

Schutzhund and IPO Dog Sport

Courtesy of Animal Info Publications

Schutzhund was developed in the early 1900's. The movement began with the training of the first police dog, a Great Dane named 'Caesar' by a Prussian police inspector, Franz Laufer, to accompany officers on night patrol. A number of different organisations with an interest in training dogs for working roles joined together after the war in 1947 to form the 'Deutscher Verband der Gebrauchshundsportvereine' (D.V.G.). German Shepherds, Dobermanns, Belgian Shepherds, and other breeds such as Rottweilers and Boxers commonly participate in this type of training and competition. Schutzhund trials consist of three phases - tracking, obedience and protection. In addition, dogs are required to pass a temperament test, the 'B' or 'BH' (Begleithundprüfung) which translates to 'traffic-sure companion dog test' which tests their temperament and steadiness in crowded, noisy situations around strange people, before being allowed to advance to Schutzhund. Dogs that exhibit fear, or inappropriate aggression, and those that are easily distracted will not pass the test and go onto Schutzhund training.



Apart from assessing the dogs working ability, Schutzhund training is used to reveal the character of a dog. Rather than producing aggressive and dangerous dogs, the training aims to identify dogs that have traits that make them suitable for work as police and service dogs, as well as search and rescue and many other important working roles. These traits include -

- Strong desire to work
- Courage
- Intelligence
- Trainability
- Strong bond to the handler
- Perseverance
- Protective Instinct

There are three Schutzhund titles -Schutzhund 1 (SchH1), Schutzhund 2 (SchH2), and Schutzhund 3 (SchH3). About five years ago, the name was changed to Vielseitigkeitspruefung fuer Gebrauchshunde which translates to 'Versatility Test for Utility (or Working) Dogs'. The abbreviations for the titles are now VPG1, VPG2 and VPG3. IPO follows the same type of training and competition guidelines as SchH, but is practiced worldwide. The awards are referred to as IPO 1, IPO 2 and IPO 3. Each requires a passing grade in all three phases of the test in order to achieve the title.

In addition to completing obedience tests including heeling exercises, retrieving and recalls, the obedience phase tests the dog's ability to remain focused on the handler and the task it must perform in the face of various distractions. These distractions include heeling through a group of people, and gunshots are fired to test the dog's reaction to loud noises. The dog must also retrieve objects that are out of sight and behind obstacles such as A-frame walls. The dogs are judged on their accuracy and attitude and must show enthusiasm for the work.

The tracking phase tests the dog's endurance and ability to follow a scent track. The dog must either indicate or retrieve items called 'articles' that are placed on the track by the tracklayer. The length and difficulty of the test is increased for each title with the number of items increasing and the scent track becoming older and more difficult to follow. The handler follows the dog on the end of the 33ft long lead. The dog is again judged on its accuracy and enthusiasm for the work.

In the protection phase a decoy, or helper (person), is used in order to assess the dog's ability. The dog must first locate the decoy who will be hiding from view behind a blind. The dog must bark to alert the handler to the hiding place of the decoy. At various stages of the test the decoy attempts to escape or attacks the dog or the dog's handler. The dog must prevent the attack by biting the padded arm of the decoy. When the escape attempt or attack ceases the dog is commanded to release the decoy. The dog must also transport the decoy to the judge at the end of the test. The dog must be enthusiastic and not exhibit any signs of fear, but must remain under the control of the handler at all times even though it is in a heightened state of excitement. In this way the handler determines if a situation calls for a certain response, versus the dog doing it on his own. This way, the dog's natural drives are not destroyed, but instead, managed responsibly.

