

## ANATOMY AND PERFORMANCE ARE INSEPARABLE

Written by Körmeister Albert Platz

Nearly a century ago, von Stephanitz began developing the breeding guidelines for the GSD, or as one might say today, he "created" them.

He was intrigued by the untiring work of guard dogs, and driven by the desire to use them in service to mankind. The founding father of the breed knew that this was possible due to the dog's anatomy which was plain and simply based on physical laws - in particular **the law of leverage**. The body served a useful purpose and warranted the often-cited "**economy of power**", the efficient and complete work process. This useful anatomy is crowned by a harmonious physical structure, without any extremes and with all parts in right relation to each other. These were, at the time, visionary idea according to which zealous and hardworking breeders developed the most popular working dog.

We are proud of the fact that in only two man-generations we now have a dog whose performance and structural characteristics are the result of continuous improvement efforts. Only as a combined force can the physical and characteristic qualities, as stipulated in the racial identification standard, lead to proper breeding results and thus keep the associated spirit alive. Neglecting either one of these two "parts of the entity" would without a doubt lead to the breeds degeneration.

The structural details of our German Shepherd Dog have, from a technical point of view, been designed to meet the requirements of optimal performance and have elevated him to a special status among the working dog population. One might say, his well-built physical structure has led to a particular, exclusive beauty ideal that is unaffected by fashion trends or even forced breeding practices. The physical and performance related qualities can only become effective within the framework of an interacting constellation. Breathtaking perfection is only realised in a dog that meets the standard in terms of characteristic faultlessness, temperament and expression.

This in turn leads to the endeavour to admit only anatomically high-classed dogs to reputable shows. Never before were we closer to this ideal than at the present time: just look at the high-placed offspring of equally high-placed show dogs. This fact and the clearly stated goal of our association's breeding standard must never be questioned. It would in fact distort Stephanitz's ideas and by doing so cause potential damage to all concerned.

We must be on our guard not to re-evaluate a complex given standard on the grounds of subjective considerations. It never ceases to amaze me that in spite of only one breed standard, there is support for two breeding goals. One boldly speaks of differing beauty and the other boldly speaks of performance ideals and even their incompatibility with one another. Such statements obviously lack scientific support. What they do, however, is cause novice members to feel insecure. Some people may even be led to believe that, plainly spoken, "a beautiful dog is unable to perform".

Such views are simply wrong, as documented by excellent statistical data of the Bundessiegerprüfungen (SCHELD). It is not really my place to comment in this context on genetic engineering. May that topic remain the scientists' realm. I am only attempting to offer you sound advice as to breeding and performance, without the usual foreign terminology, but rather based on common sense and experience.

Do allow me to state the following:

According to the teaching of RABER, a mating may lead to '2 to the power of 39' possible combinations of chromosomes. This means a twelve-digit number of several billions that would hardly ever be considered in normal breeding practices. It seems interesting to me that not even the genetic factors of a superb male litter mate can guarantee success, because siblings are likely to be very different from each other, not only in appearance but in genetic makeup as well.

Consequently, only 20 -40% of all breeding efforts are ultimately successful, the rest just "evaporates" (BRAUNING). That thought will forever remain wishful thinking.

Of course, the inheriting abilities of the animals in question are important; any outstanding accumulation of favourable or less favourable characteristics must be taken into consideration. However, there is always the exception to the rule, for an even spread of defects across the entire population seems to be quite normal. Therefore, there may be genetic factors (e.g. size, hip dysplasia, ear deformations etc.) that may indeed be difficult to eliminate. The bearers of these characteristics may after all be good genetic inheritors. Their progeny, however, must always be judged in the light of the maternal or paternal flaws. To say it clearly: a high-placed descendant must not display the shortcomings of his ancestors. Naturally, one should not settle for any bad characteristics when shopping for good ones. This is true for anatomical as well as character traits. By the same token, mating winners of a Bundessiegerprüfung or Siegerhauptzuchtschau are absolutely no guarantee to bring forth "winners".

From the sociological point of view, the dog is a product of inheritance and environment which is evident in particular areas of development. However, this is not what we want to discuss in this article. It follows that the usability of the GSD as a working dog must be ensured throughout the entire breeding spectrum. Never must there be two differing blood lines ("the beauties and the beasts")

The founder of the breed emphasised "high breeding" as an ideal, an inspiration to achieve "perfection through breeding". Nowadays, however, "high breeding" is frequently equated with "lacking ability to perform" whereas he had used that expression to describe the very best of the dogs, the ideals which the majority would in due course, by selective breeding, follow suit. This requires responsible, continual selection. It is the only way to ensure that character and anatomy, alone and together, remain determining factors for working dog breeding. "GSD breeding is working dog breeding, or else it is not GSD breeding" (STEPHANITZ).

