



Max von Stephanitz

Bang the Drum Slowly, Requiem for the House of von Stephanitz

Jim Engel March 2026

It is said that all good things eventually come to an end. When at the dawn of the twentieth century Max von Stephanitz founded the German Shepherd it emerged as hands down the most prosperous and predominant in history. Within a decade it became the foundation of worldwide police service and the pride of the German people.

In the twilight of the twentieth century men such as Walter and Herman Martin emasculated and then abandoned the Schutzhund trial, repudiated the police service heritage and in the effete SV¹ show ring transformed this noble breed into absurd caricatures.

The consequence was collapse in terms of character, structure and worldwide registrations resulting in repudiation by the German people. May God forgive them, for no man who loved this breed or this heritage could possibly do so.

The American Experience

The American saga was similar. In the aftermath of the First World War German Shepherds came home with the troops and were so commonly referred to as police dogs that the terms would remain synonymous for the rest of the century pending the emergence of the Malinois. By the mid-1920s they were hands down the predominant AKC breed in terms of registration and as the foundation of American police service.

Civilian ownership, the vast majority, was driven by the perceived police dog persona, the desire to own and live with a robust dog of overt protection potential. This paradigm prevailed worldwide.



In the 1930s the Doberman Pincher arrived in a second wave for those seeking a more elite and exclusive persona. These Doberman advocates were promotional spin doctors par excellence and as a result this breed became the predominant United States Marine Corps patrol dog in the South Pacific Theater of World War Two. The moniker "Devil Dogs" was coined by these promoters, but does not appear in the book by Captain William Putney, the Marine Corps officer who led the program in initial training and deployment. Putney virtually single handedly created a War Memorial for these Dobermans, but recommended that in the future the German Shepherd should be preferred. The spin doctors had come up grievously short as serious working breeders and trainers, which was not entirely their fault in a land bereft of any sort of practical police or military working culture.

¹ SV: Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde
English: Club for German Shepherd's Dogs
The GSD mother club in Germany, founded in 1900.

There is a pattern here. As the German Shepherd became increasingly common and prosaic those seeking to be perceived as more sophisticated and elite first sought out the Doberman and after the Second World War it was to be the turn of the Rottweiler. Aggressive Molosser breeds such as the Dogo Argentino were taken up in smaller numbers by those with an especially urgent need for the propped up macho persona.

But not every Joe Sixpack was equipped to deal with a real police dog. Clever breeders with an eye to the bottom line quickly adapted the strategy of breeding soft dogs for the soft people with the desire but the lack of the ability to deal with such dogs. Sort of like painting racing stripes on prosaic Detroit sedans and palming them off as track ready race cars. The problem was of course that Mr. Sixpack's sons and daughters tended to see through the ruse and go looking for something "real" in a new breed.

European Decline

This state of mind was not unique to America or any specific breed. In Germany the endemic irrationality of the Doberman community precipitated the collapse of this breed to the current 400 yearly registrations. (Incredibly stupid incestuous breeding leading to rampant heart defects and other ongoing genetic issues also played a role.)

The German Shepherd establishment, preoccupied with their effete banana backs, entirely abandoned even the pretense of police potential in openly pandering to the lowest common pet owner denominator. This turned out to be the mother of all stupidity as the German SV club saw annual puppy registrations collapse from thirty thousand in 1995 to six thousand today with no end in sight. Try as I might it is simply beyond my comprehension how these people could be so doggedly blind for so long as to not perceive that the police persona is the wellspring of the allure driving the vigorous expansion and that the ongoing emasculation was and is the proximate cause of this decline.

Many opine that since companion dogs are ninety percent of sales suitability in this role should rightfully be a primary breeding consideration, and in a certain superficial commercial sense there is an aura of plausibility to it.

But I beg to differ, for this tragically misguided paradigm has been the relentless driving force in the collapse. The German Shepherd as conceived and promoted by Max von Stephanitz was a police dog,² not primarily a companion dog or a play sport dog (read IGP) but in his own words "police trial champions." There is no middle ground, breeding police dogs means breeding entirely on selection according to expected police service potential. In this way prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union world class working German Shepherds were bred in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, a paradigm which should prevail universally.

So, where are the civilian dogs to come from? In the natural order of things some pups do not make the cut—just as many almost good enough football players do not make the team—but can go on to serve other, less demanding roles such as the various play sports or as companion dogs. But we must not allow these secondary roles to be considerations in selection, have an independent place in breeding. In order to maintain the integrity of the breed, the legacy, we must relentlessly and exclusively select for police potential. To shirk this obligation, to select softer dogs for a softer market—for vainglory or

² Focus on police service actually commenced a year or two after the beginning, likely in response the pioneering program in Ghent, Belgium as von Stephanitz acknowledges in his book.

the love of money—prostitutes the heritage and brings shame upon the breeder, even when it prospers in a Sieger show ring.

