

The Ring and the Trial

Jim Engel, March 14, 2014



Malinois on French Ring Sport scaling wall.

The emergence of the dog as a working partner in the primitive past was based on immediate and direct hands on selection: those perceived as useful were kept and fed and others were likely to be abandoned, pushed out to fend for themselves or culled. When times were good the ineffective dog could perhaps linger, be fed and tolerated as some sort of pet, but hard times would mean that only those contributing to survival would survive themselves. As the human social structure became more advanced and complex, good dogs would have been sought out from neighboring bands, tribes, farms or villages, based on observation of the dogs at their work and perhaps some informal testing. This was effective as long as the social structure was simple

enough to enable meaningful observation of the dogs as they went about their work; that is the man needing a dog would be personally familiar with the dogs available or the parents of pending litters.

At the advent of the twentieth century the Industrial Revolution was far into the process of changing a centuries old way of life throughout Europe, altering the very fabric of society. The population was shifting from rural areas to rapidly expanding industrial cities, and uniformed police forces were evolving to deal with crime in the crowded industrial districts and to maintain order throughout the city.

Across much of northern Europe diverse groups of men came to realize that the indigenous working dogs of the farmer, drover and stockman were in imminent danger of being lost forever because of rapid industrialization and the mechanization and modernization of agrarian life. Separately and in small groups they sought to gather together and preserve these various regional working types and form them into breeds. Their legacy to us is the German and Belgian Shepherds, the Rottweiler, the Bouvier des Flandres and the other herding and working breeds as we know them today.

Since the purpose of these men was the preservation of this centuries old working heritage, it was quite natural that as they created their various organizations and evolved formal standards of appearance and structure they also devised a number of working trial systems. The primary reason for these trials was to serve as a gauge of working character so as to facilitate the selection of desirable

breeding stock. In this way, the working trial served the purification of the soul just as the conformation show served to consolidate the desired appearance and physical structure. The sporting aspect drew in many who enjoyed the training and then the competitive nature of the trial itself; it would seem that the desire to go out and see whose horse is faster or whose dog is stronger, quicker and more courageous is as old as the domestication process itself.

In the early years this was essentially a northern European phenomenon. Subsequent to WWI, in the 1920s, the German Shepherd especially and later some of the other breeds became enormously popular in America, but this was primarily for family companionship and conformation exhibition rather than dogs with a serious working role. Actual American police dog deployment was sparse, marginal and transient. Breeding and training according to working capability and function was beyond our comprehension, did not exist in any meaningful way. In the 1970s this would begin to evolve as police canine deployment began to proliferate and amateur involvement through the emerging popularity of Schutzhund began to bring European ways and more work capable dogs and training to the new world.

[Angel's Lair All Breed](#)

[Angel's Lair Schutzhund](#)

[Police Dog Book](#)