

## Pedigree dog breeding between ideal and ideology



The Animal Welfare Dog Ordinance has been in force since 1 January 2022. As the recent past has taught us, the interpretation of this law varies greatly in different areas depending on one's point of view. The tone between the protagonists has obviously become more heated. Many purebred dog clubs have been confronted with a set of issues this year that was previously unknown to some: **defect breeding**. Defect breeding is scientifically defined as the breeding of animals whereby characteristics such as pain, suffering, harm and behavioural disorders are tolerated or promoted. To further inject ideology into the uncertainty surrounding this topic, depending on the with the problems of reproduction within closed populations that are known to every cynologist. The frequency and penetrance of hereditary diseases and inbreeding depression should be

mentioned here. These are two fundamentally different sets of issues that must be considered separately.

The new version of the Animal Welfare Dog Ordinance stipulates that dogs exhibiting defect breeding traits are not allowed to participate in dog shows. According to the legal opinion of the VDH, the show ban does not yet apply to a specific dog breed as a whole, but the defect breeding trait must be proven individually for each dog concerned. One of the measures taken by our umbrella organisation as a reaction is the implementation of the Breed-Specific Instructions (BSI). These were first introduced in Scandinavia in 2014 and later also implemented individually by the Kennel Club (UK). Potentially affected breeds were described from the point of view of adverse health consequences for the individual animal, resulting from an overinterpretation (overtyping) of the standard.

### **German Shepherd Dog - in the BSI of the VDH for our breed we find the following information:**

Pay particular attention to the following areas:

Behaviour: Unbalanced temperament

Topline: Strongly sloping topline, tense or tucked up back.

Hindquarters: Excessively angulated hindquarters with hacking, in extreme cases cow-hocked gait and generally unstable hindquarters with disproportionately long lower legs.

In the German Shepherd Dog, attention should be paid to a balanced character. The topline should run from the base of the neck over high long withers and over a straight back to a slightly sloping croup without any visible interruption. The position of the hind legs should be slightly to the back. The hind limbs should be parallel when viewed from behind.

Pursuant to § 10 of the Animal Welfare Dog Ordinance, it is prohibited to show dogs or to organise shows with dogs, 1. in which parts of the body, in particular the ears or tail, have been completely or partially amputated in violation of animal welfare regulations, or 2. in which for hereditary reasons

- a) body parts or organs are missing or unsuitable for the proper use of the species or have been altered, resulting in pain, suffering or damage,
- b) behavioural disorders associated with suffering occur, ...

### **SV has been tackling these problems successfully for years**

Using objective criteria, we are certain that our breed is far removed from 'defect breeding criteria'. However, if you do some research in accessible - and even scientific - media, much to my

astonishment, activities such as our successful fight against hip dysplasia for more than half a century is apparently not yet common knowledge, even among so-called experts. Unfortunately, despite all efforts, some protagonists' arguments regarding our breed are far removed from facts and science, even in other areas. Clarifying these facts is a major task for the future. We have been tackling the problems of over-angulation in the hindquarters specifically and successfully for years. The so-called 'back skids' in the classical sense are rather rare today. The same applies to extremely sloping back lines, which are indeed a product of insane presentation (stacking) and masterpieces of photographic retouching rather than reality. In fact, isolated 'banana backs' can still be observed. These are also on the retreat. In Germany and internationally, the only sensible approach is becoming more and more accepted, which is that the gait of our dog needs to be economical according to the standard. The large stride with a high amplitude is still welcomed and is regarded as a decisive criterion in the final contest for top places. This requires a clear statement: this is a clear case of overtyping. Have you ever seen a German Shepherd outside of a breed show competition that moved in this way? For those in doubt, I recommend reading the Wortbild, 8th edition, page 901 (in German). In the flying 'high-speed' trot, the dog is forced to step beyond its own tread and thus in extreme locomotion, an interlocking of the entire body axis is required. There is no way not to agree with the BSI of the VDH when they state: 'Exaggerated forms of presentation counteract the establishment of correct standard characteristics.'

### **Pursuing our own breeding standards without compromise**

At this point I would like to ask our national and international breed judges to continue to consistently observe the above mentioned criteria and to put a stop to what are sometimes senseless actions. It is not without pride that we can point out that behavioural disorders associated with suffering have been consistently combated since the origin of our breed on the basis of the regulations anchored in the breeding approval. The latest update in this sense is our character assessment. If our rules are applied exactly, it is almost certain that conspicuously aggressive or skittish animals will have no access to breeding. In summary, I believe that we at SV should not worry about the term 'defect breeding' if we apply objective and ideology-free criteria. However, we should take the discussion as an opportunity to pursue our own breeding guidelines consistently and without compromise and to understand the standard of our breed as it was meant by Rittmeister: **function before fashionable exaggeration.**

Yours truly,

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Meßler,  
SV and WUSV President