

THE GUN TEST

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PREAMBLE

This article was re-constructed from notes made for a German Shepherd Dog Club of Victoria Inc. Breed Affairs Meeting, October 4, 2001 and updated on July 29, 2013, per the request of the GSDCA National Breed Commission.

1. Introduction

Due to the many misconceptions and misunderstandings of a large number of German Shepherd Dog enthusiasts (both old and new), as to the actual purpose and requirements of the gun test, it was thought that a short presentation would be helpful to address this situation.

It is my view that due to the demanding requirements of a working dog, the gun test is a critical part of the evaluation of a dog's temperament and therefore a **firm reaction** to the gun is required, rather than the current requirement survey rule of being only "sufficiently firm".

(Note: This matter was discussed at the GSDCA National Breed Commission meeting in July 2001, where it was decided to put the above on the agenda for the forthcoming GSDCA AGM in February 2002. That AGM subsequently decided that a "firm" reaction to the gun test was required for a Class I classification, but that a "sufficiently firm" reaction was acceptable for a Class II classification.)

Whilst I do not believe that a major problem exists in this country with regard to gunshy dogs, we must **never ever** allow a problem to arise. Consider the following example.

During a discussion with the highly acclaimed SV judge and breeder, Eric Orschler, ("von Batu" kennels) he gave the following graphic example of why a German Shepherd Dog **must** be gunsure. For many years he had assisted the West German police in assessing young dogs and their suitability for training and work with the police force. One of the tests for the young dogs was to walk them along a busy canal, busy to **with** water, foot and motor car traffic and see how they reacted. On one occasion, one of the young dogs reacted very badly to a nearby truck backfiring, by running around the handler and consequently the lead became entangled around the handler's legs, causing him to crash to the ground and strike his head on the concrete and tragically died!

So, a working dog **must** be gun sure!

2. Background

2.1 Current ANKC Standard Quotes:

1. Historical Overview

“The German Shepherd Dog, whose planned breeding commenced in the year 1899, after the founding of the GSD Verein, was bred from the central German and South German strains of the existing herding dogs of those times, with the final goal of creating a working dog, predispositioned to high working aptitude. In order to reach this goal, the Breed Standard was laid down, which related to the physical attributes, as well as those of temperament and character.”

2. CHARACTERISTICS

Purpose and usage: Versatile utility, herding, guard and service dog.

The main characteristics of the German Shepherd Dog are: steadiness of nerves, attentiveness, loyalty, calm self-assurance, alertness and tractability, as well as courage with physical resilience and scenting ability. These characteristics are necessary for a versatile working dog.

3. TEMPERAMENT – **The German Shepherd Dog must be of well balanced temperament, steady of nerve, self assured, totally at ease (except when provoked) and good natured, as well as attentive and easy to train. He must possess instinctive drive, resilience and self confidence in order to be suitable as a companion, watch dog, protection, service and herding dog.”**

It is most important not to place dogs that are shy or aggressive as these are disqualifying features; any weakness of character should be penalised.

Character can easily be assessed by walking towards the dog from the front in a somewhat slow way and observing the dog's eyes. Whilst he is in a stance, observe whether the dog is alert or deadpan or disinterested. He should be alert, calm and self-assured.

With an abundance of vitality he must be tractable enough to adapt himself to each situation and to carry out his work willingly and with enthusiasm. He must possess the courage and determination to defend himself, his master or his master's possessions should the need arise. He must be observant, obedient and a pleasant member of the household, quiet in his own environment, especially with children and other animals, and at ease with adults. Overall he should present a harmonious picture of nobility, alertness and self confidence.

2.2 Old WUSV Standard Quotes:

1. “GENERAL APPEARANCE – Therefore, only a specialist judge should be engaged to assess the dogs presented to him for their temperament, including gunshot indifference.”
2. “NATURE AND CHARACTER – Stability of nerves, alertness, confidence, manageability, watchfulness, loyalty and incorruptibility, as well as courage, combative instinct and toughness, are the most outstanding characteristics of a pure-bred German Shepherd Dog.”

