

# INTERVIEW WITH REINHARDT MEYER 2008

SV NATIONAL BREED WARDEN  
by David Haydon

## **“A REGENERATION OF THE GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG BREED”**

I have “read” (i.e. got the general meaning of) the two very interesting interviews by Heiko Chr. Grube, which Reinhardt Meyer, the Bundeszucht-wart/National Breed Warden, gave in the S.V. Zeitung in April 2007 and 2008. Concerning his extensive review of what, in his opinion, is required to improve the breed.

I considered the subjects upon which he intends to concentrate and it is generally agreed that, if he is successful, what he plans is nothing less than the regeneration of the German Shepherd Dog in Germany, the motherland of the breed.

As I had written in previous articles in “Das Schaferhund Magazin” on some of the subjects covered, I telephoned Herr Mayer and asked him if it would be possible to have an interview to discuss his ideas in greater detail.

R.M. agreed, a date was fixed in June in his house in Borken, south west of Kassel, and it was agreed to restrict the subjects to four, namely:

The oversize of both male and female dogs

The role of the T.S.B. at the Sieger Show

The importance of the Korung/Breed Survey

The problem of the “two populations” in the breed

And any other relevant matters

However, there was also the problem of carrying out the interview and subsequent discussions in German; R.M. kindly agreed to send a summary of the four subjects discussed, which Brian Wootton (an S.V. qualified judge) kindly translated for me, after the meeting.

Accordingly, the format of this article is that of each of the four subjects are divided into two parts, firstly R.M.’s summary and secondly our discussions and my subsequent thoughts (after receipt of the R.M. summary) on which R.M. kindly commented.

### **STATEMENTS OF REINHARDT MEYER**

#### **Oversize in dogs and bitches**

A problem which has pre-occupied the SV for years if not for decades. Incidentally, this is also a problem apparent in other breeds, where there is certainly often more latitude in the breed-standard. The size problem has already been tackled in the breed-committee under the leadership of my predecessor. However, I have demanded the strict implementation by all breed-judge colleagues of the directive from our breed-committee: namely, to unequivocally demote those dogs which very obviously exceed the tolerated parameters, and thus to send a signal to breeders and exhibitors. The SV has always followed the way of proceeding in small steps and this been justified, leading to success in the medium term.

I will adopt this method with the size-issue. It is important that, with this matter, decisive selection occurs at our chief breed show, i.e. the Bundessieger Zuchtschau. Here we have the greatest possibility of demonstrating responsibility towards the breed and of taking care that the future representatives of breed, i.e. the representatives that are used extensively, must be right to a considerable degree in the criteria demanded – in every important aspect.

#### **Subsequent discussion by David Haydon:**

##### **1. Oversize**

- I. It was agreed that this problem would not be solved easily or within a short period of time, but that perhaps within 8/10 years or 4/5 generations and a start would be made to stop any further increase and a slow reduction commence.
- II. This problem of oversize is further complicated by two very important factors:
  - a) The majority of the leading V.A. and spitzen V males and females all have similar bloodlines and these are generally genetically dominant for oversize.
  - b) The reluctance or even refusal of either the show or the working/sports dog breeders to consider using these alternative breeding lines.
- III. I gave the example of what happened, I believe it was, in Australia when height was to be strictly controlled; the result, I understand, was that the "correct height was achieved but the dogs had shorter forelegs and overbuilt bodies!
- IV. R.M. also emphasized that, whilst a reduction in overall size was very necessary, the other breed characteristics must not be overlooked, namely that of a Gebrauchshund or working dog breed.
- V. this problem will be resolved over a period of time by
  - strict measuring at all breed shows particularly at the Sieger Show (BSZS)
  - and most importantly, the judges at all shows, principally at the Landesgruppen and Siegershows, all oversize dogs will be relegated to a lower show position. In a democratic society, this is probably the only acceptable method available to demonstrate that the size must and will be reduced.
 But as I pointed out, there will still have to be "unofficially agreed" by the Breed wardens and show judges just what are the "acceptable heights" in order to arrive an "agreed maximum".

## STATEMENTS OF REINHARDT MEYER

### The Role of the TSB

The GSD is bred as a working dog, never merely as a show dog. One may formulate this by saying: it is a working dog, which can also be shown.

As in the past, the GSD still enjoys wide popularity as the best and most versatile working dog in the world. His character and qualities of temperament have made him what he still is today: a working dog, which, in comparison with many other breeds, is universally useful.

