

KNPV, The Dutch Police Heritage

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Bouvier des Flandres Duko v Mereveld, born 1969. KNPV helper Rein Beumkes

Throughout much of the world today the dogs most in demand for actual police service are those with a Dutch Police or KNPV certificate. There are a number of reasons for this, but ultimately they go back to the steadfast Dutch character, for the Dutch are above all else practical, tolerant and pragmatic; if a dog is to have a police dog certificate it should be under the influence of the police handlers and leadership in the spirit of real world police dog service rather than trial systems under conformation establishment control with more emphasis on political correctness and accommodating the less intensive demeanor compatible with companion homes. Prancing obedience, ultra precise sits and ever less demanding protection are left to the increasingly hobbyist oriented sports; Dutch police trials are about things that matter for real world police dogs, about control and restraint as well as power and aggression. Largely unknown to the rest of the world until the 1980s, this steadfast Dutch heritage has become influential and respected throughout

much of the world, with the dogs themselves in enormous demand.

The Dutch were a little bit late to the party, for although there had been previous training, formal trials did not commence until 1907 under the auspices of the *Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging* or NPV. In 1912 royal sanction was obtained to bring forth the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging* or in English the *Royal Dutch Police Dog Association*. The KNPV designation, or the even more elite "KNPV met lof" (with honors) appearing on a pedigree or certificate are among the most coveted in the world today.



In the early years the numbers were small, with for instance 12 certificates in the year 1921 and 60 in 1925. In that era the German breeds such as the Boxer and the German Shepherd were much more predominant, much better represented than today. Prior to 1924 the Dutch Shepherd was the most numerous breed, but political machinations in the show dog community, causing many successful Dutch Shepherd breeding lines to be excluded from registration because of coat color, texture and pattern resulted in a decline in this breed.

Perhaps as a consequence of these early struggles, the KNPV community tends to hold formal registration and the foibles of the show community in disdain, for such people a dog is what he can do on the field rather than what is scribbled in registration books.

As of April 1994 there were 509 KNPV clubs in the Netherlands, 140 certified decoys and 64 certified judges. By 2011 the list of judges had grown to 74. In 2013 there were 82 judges and 65 helpers listed on the KNPV web site.

Yearly KNPV statistics are as follows:

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	1993
Police Dog I	545	507	473	607	581	580	695
Police Dog II	43	47	55	54	40	82	62
Object Guard Dog	26	51	90	73	66	97	117
Members	5864	6052	6146	6189	6293	6348	10,000

Judging by the more rapid fall of in PH 2 and Object Guard numbers, it would seem plausible that the motivation for the PH I is increasingly commercial rather than simply personal sport and recreation. KNPV is most popular, and the competition the most intense, in the southern provinces of the Netherlands, such as Limburg and Brabant. 2010 membership figures were 1,718 in North Brabant, 868 in Limburg, 859 in Gelderland and 524 in South Holland.

The KNPV trial is an arduous, comprehensive daylong sequence of exercises, typically beginning with water retrieval and obedience in the morning and a sequence of protection exercises in the afternoon. The protection exercises are generally held on a large field to accommodate the extremely long distances and relatively large audiences. Three judges are used, so the obedience and search exercises go on concurrently, each judge handling the separate exercises such as the coin search, guard of object, bicycle exercises and so forth. In the protection phase all dogs perform sequentially on the same field, that is, all dogs do the first exercise, then the second and so forth until the trial is complete. All three judges are on the field for this work, as there is a lot going on and the large distances would make it impossible for a single judge to adequately direct and observe the performance.

The Police Dog I examination has a water exercise where the dog must swim across a canal on command and return on command. There is also a large object retrieve. Obedience is much less precise but more demanding than other venues. The dog must heel on and off leash and beside a bicycle, and in both instances switch sides on command. There is a food refusal, an exercise where a dog must remain quiet during gunfire, and a one meter (39 inch) hedge jump, a 2.25 meter ditch jump and a 1.75 meter wooden wall.

The protection exercises include a guard of object, object search in the woods, a person search in the woods and transport of prisoners, including a simulation of an intoxicated prisoner. There is a long attack in which the dog is struck with a long stick before the bite, a call back from the long attack, an attack against the gun and a long attack to stop a person fleeing on a bicycle. The distance attacks are so long that I have seen a handicapped handler use a bicycle to move up into position to give the out command at the required time.

Historically the protective suit of the KNPV trial was relatively heavy and bulky and the helper, as also in the Belgian ring, tended to be less mobile than in the French Ring, where modern materials have been utilized to produce much lighter and more flexible suits. In spite of these heavy suits, and ancillary padding and wrapping under the jacket, bruises, abrasions and more serious injuries to the helper were not uncommon.

