

To: All Friends of the German Shepherd Dog
From: Deb Zappia / 2015 WUSV Champion

In light of the fact that I have become the unwitting catalyst for discussion concerning the discord that exists between animal rights extremists, German law, ethics and WUSV directives, I feel compelled to express my views on the subject.

Let me begin by saying, I have been a proud member of USCA since 1984. USCA, along with the SV and WUSV have dominated my life for the last 3 decades. My love and devotion to the breed has formed the fabric of my life; encompassing friends, family life, travel and of course, training and competing with my k9 partner. I cannot imagine another life.

During this time, I have held the SV along with the WUSV in the highest regard. Without their dedication and hard work this discussion would not be taking place. That being said, I respectfully disagree with Mr. Messler's vision for the German Shepherd Dog and the direction he is taking the WUSV. First, obviously the WUSV, which has its headquarters in Germany must abide by German Law. Rules that are imposed by the WUSV related to sanctioned WUSV events are understandable and acceptable at this time. However, German law should not be imposed outside of said events. Many member countries do not impose those same laws. Animal abuse, however, is illegal in the United States, as well as in most countries, and should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

In the United States, the e-collar is not only legal, but endorsed by the American Kennel Club. I share 40 acres with deer, fox, coyotes, skunks, Fischer and an occasional boar. My dogs run freely alongside my ATV, all wear E-collars for their protection. Under planned WUSV directives this practice will be viewed abusive. I submit, my dogs are happy and healthy, much more so than if they were tethered to a line. Extremists would contend otherwise.

I own a board and train business for problem dogs. This is my lively hood. We have saved countless dogs slated for euthanasia with the use of an e-collar. Would it be more humane to allow these dogs to be needlessly killed? Should I give up my income because German law forbids the use of an e-collar? What is next? Pinch collars? Choke collars? Feeding too much? Feeding only kibble? No raw food allowed? How a dog is confined? How a dog is walked? This type of dictatorship crosses a line. It seeks to control the lives of individuals outside of sanctioned events.

I submit that the banning of specific training tools is unjust and it is the responsibility of the WUSV to contest unjust legislation. Especially when said legislation forbids the use of an e-collar, but not the sale of it. What people don't understand frightens and threatens them. It is up to all member clubs to educate those that would claim a specific training device is abusive. Any tool can be used to abuse an animal. Absent these tools, hands and feet can be used to inflict pain and suffering. The person on the other end of the leash owns the responsibility for the humane treatment of their dog. Mr. Messler, the best trainers are those that strive for balance in their training program. Trainers who are open minded and employ numerous tools in the training of our canine friends. Nothing can take the place of a great relationship with your dog. Clickers do not make for a relationship, nor do leashes, prong collars, e-collars or hot dogs! Handlers (people) make that relationship.

Furthermore, trial rules and regulations are already in place to address abusive training. Judges have been directed to reward performances that demonstrate joy and attitude and to penalize performances that show stress. Just look how far we have come during the last 15 years.

IPO / Schutzhund is a test designed to test the courage, hardiness, fight drive and temperament of the German Shepherd Dog to serve man. There is no way to accomplish this without stress. That, in fact, is the point of a breed suitability test. I read the translation of your words at the WUSV meeting. If the translation is correct, you would also like to abolish the use of prong collars in training. You believe training should be absent any compulsion. Yet the highest points awarded in the protection phase are given to the dog that bites hard and full, actively fights the man, shows a transition stage and outs instantly upon command.

I speak only for myself when I say, I do not want the German Shepherd Dog that would out instantly for a "Cookie". Perhaps that GSD is a representation of your vision, but it does not represent mine. To quote Ravi R. Iyer, MD in his article THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS of MODERN DOG TRAINING: OPERANT CONDITIONING and the RAZOR'S EDGE, "The Competition Canine is a breed apart from other canines. A seldom appreciated aspect of the Operant matrix is that reinforcement directly boosts motivation and punishment directly boosts concentration. Motivation produces drive, initiative, power and speed. Concentration produces focus, precision, compliance and control. The IPO trial is actually a test of the dog's ability to constantly switch gears between these two states smoothly and without conflict. Top competitors and experienced judges understand this bipolar characteristic of the IPO trial. This is the main reason why today's IPO trial continues to be such a comprehensive test of the working canine." You can't test the German Shepherd Dog at this level without both motivation and punishment. It is scientifically impossible.

Finally, I am not certain what the ethics contract contains that judges will be required to sign. At the very least, it will be interesting indeed, as I know and have trained with many judges who themselves use prong and e-collars. These directives can only cause more division within the organization, while destroying the German Shepherd Dog in the process.

In conclusion, the WUSV, led by Mr. Messler, is taking a path that they believe is in the German Shepherd Dogs best interest. As they are in the position of control, without interference, they will continue down that road. I firmly believe that the choices made by the WUSV today, will be the demise of the German Shepherd of tomorrow.

I have faith that new coalitions will form, protecting and prioritizing the German Shepherd Dogs' welfare and integrity. As Mr. Messler has already stated, ***this should be our priority.***

In the final analysis, we must all act upon what we believe. So, it is with a heavy heart that I prepare for my final trip across the pond. I will miss the friends that I have made and the sport I love. I wish all of you the very best. Thank you all for allowing me the honor of competing with you and being a member of the international dog sport community.

Sincerely,

2015 WUSV World Champion Representing USCA
Deb Zappia / Iron Von den Wolfen