The assessment of the T.S.B. features is the central element in assessing some significant areas of mental strength. Consequently, it is a basic component in the breeding of a working dog and fundamental in the selection of a working dog.

Drive-based aptitudes such as, for example, the expression of a drive and its consistency, resilience self-confidence and directability are significant elements. These things are naturally influenced by training techniques, so that the assessor needs an educated eye to be capable of recognising the qualities that are genetic.

It is a very unsatisfactory fact that the assessment - outcome 'pronounced – comes out' has little significant meaning for the interested observer and breeders.

Concealed beneath this grading lies a relatively wide latitude in measurement which does not allow a differentiation in the quality of the dogs assessed. It is also not clear whether any particular dog is an absolutely top representative of our breed in this respect or one which merely fulfils the minimal requirements for the grade 'pronounced'

At the BSZS 2007 for the first time the dogs with the best TSB grades were singled out and named; these results led to a higher position. With this measure the dogs concerned were lifted out of a position of anonymity and made known to interested breeders.

### Subsequent discussion by David Haydon:

#### 2. The role of the T.S.B. at the Sieger Show

- I. I was particularly pleased to hear directly from the national breed warden/Bundeszuchtwart that he places so much importance on the original purpose for which the breed was founded over a 100 years ago, namely that the breed is a working breed, which can also be shown; many respected breeders consider that this most important factor had been marginalised over the last 20/30 years.
- II. It was quite clear from R.M.'s remarks that he believes firmly that considerable control and influence on the future direction of the breed can be obtained by the correct use of the information available from a revised format for both the T.S.B. and the Körung. (See next paragraph)
- III. We discussed at length the problems facing a T.S.B. Judge in that the present awards of "A and I. ab" do not allow any distinction between an "excellent performance" and a "marginal pass".

IV. Most importantly R.M. stressed that the meaning of the T.S.B. as "consistency, resilience and self-confidence", can also be influenced by training techniques.

V. I proposed the following amendment to both awards:

Dogs proceed to show classes on the award of:

- "ausgeprägt/distinct" – only given to dogs which deserve such a high standard
- "annehmbar/acceptable" – an acceptable standard but not up to "a" standard, this amendment would give the judges more choice.

If accepted, would probably result in fewer but deserved "a" grades and more "annehmbar" dogs, but of an acceptable standard.

All other dogs would be failed.

VI. R.M. pointed out that, at the 2007 Sieger Show, he picked out 14 males, including 2 V.A.s, which had shown the best working standard in the T.S.B. and rewarded these dogs with higher show positions, which is consistent with his ideal of promoting the G.S.D. as a working breed. R. M. also expressed interest in the other uses of the breed such as: search and rescue (RH1 and 2), avalanche rescue, guide dogs for the blind, drug and explosive detection, and the sports of schutzhund, tracking, obedience and agility.

All the above activities in R.M.'s opinion serve a very useful purpose in preserving the working ability of the breed and not forgetting the faithful family dog.

VII. I asked R.M. how did he select these "pronounced dogs" and he replied on the advice of the class T.S.B judge; he also showed me a video recording of the V6 male "Bazi v.d. Urbecke", which showed a very good standard of work, one of the nominated 14 dogs.

VIII. I then showed R.M., the T.S.B scores for the 2007 Sieger Show, prepared by Werner Dalm, the ex-breed warden for 30 years of the DDR, which were divided into two columns: "Überfall/attack" (from the hide) and "Abwehr gegen Angriff"/defence against attack" (as in the long flight), the marks were awarded as follows:

5 – vorzüglich/excellent

4 – Sehr gut/very good

3 – gut/good

2 – befriedigend/satisfactory

1 - nicht genügend/insufficient

Previously when I had discussed with Werner Dalm his system, he explained that he had written a book on this subject and also explained that for the purposes of assessing a male as a potential stud dog, the DDR only considered those dogs with marks of 4 and above.