2.3 The Biology of the Ear

Hearing is accomplished by pressures. Everyone knows what a dog's ear looks like and the hole, which it surrounds, which leads into the head. All the delicate mechanism of hearing is embedded in the heavy bone at the base of the skull. Technically the outer ear, which we see, is the *auricle*. In dogs with erect ears, these cone-shaped organs can be moved to better collect the sound waves and conduct them down into the cavity where these vibrate against the eardrum. This is a membrane (*the tympanic*) which lies across the end of the auditory opening and is very thin and delicate. It has no vibrations of its own and is able to pick up vibrations of a variety of lengths and intensities.

Behind the eardrum, there is a small cave (*tympanic cavity*), a tube (*the Eustachian*) drains it from its lowest part down to the throat of the dog and allows air to enter to ensure equal pressure on both sides of the ear drum. Within the tiny cave, there is a most ingenious arrangement of delicate bones – the mallet (*malleus*), the anvil (*incus*) and the stirrup (*stapes*). The mallet is attached to the ear drum while its body attached to the body of the anvil. This bone in turn attaches by its other end to the stirrup, the flattened area of which fills the end of a crooked tube called the *cochlea*.

While these three small bones undoubtedly make **hearing more acute**, a dog can hear fairly well without them, as was shown by a veterinary student who surgically removed them from a dog that was still able to hear after the operation.

Intense sound can destroy the end organ of hearing, the sensory part of the cochlear duct, called the *Organ of Corti*. Changes which are **permanent** can be produced by certain sound frequencies of considerable duration. This is nowhere nearly as severe as a loud blast, which may deafen by rupturing the ear drum and is of an entirely different nature.

In the matter of hearing, dogs and human beings live in the same world, but at times hear quite different tones. By that, I mean that the dog can hear everything we can hear but a lot more too. He can hear fainter sounds coming from a somewhat greater distance, but he really puts us to shame when it comes

to hearing notes of a higher pitch – higher on the musical scale. (For example. stereo).

In the same way, dogs can hear cycles far up the scale. A man's hearing capacity begins at about twenty and stops at about 20,000 cycles per second. Dog's start at about twenty but go up to above 30,000 and some experiments claim as high as from 35,000 to 70,000. (Cats can hear up to 50,000.)

Besides the cycles, we must consider **pitch**. This is the quality of sound that depends on the **rapidity of the vibrations**. We hear at best at about 2,000 vibrations per second whereas a dog hears best at about 4,000. Dogs respond to sounds to which we are deaf, because of the higher pitch.

3. Current Requirements of the GSDCA Breed Survey Manual

Page 11, para 7.7 Gun Test

Only those dogs and bitches which will stand sufficiently firm and sure during the gun test can be admitted to either classification. (*Refer 2002 changes page1.*)

Dogs and bitches that fail the gun test shall not be admitted to either classification and shall be deemed to have failed the Breed Survey.

Page 20, para 11.4.5 Gun Test

The test shall be carried out at the conclusion of the temperament and character tests.

The handler shall walk to a designated position and stop without giving the dog a command, facing the surveyors with the dog in stance and on a loose lead. The pistol shall be held pointing downward at the side and not rear, of the surveyor. Up to seven (7) dogs at a time may be tested at once.

The pistol shall be fired by the surveyor or steward, twelve (12) paces from the dog, with a minimum of two (2) shots fired consecutively. A dog that shows a wandering movement or padding will be retested on its own by the firing of more shots.

Dogs must stand sufficiently firm and confident, showing no real concern for the shots discharged. The desired reaction is one of total lack of concern.

Gun shy dogs will be those who show obvious discomfort and fear, padding their feet or wandering to and fro and cowering and hiding behind their handler. (*Refer page 7 – Scale of Reaction Chart, which is NOT part of the GSDCA Breed Survey Manual.*)

15 Appendices & Forms (Page 38, para 15.2)

Definition of Gun Sure

A gun sure dog normally reacts to the gun shot by standing on one spot and either being alerted or showing lack of interest. A gun shy dog adversely reacts to the gun shot by not standing in one spot and either moves around, jumps up on the handler, walks around the handler, hyperventilates, moves close to the ground, looks fearful and anxious, sits or cringes. If the dog moves, retest. The major assessment is stability to the discharge sound.