An ongoing program of police level breeding can and has historically produced a diverse enough pool of candidates to serve many roles such as search and rescue, guide dogs and home companions. The key to success is breeders capable of and willing to match the right dog to the right situation and stand ready to make adjustments in the inevitable instances of a mismatch. In order for this to function every breeder must have personal commitment to and hands on familiarity with the protective role, be committed to and in support of the inherent aggression necessary in a police breed.

The key to making this work is recognition that some civilian situations are not realistic for a real police level candidate and encouraging the prospective customer to seek a more appropriate breed. Immediately obvious alternatives include the Golden Retrievers and Black Labradors, which are fine dogs for those in need of a moderately active household companion. If current trends persist these two breeds will outnumber the German Shepherds in a very few years, which can be seen as a good thing.³

The Stick Issue

Over the past decade the most egregious assault on working dog viability by the FCI establishment has been the elimination of the stick hits from the IGP trial. An occasional effete Nordic dilettante may make the shrill claim that the stick is actually superfluous, that he and other experienced judges are fully capable of evaluating protection dog character and potential without resorting to such brutality. But men of much greater stature and credibility such as Ivan Balabanov have spoken out eloquently and passionately for restoring stick hits in IGP, arguing they are essential for evaluating a dog's true character, fight drive and threshold for pressure.⁴

That for several years most dogs on trial fields would be successful even if the stick were to be applied is without doubt. But this is because of the decades of diligence of devoted breeders and trainers and the vigor and courage of the existing pool of breeding stock.

But going forward the temptation to trial a stick shy dog to get another title—but of course never to breed such a dog—would always be present. And some of these tractable dogs would go on to much success, even win major championships. And due to the frailty of human nature some of these dogs eventually will be bred, letting the cat out of the bag to spread the cancer. It is only a matter of time.

Some may claim that my concern is overreaction, that we must have faith in and respect for the establishment authorities. And the decline has indeed been gradual, incremental, making it difficult to know where to draw the line. But this stick hit ban is not a minor point but rather an egregious emasculation of trial integrity, an elimination of a fundamental and irreplaceable aspect of any valid protection dog trial.

³ 2024 German registrations were 6316 for the German Shepherd, 2367 for the Black Labs and 1952 for the Golden Retrievers.

⁴ [Ivan Balabanov Video](#)

Way Forward

The way forward is obvious, follow the lead of the NVBK Malinois community by breaking entirely free of FCI influence and making breeding selections according to a serious working trial. Unfortunately it has become quite evident that serious selection trials cannot exist within the FCI scheme of things. In this better world dogs for the man on the street can and should be by selecting the right pup from the pool of candidates according to the home circumstances and comprehensive follow up.

To belabor the obvious, IGP is not in any sense a serious breeding qualification trial but rather an emasculated venue suitable only for the most effete pet owner or self-deluding dilettante. Those of us drawn into Schutzhund in the 1980s era have been subjected to a malicious bait and switch scam on the part of the SV and must now make the bitter choice between living the lie or seeking another venue.

American Dilemma

For the American (USCA) leadership, over the years predominantly steadfast and serious working dog advocates, this is a Gordian knot, an insoluble dilemma. On the one hand if they repudiate and replace the IGP nonsense they will most likely lose WUSV membership to be replaced by a new and corrupt group of opportunists. On the other hand their national trial program retaining the stick is for many practical reasons little more than a virtually useless and unused fig leaf. As an advocate of the 1980s era this is a deeply distressing state of affairs a half century into our Schutzhund movement, a demoralizing personal failure.

The United Schutzhund Clubs of America (USCA) was founded in the late 1970s as a unified, comprehensive all breed entity to bring order out of the chaos of the fledgling American Schutzhund movement. Today it is by far the largest, most influential and predominant American working dog organization. Unfortunately over the intervening half century each word has somehow been transformed:

- United In earlier years presented and promoted as all-breed.
- Schutzhund Long gone, replaced by the pathetic IGP play sport.
- Clubs Overtly commercial entities with clients rather than members.
- America Germany as propaganda and distribution subsidiary.

None of this is inherently the fault of American leadership but rather the blatant greed and corruption in the German mother club, that is the SV. The fact nevertheless remains that our fate seems to be to run their pathetic pretend Schutzhund trials and generally serve as underpaid agents for German commercial interests as far into the future as the eye can see.