IX. Subsequent to my interview with R.M., I asked W. Dalm's permission if I could use some of his scores and they proved very instructive. The following dogs in the first 70 V/excellent dogs scored 4, 4 and all dogs which gained the excellent grade of 5:

VA3, Dux de Cuatro Flores, 4-4

VA7, Ingodds Agassi, 4, 4-

V19, Tiras v. Roten Feld 4-5

V69, Campino v. großen Schönberg 4+5

V70, Blade v.d.Wannaer Höhen 4+5

V105, Whisky v. Haus Abate, 4+5

V137, Lasso v. Petersbrunnen; 4+5

V147, Javier v. Talka Marda 5,5 (Universalsieger 2007)

V148, Amigo v.d. Holzinger Au 4+5 (Vize-Universal sieger

V152, Ix v. Patscherkofel 4+5

I was particularly impressed to see the considerable number of males, which had scored 4,4 and this I have only listed below those dogs in the first 70 "V" group, using their final show award numbers:

V10 4,4

V13 4-,4-

V27 4-,4-

V28 4,4-

V30 4,4

V31 4,4

V34 4,4

V38 4,4-

V39 4,4

V45 4+,4

V58 4-,4+

V64 4,4-

V68 4,4+

I also counted a further 26 V males, which had also scored 4,4, so it is clear that with the guidance of R.M: the breeders, who have an interest in the working ability of their progeny, have a great opportunity of improving this ability without losing type.

However R.M. also remarked that one of the major problems facing him is that too many breeders will only consider V.A. male/females and disregard other dogs which perhaps were more suitable and should therefore take a more long term view in planning the improvement of their progeny and not just the next Sieger Show!

X. "Genetic qualities"

After having read R.M.'s summary, I was interested to know how the Sieger Show judges with over 250 dogs per G.H.KI. would have the time to assess this genetic ability and by what method of assessment.

Perhaps this might be better assessed at the time of the Körung? (See later)

## STATEMENTS OF REINHARDT MEYER

### Importance of the Survey

The point and purpose of the Breed Survey is to select the cream of our breeding animals, which, in temperament, work and anatomical construction, appear suitable to a significant degree for the preservation and development of the breed.

We must ask the question: does our survey, together with the survey reports on an individual dog, fulfil these requirements?

Shepherd Dog breeding is working dog breeding, and when it is no longer working dog breeding, it is also not Shepherd Dog breeding.

The breeding of a working dog according to the guidelines of the breed standard.

The Direction monitoring and development of the breeding and training of the GSD as a working dog. When we look at both the inner pages of a survey report, it is obvious that we devote considerable space to the anatomical aspects, the exterior appearance and to Data and measurements.

Furthermore, the same anatomical features are sometimes dealt with several times: e.g. the croup, the front, the length of stride are found in both the text and the Matrix.

The mental areas, features of prime importance in a working dog are rather under-represented.

Practically all the dogs are described 'pronounced – came out' (I have revealed my opinion to you about this in comments above) and practically all the dogs are designated:

Temperament: firm

Alertness: present

Condition of Nerves: firm

Imperturbability: present

A properly worked-out temperament test of the necessary thoroughness does not occur. Consequently, it is not possible on the day of the survey to select the essential degree of excellence. These minimal statements, therefore, do not offer the engaged breeder a satisfactory level of information so that he can select the cream from among the breeding animals himself.

At this point, I should report that all the committees are already working with the future in mind to modify and optimize the survey in various areas, especially with regard to the mental qualities of the dogs presented.

The idea of a survey panel comprising 3 surveyors is also being considered. In this way the validity of the survey reports would be freed from an aspect of subjectivity and be based on a broader consensus.

### Subsequent discussion by David Haydon:

#### 3. The importance of the Körung/breed survey

I. R.M.'s plans for the revision and re-emphasis to the format of the Körung is very interesting and is urgently required.

It is also indicative of his determination that the G.S.D. must be regarded as a working dog in accordance with the guidelines of the international breed standard and thus all future breeding plans should take this basic aim into account.

II. R.M. points out that the present layout of the Körung document places far too much emphasis on construction/anatomy and very little space to describe the dogs character and working ability, thus most dogs are described as "ausgeprägt"/"lässt ab", "firm nerves" etc. This type of Körung serves very little purpose in providing information to the informed breeder, who wishes to improve both the physical and the mental characteristics of the progeny by the choice of stud dogs.

III. DDR Körungs

Referring back to R.M.'s intension for Judges to pay attention to the genetic value of a dog's ability to work and thus to pass on these characteristics, I mentioned to R.M. the DDR system which had been explained to me by Werner Dalm, the Ex-DDR breed warden and author of the book describing the system for breeding dogs – the Wertmessziffer-system; 3 numbers describe the conformation (1 basic type, 2 constitution, 3 anatomy) and the numbers 4,5 and 6 describe the working qualities (4; basic instinctive behaviour, 5 the fighting spirit/the dogs speed and 6 the level of hardness and quality of the bite.

This numeric system could prove useful.

