

THE GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Kennel Club
invited representatives from
**The German Shepherd Dog League,
The British Association of German Shepherd Dogs
The German Shepherd Dog Breed Council**

to attend a meeting at The Kennel Club
with
KENNEL CLUB BREED HEALTH AND WELFARE STRATEGY GROUP
on Thursday 20th. November

The 3 organisations attended this meeting, united behind the agreed discussion documents listed below, which had previously been hand delivered to The Kennel Club on 13th. November 2008.

Unfortunately, The Kennel Club advised our representatives by telephone late in the afternoon on Wednesday 19th. November that the Kennel Club did not wish to discuss the Health and Welfare of the German Shepherd Dog at this meeting but wished only to discuss the Breed Standard.

The Kennel Club aims of this meeting were:

1. To consider criticism made both by informed dog people and by the general public in regard to the conformation of German Shepherd Dogs currently being exhibited at British shows.
2. To identify ways in which the current public perception of structural problems in the Breed as seen in the show ring can be improved.

These issues, although important, are not connected to the Health and Welfare of the German Shepherd Dog, but caused by the exaggeration in breeding and/or judging.

After lengthy discussion The Kennel Club have promised, at the earliest opportunity, to discuss the German Shepherd Dog Health and Welfare Planned Improvement Proposal with the 3 organisations.

The German Shepherd Dog Club of the U.K. were also invited and represented at this meeting.

It would appear that The Kennel Club's main concern is the 'Topline and Hindquarters' of the German Shepherd : "These two issues together produce the picture of the breed as perceived by outsiders. Taken together, the apparent roach back, low hind quarters, excessive turn of stifle, sickle hocks and hind pasterns sometimes flat on the ground when moving, sometimes associated with pacing, is the picture to which many critics of the present state of the breed point. Individual dogs appear able, when at rest, to stand with their hocks touching - demonstrating their extreme cow hocks".

The meeting spent a considerable time discussing the above, during which it was explained to The Kennel Club that the majority of GSD breeders and exhibitors also recognise the above issues as faults and not part of the Breed Standard. However the problem mainly lies with poor judging of the Breed allowing exaggerations and unsound movement to achieve high awards without being penalised.

Many other items were discussed including the following :

Overangulation

German Shepherd judges having to attend compulsory seminars every 3 years

Outside attraction

Importance of Breed Surveys - which should be mandatory

Over training - pulling into the collar at too young an age

The Kennel Club advised that they would revise the German Shepherd Breed Standard to give more clarity and guidance for judges, and that this would be forwarded to the 4 organisations for their comments before being implemented.

Meeting with the Kennel Club

Meeting with The Kennel Club and the Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group on the 20th November 2008.

Dear Ms Hallett
12th November 2008

The German Shepherd Dog Breed Council of the UK and the two largest and oldest GSD Breed/Working Clubs in the UK The German Shepherd League and The British Association German Shepherds are delighted to confirm their joint attendance at the above meeting.

The Partnership formed by the three prime organisations who collectively represent the vast majority of GSD who work and show their dogs in the UK respectfully requests that the issues recently raised by the Kennel Club(KC) are considered along with the current lack of focus on the Health and Welfare of the GSD. The way forward and the solutions to your concerns are, as you already identify, intrinsically linked to the Health and Welfare issues.

The Partners believe that the most important and substantive threat facing Pedigree GSDs today, is without question, the lack of mandatory Health and Welfare initiatives for KC registered GSDs. We sadly conclude, that as a consequence of a lack of any mandatory breeding control, that the vast majority of the 12,000 plus Pedigree GSDs registered yearly by the KC do not conform to be classified as Fit for Function: Fit for Life.

We can help. The Partnership of the GSD Breed Council and the two main breed clubs and their members have, for a number of years, imposed voluntary Quality Control initiatives on the GSDs under their influence.

The Partners would like to present to the meeting the work that has been done in improving the Health and Welfare of the GSDs controlled by the clubs. The Partners record that this initiative has been implemented so far only by their members, members who care and invest time, skill and devotion into choosing to enforce restrictions on breeding themselves and not by the whole of the GSDs registered by the KC.

As many as 80% of GSDs registered by the KC every year do not have to pass any tests whatsoever to be allowed to breed, with the consequential health and variations of type which inevitably and unfortunately evolve.

There are some early wins we can achieve together by imposing stricter control on dogs being registered for breeding.

In order to try and regularise this situation and in order to work together with the KC, the GSD Breed Council and the two main breed and working clubs together suggest the following agenda.