The modern KNPV suit is a fully padded leather suit and a separate jute suit. The firm *Dog Sport Holland* was the first to manufacture these lighter, more supple tailor made KNPV suits. Today all top level decoys use such suits weighing 10 to 13 kilograms (22 to 28 pounds). These suits are lighter, have better protection in the bite areas, are more flexible and have more effective ventilation for better cooling.

In 2007 the KNPV introduced a new program for scent work, that is searching and tracking. This program had two primary motivations, one being the recognition of the increasing importance of olfactory or scent work in real world police applications and the second a means of bringing new, younger people into the KNPV family to reverse the loss of membership in recent years. The basic certificate, the Basiscertificaat Zoekhonden is preliminary, that is a requirement or prerequisite for all of the other programs.

The Sorteershond or Sorting Dog is a scent discrimination program, in which a number of articles with the scent of different people are placed in a rack for the dog to select. In each instance the object is a tube or pipe 20 x 20 mm x 10 cm long.

Sorteerhond 1: The dog must 3 consecutive times indicate the object with the scent of a person indicated to the dog.

Sorteerhond 2: The dog must indicate first the scent of an indicated person and from 2 different rows of 7, and after the first indication is successful, the scent of the suspected person out of the same rows

The tracking dog is similar to advanced IPO tracks.

Tracking dog 1: The dog must follow a 2 hour old track approximately 700 meters long on agricultural fields, with 8 90 degree corners, 3 small objects and 1 and one large object. The field can be sand/soil or grass

Tracking dog 2 : The dog must follow a 3 hour old track approximately 1400 meters on different soils (also ditches and roads) with 10 corners (with a Sharp 45 degrees corner and a 135 degrees corner and a omega) 4 small objects and a large object such as a rifle. The track must have both areas of sand or soil and grass. One half hour before the track is followed a person walks over an area of the track to provide a distraction.

Search dog 1: Find 2 persons in a 10 to 15,000 square meter wooded area. (A square 120 meters on a side)

Search dog 2. Find 2 times 3 different persons in a 20 to 30,000 square meters area. (A square 173 meters on a side.)

Rescue dog 1: Find 2 persons in ruins of buildings/trash in a 1000 square meter area.

Rescue dog 2: Twice find 3 persons in ruins of buildings/trash in a 3000 square meter area. (A square 55 meters on a side.)

Each year in the months of May, July and October, the KNPV holds certification trials in each province with enough candidates, organized by the national and provincial officers. Normally each dog certifies in his own province. The decoys and the judges for each provincial trial are designated by the national KNPV office and come from another province rather than being local.

Each year in the first weekend in September a national KNPV championship is held in the soccer stadium of FC Eindhoven in the city of Eindhoven.

Championship events include:

- A PH-I championship open to the ten highest scoring dogs obtaining the PH-I certificate that year.
- A PH-II championship open to the highest scoring PH-II dogs from each of the 11 provinces and the National Champion from the previous year.
- An Object Guard championship for the 8 highest scoring dogs that year.

This means that a dog can compete for the coveted PH-I national championship only once in his life. For this reason, sometimes a high potential dog will be held back a year or even two to have a better chance at every KNPV trainers dream, the national championship. From this we can see that the KNPV is much less of a sport than for instance, Schutzhund, where a dog can compete many times. This also means that a titled dog has value only as a police dog, commercial guard dog or personal protection dog and as a breeding resource; there is no "used dog market" for trained and titled animals to be taken back into KNPV competition. (Some dogs are converted for Schutzhund, but given the age of the dogs and the differences in training and trial procedures they seldom become championship level competitors in a new sport.)

A dog may repeat an examination, but must relinquish in his current certificate. If he fails, he again becomes an uncertified dog. Repeat certification attempts are unusual, but sometimes a handler feels that his dog is better than the first score and is willing to take the risk.

Becoming a KNPV judge is a very difficult process, with a long series of challenging written and practical examinations. Each trial requires the services of three judges and two decoys.

One of the problems with all trial systems is that judges must differentiate among increasingly better dogs in order to produce winners, to know who to hand the trophies to. The best way to do this, to adapt to increasingly better dogs brought to a sharper edge by clever and persistent training, would be to introduce more complex and demanding exercises; higher jumps, longer call offs, searches in larger and more varied areas.

Unfortunately in practice there is resistance to higher standards and judges thus tend to rely increasingly on irrelevant trivialities to differentiate. If all dogs heel correctly, then perhaps the edge should go to the dog with a quicker or straighter sit or a stylish three-legged hop with the nose in the crotch of the handler. (Not to mention dogs between the legs of the waddling helper in contemporary French Ring trials.) The KNPV community has done a much better job of resisting this, and retained reasonable proximity and responsiveness in heeling, as an example, and relied on the overall length and difficulty of the program to sort the dogs out.

Perhaps an even more important factor is that most dogs certify once, and only a very small number of dogs, about ten, compete in an annual championship. There is no such thing as a dog having a trial career and coming back to defend a championship, and you cannot buy the winner to be a big shot next year because the dog will not be eligible to compete.



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