

## SCHUTZHUND

For any working breed it is vital that the breeding stock not only meet the physical standards established but also maintain the mental soundness and intelligence necessary to continue the work for which it was bred. Named for the German herding dogs used to develop the breed; from its conception, the German Shepherd Dog was intended to be much more than a herding dog. The developers of the breed recognized that the unique characteristics of these herding dogs would make it an adaptable and versatile working dog that could serve humans in ever expanding service roles. The dogs that meet the breed's standard for temperament have the mental stability and intelligence to be of service to humans in a variety of roles from police dog to service dog to a beloved family companion.

The word schutzhund translates from German as Protection Dog. Its original goal was to test if the animals being considered for breeding had the desired characteristics to maintain the working ability of the breed. Since then, while still being used as a breed test, it has also become a competitive sport that many enjoy.

Schutzhund trials evaluate a dog's aptitude for tracking and protection work while maintaining a high degree of control and obedience. It has 4 levels, the first being a BH, which includes obedience and temperament exercises designed to test the dog's soundness before they continue on to the three schutzhund levels, each of which increase in difficulty and includes tests for tracking, obedience and protection phases. The three levels of schutzhund are divided into three phases and a competitor needs to get a passing score in all three phases in order to be awarded the title.

The first phase is tracking. When training for tracking we are not teaching the dog to track, this is a genetic ability in our breed, if the genetics are not there, it cannot be taught. When our dogs naturally track they are picking up a variety of different scents. What we do in the training process is teach the dog to pick out a scent we want them to follow while blocking out competing scents. Initially we teach the dog to follow our own scent and as the dog advances, to follow other scents. All three phases of schutzhund tracking require the dog to keep their nose to the track and also indicate articles on the track.

The second phase consists of an off leash obedience routine. The GSD is a very trainable breed. This breed has a desire to please. The foundation of all obedience work is focus and the goal of obedience training is to teach the dog to always look to the handler for direction. When judging a Schutzhund Obedience routine the judge is looking for a dog that works joyfully and is attentive to his handler.

The last phase is often the most misunderstood. It is the protection phase. To be clear, in this phase we are not training the dog to be protective. Like many breeds from a tiny Yorkshire Terrier to a Great Dane the German Shepherd is genetically programmed to be protective. What we are teaching the dog in the protection phase is control and obedience. These dogs learn to look to the handler for direction. Unlike their untrained counterparts who try to determine on their own what is and what isn't a threat and have a tendency to act of their own accord, dogs properly trained in protection always look to the handler for direction. This makes these dogs safe, desirable members of their community.

**CAUTION:** This is a serious sport and requires advanced training. It is only for genetically sound, clear-headed dogs with balanced drive levels. This is not a sport to dabble in. It requires a serious commitment of time and financial resources. Do not attempt to train for this sport without the guidance of a qualified, experienced trainer and decoy. Check to make sure the decoy is certified as a helper. This assures that he has the minimum skills to assure your dog will be worked safely. You should also remember that training in tracking & obedience as well as protection is vital for the schutzhund dog.

For more information & a detailed description of what is tested in a Schutzhund Trial, check out the following websites:

- [www.gsdca-wda.org](http://www.gsdca-wda.org) - The website for the German Shepherd Dog Club of America's Working Dog Association (WDA). The WDA hosts Conformation Shows and Schutzhund Trials. Schutzhund titles awarded at WDA trials can be recorded on an AKC registered GSD's pedigree. Their website is a great source for information about schutzhund. You will also find a list of WDA Training Clubs with contact information and upcoming events.
- [www.toplinegsdc.com](http://www.toplinegsdc.com) - Topline's website. A great source for information about the German Shepherd Dog. Topline hosts a variety of both AKC and WDA events throughout the year. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact us at [toplinegsdc@gmail.com](mailto:toplinegsdc@gmail.com).