This Agenda has been derived to specifically answer the four questions to be addressed, as defined in section 4 of the briefing paper attached to your letter of the 5th November 2008. Our further aim is to agree the principles of a progressive improvement plan for the GSD, endorsed by the KC, wholly aimed at promoting the Health and Welfare of the GSD in the UK and work towards achieving Fit for Function: Fit for Life

Yours Faithfully on behalf of the Partnership

Bob Honey Chairman of the BAGSD
Graham Stephens Chairman of the GSDL
John Cullen Chairman of the GSD Breed Council

Agenda

1) Review of the Health and Welfare initiatives currently implemented by the Partners.

2) Questions to be addressed:-

Q – How can the temperament as seen in the ring be improved so that dogs are not rewarded by judges for being over excitable

A - the KC are requested endorse the introduction of mandatory Breed Surveys for all GSD breeding stock which selects dogs(in two grades) ensuring the desired working dog temperament by test and qualification are supported by prescriptive health standards before being allowed to be bred from.

Q – the views of the breed representatives on how much this perception of dogs of this breed, having exaggerated toplines and hindquarters, is due to underlying structure and how much is due to training of these dogs.

Q – How can evidence concerning health problems that could be related to these issues be obtained?

Q – What input on relevant health and welfare issues is included in judge training schemes?

3) Proposal on the way forward by representatives of the The Breed Council, the BAGSD and The GSD League

Please see attached briefing note on the GSD Planned Improvement Programme

4) Working Together, way forward and Action Plan

5) Any other business

5) Date of next meeting

Agenda Item 3 - GSD Health and Welfare Planned Improvement Plan

Introduction.

1.0 The Partners

The GSD League and BAGSD are members of the WUSV (World Union of Shepherd Dog Clubs) which has representation from 76 member countries, the two clubs are the largest and oldest national breed clubs. Collectively they work proactively with the GSD Breed Council which is the body formed by all GSD Clubs in the UK and charged as a collective group with the progressive development of our Breed within the UK. The Partnership of the GSD Breed Council, the GSDL and BAGSD without question, make up the largest critical mass of GSDs working and showing in the UK.

1.1 One voice, one aim

The Partnership would therefore like to present the following on behalf of the vast majority of working and breed clubs in the UK.

Over the last 15 years progress has been made by the partners to implement VOLUNTARY Health and Welfare schemes for participating individuals within the breed. The facts are that none of these initiatives is endorsed by the KC and none are MANDATORY. Recognition however is made of the contribution made by the KC in the development of KC/BVA schemes so far.

2.0 Progress so far:-

- Highlighting the breeding lines responsible for epilepsy through testing by Dr P. Croft.
- Introduction of a Voluntary Hip Scoring Scheme.
- Voluntary Tattoo identification.(and Micro chipping)
- Voluntary Haemophilia testing.(males only)
- Voluntary Elbow X-rays and grading.
- Voluntary DNA Parentage identification.
- Other Parentage tests, work in progress.....
- Voluntary Breed Surveys
- Ground Breaking GSD Sieger event, for the Fourth year, where only GSDs with mandatory Health and Working qualifications are promoted to the highest awards.
- Mandatory Judges Training scheme in order to become sponsored by the GSD Breed Council judging lists, not mandatory for eligibility to Judge KC shows however.

3.0 The Opportunity

The time is right to implement the next steps and introduce mandatory improvements as part of a phased Progressive Improvement Plan. The GSD community and the KC do not want to be seen as complacent in this respect. We must work together with the KC Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group (BHWSG) and produce a realistic and achievable improvement plan to increase the Health and Welfare of the GSD and perhaps be a vanguard for other breeds to follow.

THE PARTNERS WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORT THE KENNEL CLUBS FOLLOWING DECLARATION:-

“The Kennel Club will make full use of the measures it has within its remit and authority to ensure that all breed clubs and councils encourage their members to undertake health screening appropriate to each breed and that individual breeders reach the highest possible standards of husbandry and welfare”.

The Proposed Planned Improvement Programme

To further improve the Health and Welfare of the German Shepherd to be 'fit for purpose, fit for life' we would like to propose the following Terms of reference to build on the work already done by the KC and voluntarily by our members and produce, in agreement with the BHWSG, a mandatory sustainable Planned Improvement Programme for all registered GSDs.

4.0 Our Proposal in Summary

4.1 The breed name of German Shepherd Dog (Alsatian) should be brought into line with the rest of the World and changed to German Shepherd Dog. This will also avoid the confusion that exists with the general public who often believe that there are 2 different types/breeds - the German Shepherd Dog and the Alsatian.