4. The Assessment

A careful observation of the dog's immediate reaction to the rapid firing of two shots, will **in the vast majority** of cases, determine whether the dog's reaction is "gunshot indifference", being the desired reaction, or not.

Matters to be observed and subject to assessment by the surveyors are as follows:

(Note: Remember that the dog is **standing away** from the handler **on a loose lead**.)

- Movement by the dog
 - exactly what
 - to what extent
 - toward to or away from the handler?
- Breathing rate
 - is it noticeably higher?
- Eyes
 - what do they reveal?
- Overall body language and demeanour of the dog
 - is it positive or negative?

As the surveyor is approximately twelve paces from the dogs being gun tested, he or she is in the best position to judge these matters, as opposed to someone being thirty or forty metres away.

Yes, sometimes the assessment can be a little subjective, but that is where a surveyor's experience, knowledge and powers of observation come into play.

Sometimes the reaction to the gun test is one of lack of conditioning and/or socialisation, which should not be confused with actual gun shyness. These dogs should be represented after suitable training and conditioning to the gun.

There are numerous scientific experiments, as well as practical experiences with the gun dog breeds, which support this statement.

In reality, the major problem with gun shyness is a physiological one. That is, physically the ear drum cannot take the "pitch" of the sound and causes the dog

great stress and discomfort and hence the dog wants to run away. The higher the pitch, the greater the problem. By way of interest, Germany uses a 6mm gun whereas in some other countries, they use a 9mm which is not as severe.

Remember also that this dog may well have otherwise a generally sound temperament.

Or alternatively the above dog may still be of a generally nervous disposition, as evidenced by its behaviour generally, as well as to the gun.

Of course, gun shyness is **highly inheritable**. Therefore, we have to be very firm in assessing dogs on the gun test for suitability for breeding in our survey scheme.

Obviously it is very upsetting to all to see a dog obviously in distress because of the gun test. Consequently, it **must** be considered a major fault, similar to incorrect dentition, monorchidism, cryptorchidism, coat, size, etc and therefore that should be **always** kept in the breeder's mind.

Please review the attached "Scale of Reaction Chart".

5. Conclusion

Always remember that the purpose of the gun test for working dogs is a "**gunshot indifference**", that is, alert but not skittish, as quoted in a Walt Disney TV Show on Guide Dogs. A nervous or aggressive reaction to the gun not only detracts, but also in many cases, **destroys** a dog's ability to concentrate and work.

Finally, I trust that this article has assisted you in giving you an understanding of the requirements of the gun test, as well as the assessment.

James Rodger

References:

1. ANKC – Extended GSD Standard adopted 2009 from the German Standard
2. Old WUSV Standard
3. *Dog Psychology, the Basis of Dog Training* – Leon F Whitney
4. *GSDCA Breed Survey Manual*



THE GUN TEST – SCALE OF REACTION

WORKING DOG REQUIREMENTS

- * Alertness
- * Calmness
- * Self assured
- * Steady nerves
- * Fearless
- * Sense of purpose

FEAR	← High	Medium	Low	GENERAL INDIFFERENCE	Low	Medium	High	AGGRESSION
* Grovelling on the ground		* Moves toward & behind handler	* Wandering to and fro	* Interested to show a reaction but that is all		* Low level growling		* Barking excitedly
* If not on lead would run away		* Jumps up on handler	* Padding	* Alert but not skittish		* Low level barking		* Jumping about excitedly
* Hyperventilating		* Moves almost continuously	* Low anxiety			* Low level movement		* Trying to get at the gun
* Visibly in great distress		* Eyes, ears & body language quite negative						
* Eyes literally rolling								
* So frightened the dog cannot move								

Note: From the writer's experience and observations since 1972 to the present day, whilst generally there is not a problem with gun shyness in Australia, those dogs that are gun shy have very largely shown varying degrees of fear, with very few aggressive dogs to the gun.