training, and it explains why educated Schutzhund dogs show a much greater self-control in conflict situations.

The text is authored by Antje Grzeschizek, Johanna Murawski, Ursula Zabel, Dr. Helmut Raiser, Dr. Franz Killmann, Uwe Junker, Dieter Klein, Hans-Heinrich Lohmann, Reinhard Wissmann, Werner Zabel und Juergen Rixen.

Article translated into English by Jens Kollenberg.

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The working dog is a highly trainable utility dog. It has pronounced, inherited drives and paired with its strong constitution, makes it well equipped to be trained to serve man in many important areas. The working dog per se has its own value and to preserve it and its genetic resources belong to the preservation of our cultural inheritance.

Especially the Schutzhund training with its three disciplines of tracking, obedience and protection work, is excellently suited through training, survey, selection and breeding to preserve the type of dog which possesses all the hallmarks of a working dog. Dogs which are sociable, intelligent and possessing strong nerves & well developed drives will best serve as sport dogs (Schutzhund dogs), and/or as service dogs (i.e.: border protection), as search & rescue dogs, as guide dogs for

handicapped people, for police work, Customs or in the Armed Forces.

Clearly then, in addition to the personal satisfaction of training one's own dog and contributing to the continuation of the thousand year old symbiosis between man & dog, the training and trialling in the Schutzhund sport offers an obvious advantage to the wider community.

The tracking, at which the dog has to follow a person's trail, tests the ability of the dog's sense of smell as well as the dog's ability to remain focused. In the obedience work, dog and owner have to show a high level of harmony and team spirit. The dog's trainability, its intelligence, its ability to concentrate, as well as its social skills being all put to test.

From what you have read so far, you will most likely agree

that Schutzhund training has a lot to offer all of us. In the third discipline, during the so-called character work, where a dog bites the sleeve, in some quarters possibly causes calls for a ban, we presume. ☺ A dog, which uses its teeth to use against its own “social group” must be aggressive! But IS this activity a cause for putting the animal to sleep and to severely punishing the owner?



Firstly take an objective look at a dog before we continue. It has four legs which enable it to move, that is obvious. But it's also obvious that it has no arms and no hands – the tools of the primates, which includes us. You have of course already concluded that the only tools a dog has at its disposal are its jaws and its teeth. With these tools it cuts the naval cord of its newborn puppies, cares and transports food to them, and yes, even carries them away to a safe place if danger should occur. It's with its teeth the dog catches its prey and protects itself and its progeny if necessary.



Before we then make a judgement over a dog which uses its teeth, it's both logical and necessary that we use our knowledge and experience to try to understand what “went through the dog's head” before and during its course of action.

A dog's predominant behaviour, and also that of human beings, can be attributed to the four main motivations, and in accordance with the classical drives, they are:

Nourishment, Reproduction, Fight and Flight.

In the training and trialling situations other more appropriate definitions are commonly used, namely:

Nourishment (including hunt) = Prey

Fight = Aggression

Flight = Avoidance

Reproduction related motivation is not (and can not be) used in purposeful dog training.

All of these four different areas of motivation have specific triggers, specific behavioural actions and drive satisfaction.

In the character work, these motivational drives (except for the reproduction motivation) are deliberately called for, controlled and satisfied in the training.



The specific trigger for the prey drive – think for a moment of the fleeing rabbit – is a movement away from the dog. In reality, if the prey object is a real rabbit, or a ball or a stick, which is fetched by the dog, or it is the sleeve, it doesn't make an ounce of difference to the dog in the end. A fleeing object will be pursued! That is pre-programmed into the canine's repertoire of behaviours, and as we all understand, this drive is a part of the dog's natural way of living out its life by using normal instincts. Should it be denied its natural needs, we would actually rob the species of an important tool in its ability to pursue its natural life.

These realisations demand specific training methods. For the Schutzhund trained dog, the padded sleeve is its “prey”, - its toy, which regularly given to reward the dog by the Helper, and which it is encouraged to carry off the field at the end of the training session, a trophy to satisfy its drive goal.

Some people might get the idea that this play/prey work involving the dog's prey drive (instinct) is dangerous because the dog is taught to pursue a moving object.



The uninformed observer could possibly argue that the dog would equate the padded sleeve with for example a jogger or a child running around. However, this presumption has been proven completely unjustified during many decades of practical work and

training. This is also simple to explain and show, because, during the training only very specific behavioural triggers instigated by the Helper will motivate the dog to engage himself. In no other situation in the daily life is the specific “dummy” in the form of the padded sleeve being used.

Therefore an educated and well-bred Sport Dog would never bite, for example, a running child or a child waving its arms out of happiness. As one can well understand, the sport (or Schutzhund) trained dog is, like all other dogs in our society, strongly discouraged from pestering our fellow man. And in addition, and as you have noticed already, the Sport (Schutzhund) Dog is actually educated to only engage its prey drive at a training field and towards a toy, in the form of a padded sleeve, a dumb-bell, etc.

In addition, we hope another couple of other facts about our four-legged friends will interest you, where in other situations the prey drive is actively used in the training. The activation of and the use of the prey drive in training our sport (Schutzhund) dogs doesn't hinder or limit the dog's natural restraint from biting in any way. The well-socialised dog does not normally harm (bite) its own fellow dogs... even during a serious argument. It would probably be no news to trainers to know that the handlers of our Search & Rescue dogs, and also our Service dog handlers with their sniffer dogs, actively use the dog's natural prey drive throughout their training and in their work. The sniffer dog, for example, searches for his prey object, which, during training, is always filled with some kind of drug. The dog is lead to the prey object by sniffing for the smell of the drug where it is always strongly rewarded (i.e.: gets drive satisfaction) when it finds the object, by either food or a game of tug of war with the object and being allowed to carry it away.