Understandably, various interest groups have formed within the wide range of possible uses with the GSD. They must by all means do justice to the dog, the breed, and the breeding and performance standards to which the breeders are tied. Part of that is having the dogs which are used for breeding, judged in all required performance and show events. This quite inevitable leads to a shift in interest and attendance. For example, dog handlers whose main interest lies in performance and thus the necessity for continuous advancement, find less time to train their dogs for show events. Of course this works the other way around for show visitors. Both groups, as breeders or buyers of young puppies, strive to use the very top dogs for their particular area of interest, and both are frequently disappointed by the lack of due consideration given to them and their dogs. Is there a solution? I would think so: Körmeister, breeding judge and performance judge must closely co-operate to that end. Stephanitz warns of "damaging misjudging" and this is true in both performance and show areas. It takes a lot of subtle intuition and a thorough feel for the dog as a whole. A performance judge cannot disregard the standard, a fact that a dog handler with a main interest in show must accept. It may well be that his show dog scores low in a performance event.

The consequences at exams, shows and Kórunn events are laudable. **It is wrong and damaging to the breed if dogs are given false top ratings at shows, Kórunn events and exams. This will in no way justify a mating!** May I, in this context, recall the fact that the VORZÜGLICH (excellent) rating must only be given to dogs that strictly meet the standard, display self-confidence and poise, and are indifferent to gunshot noise.

The score SEHR GUT (very good) must only be applied to dogs that meet the requirements for VORZÜGLICH, but display slight structural deviations. This includes dogs falling short of or exceeding the standard height by one centimetre.

GUT (good) is applicable to dogs that meet the standard but display easily recognisable structural deficiencies.

It may be subjectively understandable when points and ratings are adjusted to one's advantage. But it is simply wrong to try to use that process to document that a dog is a high-performing and anatomically superb animal when in reality he is not. The associated members must not be misled by an accommodating grading system. Unfortunately the Kor Class 2 grading will always put the dog at a disadvantage even through he may be a well-suited breeding partner due to high "general appearance" scores, i.e., performance and structure. **It might be advisable to consider introduction of one single Kórklass**, as is done in working dog breeding, with special provisions for the Schutzhund (protection dog) requirements. The criteria as stipulated in the standard must be met without any display of favouritism on the judge's part. If it is not, the standard only suffers. This indeed requires responsible co-operation. Both show and performance groups must take a more conscious and willing approach to working together, particularly in light of the fact that the association's backbone is constituted by members with average breeding and performance results. Top performers are for example, to motivate others, but they are not the guarantors of the association!

Fortunately, there is an increasing awareness in the performance sector that in order to attain top ratings, the structure and performance-related standard specifics are indeed to be striven for more carefully.

Corresponding conclusions should be drawn in the show sector as well. This includes making top-rated males available for breeding with females that are strong in performance.

A performance man will hardly get excited over a dog displaying over or near over angulation, which is usually accompanied by weak hock joints, nor will he fancy an over-sized dog. Without a doubt, many members have lost their sense of direction in that respect. We must not yield to the apparent demand for over-size, a trend that is not at all appreciated by performance people, for "giants are never skilful" (STEPHANITZ). To my knowledge, we never had a performance winner with height bordering on the upper limit. This is certainly even more true for agility. It is important to note that with an increase in body size, the weight increases far more than the power effective motion (disharmony of muscle proportion). **Overweight** builds up dead weight, thus restricting the dog's basic speed and possibly leading to hip dysplasia and a faster wearing-out of the dog in general. any considerations as to size must be based on the standard, for adhering to a medium size is of uttermost importance in view of performance ability. Size and proportions are determined by measuring as well as a visual assessment. Only that way do we achieve a harmonious, medium-sized total appearance that ensures good working abilities.

May my above thoughts lead to fruitful discussions and ultimately unite both interest groups in their common roots and a meaningful future of togetherness. This requires conforming to the standard, for its statements as to structure and character are indispensable for the breeding and use of our GSD as a working dog. Applying the standard too liberally in both sectors would be at the expense of the breed, and consequently endanger the common goals of the association.

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