



Dear Members and Friends of SV,

Promoting the image of the German Shepherd breed is a key focus of my work as our club's Public Relations Officer. What does the term 'image' actually mean? The image of a breed is the totality of ideas, associations and judgements that people associate with that breed. It includes rational aspects such as the quality of the breed, as well as emotional ones such as sympathy, trust and personal taste. This already shows that in most cases, it is not purely rational considerations that play a role. Especially when it comes to animals, the emotional level plays a very important role. If we want to work on the image of our breed, we must first agree on what image it is we want to convey. This is sometimes not so easy, as the importance of the quality traits of the breed can vary from one club member to the next, and the public often considers completely different quality traits to be important (emotional perception). But there is one thing we can all agree on: health, temperament, working ability and standard anatomy are the essential qualities of our breed. The German Shepherd is a very healthy breed by international standards and SV has set considerable health standards for breeding. We must never tire of communicating this and countering misconceptions and prejudices objectively. We are currently working on raising the awareness of veterinarians and prospective veterinarians to pass on facts rather than opinions. Vets are key opinion leaders and should therefore provide competent and correct information.

Working dog characteristics are often assessed differently by the public than by us dog sportspeople ourselves. We all agree that they are and should remain an essential quality trait of our breed. However, we must be aware that they must not be based solely on *Schutzhund* sport if they are to be perceived positively by the public. Rescue dogs, sniffer dogs, herding dogs, and therapy and assistance dogs are held in high esteem by the public. But athletic family dogs are also popular as leisure companions. Of course, top sporting performances in the various disciplines support the image, but this is not one of the primary criteria used by the public when judging a dog breed. This is also reflected in the fact that any exaggerations in terms of both character traits and anatomy are not perceived as positive by the public, but on the contrary often lead to the breed being criticised. However, we also recognise how difficult it can be to reconcile the public's expectations with those of the different groups that make up our membership. Yet that is exactly what we have to do, because our members and their dogs are our image bearers and important ambassadors to the public. Image management means positively influencing public perception. This is achieved through communication, behaviour and visual presentation. We need to take advantage of all these opportunities: when walking our dogs, in our local groups, at events and in the media. But this also means making improvements where necessary: where the criticism is justified. This is the job of breeders.

The German Shepherd is rightly a popular and well-known breed, but the better known it is, the more important it is to manage its image, as it is more likely to be criticised by the public. With this in mind, I ask all of you to be ambassadors for our German Shepherds. Do not tire of educating people and challenging prejudices, and show your healthy and well-behaved dogs in public, even outside the dog parks.

I am confident that we can all work together, each within our means and responsibilities, to help the German Shepherd regain the positive image it deserves.

**Yours truly,
Barbara Ullrich-Kornadt**