

Back to the roots



'A shepherd calmly drives his flock across the paddock. Whether the sheep progress or stand still, and whether they swing to the left or to the right, is directed by two dogs, with a minimum of voice commands, connected to the shepherd only by brief gestures.' This is what it says in the special edition of the SV Magazine entitled '100 Years of the German Shepherd'.

The observer, Rittmeister Max von Stephanitz, it continues, 'easily recognised what was special about the two herding dogs he had observed: obedience, intelligence and performance. He had to have such animals – even if he had to breed them himself. They were worth preserving as a species and breed, as versatile service and working dogs. Moreover, their historical significance also lay in the fact that for centuries, they had been at home everywhere in the new German Empire that had only come into being 20 years previously. After he had resigned from service at the age of about

35, he devoted himself completely to the breeding of German Shepherds and his club.

Very soon after the foundation of the club, the German Shepherd unfortunately ran out of shepherds. From then on, however, new fields of activity, which we are all familiar with, have been found. Moreover, the German Shepherd is particularly suitable as a family and companion dog, because it is born for close coexistence with people and with other animals.

In the June issue of the VDH's association magazine Unser Rassehund (Our Purebred Dog), VDH board member Udo Kopernik pointed out in the editorial that a new set of rules has been created under the FCI umbrella to test the herding aptitude of herding dogs. This test is called the Natural Herding Aptitude Test, NHAT for short. Among others, the German Shepherd is approved for this test.

The purpose of this test, which involves herding animals, is to create a simple and practicable basis for obtaining the behavioural traits that were shaped by the original work of sheepdogs. These behavioural traits are the basis of the German Shepherd and fascinated the founder of the breed. I can understand this fascination.

Mr Kopernik points out that the VDH is working on creating the structures for this test in Germany as well. The FCI rules can be found on the internet. Search term: FCI Rules for Natural Herding Aptitude Tests.

The essential components that are tested and evaluated are:

1. Contact with humans
2. Contact with dogs
3. Sensitivity to sound
4. Relationship with the handler
5. Jumping over an obstacle
6. Absence of the handler
7. Retrieving the dog
8. Approaching the herd
9. Contact with the herd
10. Interest and drive to control the herd

The test can be conducted entirely in a local group exercise area. There must be at least 10 sheep available for the test.

In addition to the character assessment, the companion dog test and the endurance test, the NHAT could serve as alternative proof of our German Shepherd's performance if the breeding regulations were adapted accordingly, and it could also function as a qualification to exhibit the dog at the breed survey.

Yours truly,

Helmut Buß
SV Vice-President