

Schutzhund as a “Dog Sport”an Overview

By Dennis L. Vander Linde



Europeans call it “hundesport”, dog sport. Schutzhund started at the beginning of the 20th century as a test for working dogs. Its initial purpose was to determine which dogs could be used for breeding and which had true working ability. The growing demand for working dogs made more sophisticated tests and training necessary. These dogs were needed for police, border patrol, customs, military, and herding services. As these tests evolved, more people participated just for the sheer enjoyment of seeing if their personal dogs could be trained as effectively as these “professional dogs”. Now, over 80 years after the first formal Schutzhund rules were introduced, tens of thousands of people participate in the sport each year world wide.

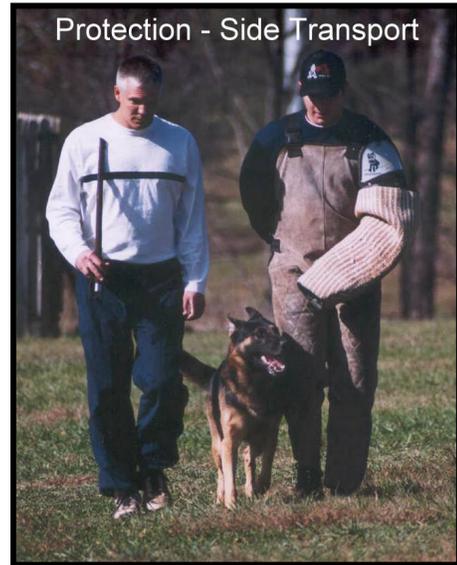
Schutzhund tests specific areas of a dog's behavior and training, and this is done in phases. The first phase, **Tracking**, requires the dog to track footsteps over mixed terrain, change direction, and show absolute accuracy and commitment to finding the track. The dog must also find dropped articles and indicate their location to the handler. Many find tracking to be the most satisfying experience in training. It is certainly the most peaceful part of Schutzhund.



The second phase is **Obedience**. Those who are familiar with AKC obedience will feel more comfortable in this area, as many exercises are similar to those in Open and Utility. There is heeling, both on and off lead. The sit, down, and stand are performed when the dog and handler are moving. But, Schutzhund applies its own style to this work. Instead of a 40-ft ring, the handler and dog work on a football-sized trial field. Some

exercises require the dog to work under the distraction of a firing gun. In addition to the normal dumbbell retrieval, the dog must retrieve over a 39-in. (1-m) high jump and a 6-ft (1.8-m) high scaling wall. The dumbbells range in weight from 1.4 to 4.4 lbs. Down stays and a long send away conclude this phase.

The final phase is the most misunderstood by the general public. This is the **Protection** phase. The most important point to understand when watching a protection routine is the relationship between the dog and the handler. The dog must NEVER bite the trial helper unless either the dog or the handler is attacked. Then, the dog must attack fully and without hesitation. But here the real difference becomes apparent. The dog must stop biting on the command of the handler and guard the trial helper without further aggression. Often people confuse Schutzhund protection training with police dog or personal protection work. Only the Schutzhund dog is capable of the feats of never being aggressive except under those specific situations it is trained to face, and even then it must always be under the absolute control of the handler.



These three phases are difficult enough in themselves, but to make it even more demanding, they all take place in one-day competitions that are held all over the U.S. These trials are held at local clubs, like ours, or in regional and national championships. Each dog is judged using a complex point system, which then determines if the dog earns a Schutzhund title and the winner of a trial.

A dog must have already earned a Schutzhund BH title (a Companion Dog title that includes obedience work combined with temperament, gun sensitivity, and traffic surety testing) to prove its basic stability before it is allowed to compete in Schutzhund trials for advanced Schutzhund titles.

When a dog successfully passes its first Schutzhund trial, it is awarded a title of Schutzhund I (SchH I). The dog can then progress to Schutzhund II (SchH II), then to the ultimate competition level, Schutzhund III (SchH III). Any Schutzhunder will tell you that a high scoring (270 out of 300 points) SchH III dog is the ultimate working dog; one in a thousand of all working dogs.

Today, Schutzhund is more than the small group that started in Germany so long ago. It's organizations have several hundred thousand members, scattered across Europe, North America, South America, and Asia. Contact United Schutzhund Clubs of America at www.germanshepherddog.com or German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association at www.gsdca-wda.org to learn more about this exciting dog sport in America!