- 4.2 Introduction of a mandatory breed survey before being allowed to be bred from.
- 4.3 No female under the age of 21 months should be bred from.
- 4.4 No male under the age of 18 months should be bred from.
- 4.5 Inbreeding closer than 3, 2 or 2, 3 should not be accepted.
- 4.6 Mandatory training scheme for Judges with a scrutiny panel of senior breed judges empowered by the KC and the Partners who will monitor judge's adherence to the rules, with regular forums for discussion.
- 4.7 Reduction of the judges list to an active register and qualified list
- 4.8 Line breeding to be shown on the KC pedigree in order to differentiate.
- 4.9 A quick win in differentiating GSDs who have had tests from those who have not would be for the KC to acknowledge international working Health and Working tests on Pedigrees. The standard of a good proportion of GSDs registered with the KC would be raised demonstrably.
- 4.10 Future breeding standards:-
- 4.11 Any puppies registered by the Kennel Club must have parents who have both been hip X-rayed and have achieved a minimum status of a score of 20 (with one side being no higher than 12) or a recognised overseas grade which is similar.
- 4.12 Any puppies registered by the Kennel Club must have parents who have both been elbow X-rayed and either graded by the BVA or have achieved a recognised overseas status.
- 4.13 The sire of any puppies registered by the Kennel Club must have passed a haemophilia test if bred in the UK.
- 4.14 Any puppies registered by the Kennel Club must have parents who have both been either tattooed or micro-chipped for identification purposes, in order for the individual dog to match his/her documentation.
- 4.15 The parents of every puppy to be registered by the Kennel Club must have had DNA identification recorded with the Kennel Club or a recognised overseas authority.
- 4.16 Any puppies registered by the Kennel Club should conform to the Breed Standard colour requirement.
- 4.17 The parents of any puppies registered by the Kennel Club must have passed a Breed Survey (in the year in which the animal attains 2 years of age - or older) either in the U.K. or with a recognised overseas authority.
- 4.18 The U.K. Breed Survey to be upgraded to include a fitness/endurance test similar to the ' (AD) required by International WUSV authorities.
- 4.19 The parents of any puppies registered by the Kennel Club should have achieved either a recognised Kennel Club or WUSV working qualification, with the minimum being a Gold Kennel Club Good Citizen Test or a BH qualification.
- 4.20 The breeder of any puppies registered by the Kennel Club should hold a valid Kennel Club prefix.

5 Timescale

Clearly we cannot unilaterally propose a time scale for this planned improvement programme without the absolute involvement of the KC this would be inappropriate at this time, however we see no reason if we all work together to implement item 4.10 - 4.20 from 1st January 2010.

As a registered puppy achieves certain standards of Health and welfare qualifications these should be added to their official pedigrees by application to the Kennel Club for upgrading.

6 Summary

We fully understand that the Kennel Club cannot refuse registration applications for any puppy due to the Kennel Club being a sole governing body (although this does not appear to have been tested legally).

With this in mind it would appear that the Kennel Club may be forced to register those dogs that have not been tested as 'fit for purpose, fit for life'.

On the basis that all puppies must receive a registration by the Kennel Club, the alternative should be that puppies complying with the above requirements receive green registration documents and pedigree certificates with the additional information contained thereon, and that all other non-complying puppies are issued with 'blue' registration documents and pedigree certificates.

There are further fundamental issues that need to be addressed i.e. The amount of puppies being born annually with multiple lines to known epileptic dogs which information is held by our breed archivist. We would refer you to the article by Mrs. Chris Hazell on page 22 of the 2008 Our Dogs Sieger Supplement. Can you imagine the distress caused to innocent purchasers of a puppy when, at around 18 months of age, as a fully integrated member of their family, their young dog begins to 'fit' and most often has to be euthanized because of multiple epileptic fits. Surely the Kennel Club cannot condone this disgraceful situation.

The Kennel Club Breed Standard for German Shepherd Dogs, as it must, closely mirrors the internationally accepted Breed Standard and encouragement should be given for all judges to attend regular seminars to ensure that judging standards are upheld. Exaggerations of the Standard and poor judging are at fault here - not The Breed Standard itself.

We are at a loss to understand why the photograph of a German Shepherd, which the Kennel Club have attached to the Breed Standard, was used. This photograph is extremely misleading as it bears absolutely no resemblance to the correct conformation of the German Shepherd Dog as described in the Breed Standard.

The unsoundness in movement of a GSD shown on the recent BBC television programme was not the Best of Breed Winner at Crufts but the C.C. winner at an earlier all breed Championship Show.

It is important that judges of the German Shepherd have knowledge of sound movement, as well as correct construction, required in this breed. Unfortunately those organisers of all breed shows only have the current Judges List to work from - this needs to be reviewed urgently.

To prove the ability of the judge they should be required to justify their placings after the end of each class by giving verbal critiques.

It is sincerely hoped that the Kennel Club will approve and incorporate the above proposals, as we feel that by doing so it can only improve the 'fit for purpose, fit for life' requirement for the German Shepherd Dog.