Resurrection

To reestablish viability the breed would need to be revived as a strong police service dog with an extensive but selected civilian population of carefully screened owner candidates. The prevailing SV paradigm of breeding exclusively for the lowest common pet market denominator leaving the cops to scratch In the crap is inevitably going to be an ongoing failure on the streets.

Over the past several decades the decline of viable German Shepherd candidates has played an important role in the increasing American importation of police titled Dutch KNPV dogs, mostly Malinois and many or most without pedigree. As a consequence a pedigree has become increasingly irrelevant in the police dog market. In addition it is becoming increasingly evident that any trace

of credibility or deployment of breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler or Bouvier des Flandres is most likely gone forever.

Those breeding and training German Shepherd police dogs have been increasingly handicapped by the necessity of jumping through all the SV hoops in order to obtain registration which has made the breed much more expensive than the Malinois in many instances. The decline in physical agility and power imposed by the SV and the general intrusion of banana back type is seriously eroding police or military potential. A likely long term ramification is the abandonment of SV registration, which over time would greatly increase the commonality of appearance among German Shepherd and Malinois police dogs.

In the world at large all of this is a manifestation of the general decline of the underlying purebred paradigm as for instance exemplified and popularized in the emergence and glorification of so called rescue operations, that is used dog markets. While many of these emerged as unselfish amateur efforts today many more have evolved into blatantly overt large scale for profit commercial ventures.

This has been driven on the one hand by cost, that is the enormous escalation in the expense of confirmation showing, the incessant proliferation of medical screening and the cost escalation of veterinary care in general. Beyond these generic factors are the enormous costs of ever proliferating SV certifications and requirements.

On the other hand there has been the general realization that the hunting dogs no longer hunt, the herding dogs are no longer on patrol on meadows and fields and the protection dogs are akin to sedans with painted on racing stripes. The purebred is no longer perceived as an elite realization of a breed defining service but rather has evolved to serve a lowest common denominator market for effete commercial replicas.

Abraham Lincoln's principle that "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time" applies here. In the purebred world some of the time turned out to be a hell of a long time, but the advent of the Internet in the 1990s finally and precipitously collapsed the purebred establishment.

Prognostication

So what does the future hold?

The breeding of pathetic pseudo German Shepherds for the commercial companion market will no doubt persist and an ever diminishing cadre of hardcore police breeders may endure at least in the short term. The SV Sieger show will carry on and some may even be able to pretend that the glory days persist not noticing that the venue had become a neighborhood school playground because there were so few entries. The so called work of this once noble breed will focus on things such as dancing with dogs and dock diving. The supposedly hardcore people will hardly notice when the bite quietly disappears from their pretend trials.

In America USCA will see the people and dogs growing ever older and softer together as the younger generation will by and large see no point in it and go on stumbling through life fingering their iPhones and girlfriends, never even dreaming that there could be anything more. Serious people will tend to move on to other venues, leaving USCA and the AWDF in the hands of Queen Anne and the rest of the little old ladies. The SV will go on sucking money, homage and subservience out of USCA until the very end. Nobody will have any idea who von Stephanitz was.

The heritage of Max von Stephanitz is withering away because we cannot or will not muster the requisite courage and hardness to preserve it. For better or for worse a new world order with by and large emasculated protective heritage breeds and a vastly diminished purebred footprint is upon us as we harvest what we have sown as this century long golden era draws to a close.

Jim Engel Marengo March, 2026

[Ivan Balabanov Video](#)

[Ivan Balabanov Transcript](#)

Background and Reference

[Glossary](#)

[Decline and Fall of the House of von Stephanitz](#)

[Who Owns the House of von Stephanitz?](#)

[SV Power Corrupts](#)

[Canine Organizations](#)

[Supreme Authority of the Canine World](#)

[Animal Rights and Wrongs](#)

[German Shepherd Police Dog Heritage Repudiated](#)

[SV Abandons Work Test for Breeding](#)

[AWDF, Stillborn American Elite](#)

[Emergence of a new Canine World Order](#)

[American Consequences of the WUSV Vindication](#)

[The Way Forward](#)

[Meltdown in America](#)

[Legacy Lost, the Other Breeds](#)

[Temperament or Character Testing](#)

[Jack of All Trades?](#)

[Style and Opinion Sports](#)

[The Commercialization of Schutzhund](#)

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[Has Sport Subverted the Schutzhund Trial?](#)

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Web presence:

[Schutzhund America](#)

[Ongoing FCI / WUSV Strife](#)

[Conacts & References](#)

Much more historical detail can be found in the police dog book:

[The Police Dog: Evolution, History and Service](#)