- IV. We then had a general discussion on the very important problem of the honesty and the impartiality of some of the Breed wardens/Körmeister's and R. M. repeated his opinion, stated in his first interview, that there had been "tolerated dishonesty" in the past.

I then asked R.M: how he intended to stop this inappropriate behaviour and R.M. replied in the following manner:

- To obtain agreement on an improved format for the Körung, giving equal importance to construction and character assessment.
- To obtain agreement on a revised definition of the awards "ausgeprägt and lässt ab", the latter possibly later.
- The utilisation of three and not just one Körmeister; I was interested as I had previously suggested that two Körmeister's would be preferable. (D.S.M. 02/2007)
- In future all Körmeister's would be specifically selected and trained solely for the position of a Körmeister.

- V. R.M. also stated that at present there is almost an 100 % pass rate and he believes that when the above revisions are in place, there would be about a 30 to 40% failure rate.

R.M.'s reasoning is that breeders should be considering the "exceptional" dogs (male as well as female) and not just pairing with little or no thought given to the importance of both construction and working ability.

Most importantly, R.M. stressed that both the anxious/over submissive and the over aggressive dogs will not, in the future, pass; he considers that all dogs should be able to be "family dogs" and thus able to cope with visitors, friends and children, etc.

The public relations of our breed and the associated sport of schutzhund require continuous care by all owners of G.S.D. as the public in general is becoming more intolerant of dogs. Only recently on the German T.V. there was a programme, which dealt with attacks by dogs on humans, particularly children; these attacks apparently occur all too frequently. I noted that G.S.Ds were not mentioned in this report.

## STATEMENTS OF REINHARDT MEYER

### Two populations

I represent the opinion that we do not have two populations in our breed. One might perhaps formulate it thus: we have two differing lines of breeding interest.

The term 'population' is a technical term in breeding for a type or breed, that is bred according to agreed, specified principles.

If there were two populations in the GSD, then we would also perhaps need two standards, but we do not have that. The GSD as a working dog is bred to only one standard. This standard has been practically unaltered since 1899. Certainly in a club as big as the S.V. there are members with different interests in their involvement with the GSD – that is clearly the case.

On the one hand, we have members who incline more to the world of breed-showing and on the other side there are members who feel more at home in the working sport. But they all breed on the basis of one breed standard, with differing breeding emphases, i.e. priorities.

I believe that the size of our society makes it absolutely possible to justify these varying breeding emphases. But all breeders must clearly operate within the regulation and rules of the prescribed breeding parameters.

In that way the versatility and usefulness of a working breed is guaranteed to a great extent.

Nevertheless, it is my wish that we do not widen the existing gap between work and breed orientated breeders any further, but that we can narrow it somewhat in the near future. A pre-requisite for doing that is the implementation of the points made above under the heading 'Surveys'.

Perhaps I also mad the first small steps in this direction at last year's Sieger Show by highlighting the best dogs in the T.S.B. test. But it has become clear to me in retrospect that, in placing the work-orientated bred dogs in the top group, I took the third step before the first one, in particular because they were not quite up to the demands of the gaiting rounds. But in so doing I tried for the first time to demonstrate to the owners and breeders of such dogs that dogs of suitable basic anatomical quality are absolutely capable of competing at a BSZS.

In the aftermath of the Sieger Show there was sometimes harsh criticism regarding the placing of these dogs. None the less, I should still like to urge these breeders to participate again in the BSZS.