During a Sport Dog (Schutzhund) trial the dog will be confronted with resistance from the helper. The pursuit of the helper and the gripping of the padded sleeve is a prey exercise, and as we have seen, this exercise is trained already when the animal is young, where the dog is rewarded for a correct behaviour by being allowed to carry the sleeve off the field. In a trial situation, the educated dog is not given the sleeve but instead he has to release its grip on it upon a single command. A normal biological course of action would be that the dog, confronted with this frustrating situation of conflict, would react with a show of “aggression”. In human terms we would have said, that he gets annoyed because he gets frustrated.

The aim of meaningful biological aggression is, as we know, not to “kill” or harm an opponent or rival – in this case, the Helper with the padded sleeve. Every creature has a whole repertoire of inherited behavioural conduct

which regulates aggressive conduct, with the clear aim of the limiting or avoiding harm to the rival. Similarly is the weaker given the opportunity to either flee or to back down. The “defeated” will signal passivity and submission, which, by normal instinctive behaviour displayed by the stronger, will call forth an end to its active aggression.



The ritualised fight between two near equal opponents has taught us that during the evolutionary process a necessary selection for species survival has taken place, one which was aimed at limiting/avoiding damage to its own social group. The winner is selected through intimidating threats, imposing behaviour and strict fighting rules.

In the Schutzhund sport it is easy also to see when the dog is intimidating and imposing: The Hold (Sit) & Bark exercise is, for example, a strictly regulated “aggressive” behaviour. The whole of the character work is really nothing else but a ritualistic display (game) between the dog and the Helper over the “prize” – the padded sleeve.



The cultural evolution of man has copied the biological one in the form of ritualised martial arts. Experience has shown us that the kind of people who chose an aggressive sport art as their hobby, for example, boxing, karate, and even tennis, are normally not just better suited to control their aggression in every day situations, but predominantly stand out in a crowd with their above average, friendly and sociable manners. Within the controlled training

environment of Schutzhund we are able to observe the exact same phenomenon in both man and dog.

However, Schutzhund training makes further demands upon the dog. It still remains to learn how to cope with the third drive in the motivational system, namely the “flight” drive, which we call “avoidance”. During the Schutzhund trial the owner will approach his barking dog and with one single command bring the dog out of its display of aggressive behaviour into an avoidance behaviour - a behaviour strictly belonging to the classical “flight” behaviour. In dog sport terminology we do not mean that the dog actually will flee rather than the dog subordinates itself into an obedient behaviour. In this situation it is demanded that the dog willingly changes from the joyful display of aggressive (prey) behaviour into the less joyful obedient behaviour; meaning the good, well bred working dog shows obedience (full control) in a conflict situation, too!



Summing it up, it's fair to say that the most time consuming work in training a sport (Schutzhund) dog goes into teaching it to change from one drive into another one. During a trial though, it's still not hard to see if a dog in the reality has more than just sufficient prey drive and fighting drive (active aggression). However, during a trial the dog's obedience, nerve costume and self-control (self-confidence) in conflict situations are first and foremost to be tested.

This is also the reason why trained Schutzhund dogs aren't on the lists of dogs involved in biting accidents in the wider community. Dogs lacking in self-control haven't got a chance of success in the Schutzhund sport, and, in closing the circle, this means they therefore would

be identified as not be qualified to be used in a breeding programme.*

Selected progeny from dogs which have successfully passed a Schutzhund trial (which are the real working dogs), can be utilised in a number of areas to help serve man: As Search & Rescue Dogs, as Customs & Police Sniffer Dogs, as Cadaver Dogs, or Service Dogs for the Police and the Armed Forces. Worth noting today is that the word “Schutzhund” is a remnant from the early days (over 100 years ago) when testing dogs was first started in Germany. Today, no dog is trained by ordinary citizen to become a so-called “Schutzhund” (translated “protection” dog) is one in the literal meaning of the word.

Worth noting, too, is that no dog is permitted to be trained and trialed in the Sport of Schutzhund before it has proven it possesses an open, free and uncomplicated social character with good nerves and an obedient nature. This is regulated by requiring the dog first pass a so called BH (an obedience & traffic-steady cum companion dog test). The test consists of a number of straight obedience exercises, plus a traffic-steady examination during which the dog has to show its calmness and neutrality towards ordinary people, other animals, joggers, bicyclists and cars.

Of course, to give our dogs a fair opportunity to pass future tests, like BH and Schutzhund sportdog trials, the real work already starts with planned breeding programmes from proven stock and the responsible socialising of their puppies and the young dogs because what “little Tommy” doesn't know, he can't show!



**The denote refers to the compulsory demand from VDH (German Kennel Club), its affiliated working dog clubs, and other European kennel clubs that, only dogs having passed a Schutzhund or IPO trial can be used for breeding. Without such qualifications, the progeny of unqualified parents will not receive pedigrees. The ANKC (Australian National Kennel Clubs) and their affiliated working dog breed clubs (like for example the German Shepherd Dog Council of Australia) do not demand any proof of working dog abilities or of possessing a sound character before their registered animals are used for breeding purposes.*