### Subsequent discussion by David Haydon:

#### 4. The "two populations" in the breed

- I. This problem of "two populations"/"two groups" of differing interests and priorities has developed regrettably over the last 30/40 years and concern has been expressed by well respected persons such as the late Peter Messler, Peter v. Oirschot (Dutch breed warden) and many other writers.
  - II. R.M. is fully aware of the problems and dangers facing the breed with this unsatisfactory development and is determined that this "gap" does not get any wider.  
His plans as set out in Para. 3 (IV) above will, in his opinion, go a long way to improve the breed in the future.
  - III. In the "Das Schäferhund Magazin" issue February 2005, I expressed concern at this division and explained my ideas for trying to bridge this gap between the two groups, and which developed with the assistance of my friend Dr. Reinhard Habertzettl (T 12.06.2008) for a proposal to change the rules of the existing Universal-Wettbewerb (U.W.)/ Universal Sieger Competition, so as to encourage all Landesgruppen to hold such a competition, which would be based on a system of scoring the results of dogs in both the L.G. show and L.G.A. (trials); the best male/female would then be crowned – L. G. Sieger/Siegerin.  
These successful dogs and perhaps between 3 to 6 dogs from each LG should then be encouraged to enter that year's Sieger Show and thus be eligible to compete for the title of "National Universal Sieger".  
The advantages of this revision of the existing rules is to give an opportunity to those owners, who have a "V" or "Spitzen SG" male/female and who are interested in training, to compete in the U.W.; as the standard to obtain a "V.A." or Spiten "V" place at the Sieger show or a place in an L.G. team for the Bundessieger competition is now extremely high and also time consuming.
  - IV. R.M. repeated that too many breeders also were only considering either "VA" or "spitzen V" dogs for their show females or top scoring dogs for their sports females; it is a well accepted fact that neither side/group will "ever" consider using the other bloodlines; this is going to be a major problem to resolve!
  - V. R.M. also stated that in his opinion the development/improvement of the breed over the last 30 years has gone far enough and if continued will result in only exaggerations, he mentioned the American Show G.S.D.  
R.M. believes that he needs about 8/10 years to achieve a change in attitude and to make an impression on the future course of the breed.
  - VI. I then asked R.M. a very important question – "What support has he got for these improvements and bearing in mind also that his position is up for re-election in two years time?"  
R.M. replied that he has been informed that about 80/90% of the members of the three main S.V. committees (namely breeding, training and L.G. chairmen) have promised to support his proposals and that he intends to ask the membership for a further four years. But one must not forget his fate in 1994 when he was removed from his position as his ideas were considered too controversial at that time!
  - VII. R.M. in the excellent interview in the S.V. Zeitung January 2007 (also translated into English on some websites) listed twelve important areas/subjects upon which he intended to concentrate; this "action-list" may be summarised as follows:
    - o the responsibility of the breed warden
    - o collaboration between breed and training committees
    - o new reduced size of breed committee, smaller work groups
    - o G.H.class Judges, steering the breed
    - o Controlling the size of the dogs
    - o Amending the breed survey regulations
    - o Breed assessment for H.D.
    - o New control regulations, scientific matters, organization of show dates, HD, ED, DNA procedures.
    - o Promoting the dog's working characteristics, more information on the breed survey, T.S.B., breed and training committees to work together.
    - o Further training for Judges.
    - o Improvements in the breed's publicity
    - o The club breed warden for the motherland of the breed/support for the W.U.S.V.
  - VIII. As a result of the very interesting meeting with R.M., the receipt of his summary of this meeting's subjects discussed and consideration of the importance of the twelve subjects on his "action-list", I am forced to ask myself whether firstly the responsibility of basically a complete regeneration of the breed should be left to one person.  
Secondly bearing in mind the "action-list", whether these duties fall strictly in the remit of a national breed warden.  
Thirdly that R.M. is due for re-election in only two years time and if unsuccessful, there is the risk of his successor not being willing to carry on with the same ideals.
  - IX. Also it is generally accepted by the majority of owners/breeders, who have a genuine interest in the future well-being of the breed that, the breed can no longer be allowed to continue in its present state i.e. two separate groups, et cetera plus falling show entries and dramatic decline in membership numbers since 1990 of about 58 %!  
As R.M. is confident that he has the support of the members of the three management committees, I would have thought that it would be considered appropriate for his plans and any others to be formally accepted as official policy of the S.V. after due consideration.
- In this manner, R.M.'s plans would have the formal approval of the S.V. and thus have the necessary authority and thus of enforcement.
- The future of the German Shepherd Dog breed should not be left solely the responsibility of one person – namely Reinhard Meyer, the national breed warden.

## Conclusion

- I. As this interview and subsequent discussions were not in the normal format of question and answer, R.M. asked to have a copy of this article (in German) prior to publication for his comments.
- II. As I received his summary after the interview, I have had an opportunity to make additional comments, which I have asked R.M. to check, so that I am able to confirm that R.M. has read, commented upon and accepted the contents of this article.
- III. Also I was gratified to hear that R.M. has read my articles in the D.S.M. and he also paid me the compliment that our ideas for the future of the breed were so similar.
- IV. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Reinhard Meyer and Frau Meyer for their hospitality shown to me whilst in their attractive house and to R.M. for his patience in explaining in "simple German" his ideas.
- V. Finally, as R.M. is aware "behind every successful man is a good woman", so I have asked for a photograph of them both and of his 1989 World Champion "Iso v. Bergmannshof".

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