

*Love Your Dog First
And The Sport Second*



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Talking Turkey

Recently, we were confronted with video tapes to be found on social media in which the mistreatment of animals by some individuals while practicing IGP sports was documented. Up to this date, we cannot reliably rule out that highly ranking participants from IGP championships and even a functionary of your umbrella organization was actively involved in this kind of misconduct.

What can be seen in the video footage is cruelty to animals per definition. The offences in this respect are clearly defined. Please find the relevant wording of the law attached. ¹

In the year 2002 the protection of animal rights became a national objective and as such was integrated into the German constitution. According to our law, animals are defined as fellow creatures and no longer as mere things as it was the case in the past. We at the SV do have every reason to be proud that we have always considered animal rights and respect for animals one of our most important corner stones in terms of our activities in our almost 125 years lasting tradition.

During the course of the past decades, we did proactively support the change of our dogs from a working dog to a personal partner and family dog.

It becomes obvious to each of us that the images as displayed in the footage call the issue of working dogs, dog sports in general, and IGP sports in particular, into question at the most crucial level. From painful experience we learned that IGP sports does not only meet friends and supporters in politics and in our society. This kind of violation of animal protection rights is detrimental to the entire field of dog sports and all related settings – and thus, also to the SV – and as a consequence, this sort of conduct damages the reputation hereof and threatens its very existence.

It goes without saying that incidents like those that could be seen and the background hereof is in no way compatible with our associations' objectives. It is unmistakably defined in the statutes ^{2,3} and regulations of both the SV and the WUSV that a respectful treatment of our four-legged friends – in particular in terms of animal welfare rights – is the unshakeable foundation of our joint objectives and all of our activities. These requirements are self-explanatory and vital key conditions in all sections of dog keeping, education, breeding and training.

In consideration of the brutality and inhumanity of the images shown it is my personal belief that it does not at all suffice to express utmost and politician style disgust and outrage. All decent members and functionaries of the SV and the WUSV absolutely condemn such unspeakable training methods that could be seen in the video footage.

Owing to the fact that the methods as shown in the video material are obviously and above all most lamentably still successfully used – even though they are considered antiquarian and obsolete – I feel the need to offer a very clear statement in this respect

In the field of training and competition for dogs' sport, dog and man have to perform as a team.

There is consent in our modern society that this sort of performance can only meet our acceptance if it happens in a mutual and amicable way, and in a synergetic fashion of fair play between man and dog. And fairness requires a decent conduct as well as a just and honest attitude towards our dogs as our team partners, and also towards the competing teams.

This requires compliance with the rules both in training and competition and thus keep up the values of decency and fairness. The rules of **fairness** are based on consensus and the establishment of equal conditions for all parties involved. Above all, this requires the ability to distance oneself from the own role and relativise the personal profit motive when it comes to a critical situation during a competition.

If we abandoned the principles of fairness while working with our dogs – which is also a statutory requirement which applies for all kinds of disciplines in this field – we would no longer be able to refer to our activities as sports.

Our association's objectives ⁴, are among others that dogs are trained in accordance with and under consideration of their skills, disposition and motivation.

Nowadays – and more than ever – dog sports serve as a means to satisfy the dogs needs for meaningful occupation in an animal friendly fashion, especially in the field of working dogs.

Our working dogs enjoy to be kept busy. For a lack of more traditional forms of employment for our dogs, for example for our breed the herding of sheep, it is as a matter of fact, mandatory for animal welfare reasons to keep our dogs busy with specific and species-appropriate sporty activities.

However, certain rules have to be complied with in the field of sports in order to ensure that our dogs can perform without getting overloaded and certainly without the use of violence. We at the SV advocate the principle of dog sports without causing the animals pain, suffering or damage. Trial wards with their particular skills are obliged to protect the animals at all possible levels.

A dog is not a piece of sports equipment. A dog is and remains our partner, even though the animal might not or no longer be able to perform as desired, for instance for age-related reasons. Our dogs deserve – apart from their sporty performance – our special respect and recognition.

It is all about the relationship between dog and man. The conduct of participants during a competition also allows for drawing conclusions in terms of the relationship between human beings.

Considerations of outside observers permit for serious conclusions in terms of the mindset and motivation of those involved. Please allow me to point to the aspect of public image. This is also about the association's – and their members' – reputation and about the level of acceptance we enjoy in our society. Irrespective of whether we may assume that the incidents occurred are only isolated cases, it is more than ever a responsibility of the committees to remove the enticement from the rulebooks that might cause some to train their dogs in the described fashion, following antiquarian and explicitly prohibited methods.

Three approaches are to be implemented:

The judges are once more and explicitly to be instructed to take into account all unnatural kinds of behaviour patterns – and ultimately mental over-typification – and include these observations into their final assessment of the dogs.

Under consideration that the SV is primarily a pedigree dog breeding association, the question needs to be raised if the kind of specific subspecies of German Shepherd Dogs than can occasionally be found in the top-rankings at our events do really correspond with our ideal of the breed. This applies especially under consideration of the fact that quite obviously animals with a low stimulus threshold and the reduced self-confidence – respectively reduced suitability in an everyday life environment – that the aforementioned entails, do enjoy a clear competitive edge. At this point it becomes the responsibility of the jurors to ensure a respective selection of the properties and characteristics that are specific for our breed. Unreflective and fashionable techniques of presentation that originate from other breeds are from my point of view cause for concern.

Furthermore, there is a highly topical and urgent need for a review, the editing and implementation of a German Shepherd Dog breed specific examination regulation. It is our responsibility to deliberately verify the desired properties in our breed in line with a breed selection. A breed overlapping congruence with the examination parameters of other working dog breeds may never happen at the expense of the German Shepherd Dog breed. This applies even more under consideration that 80% of the entire volume in the field of IGP is covered by the German Shepherd Dog breed.

¹ Legal Situation

According to § 17 of the animal protection act in Germany (TierSchG) the mistreatment of animal is considered a criminal act, without using the specific term in the wording of the law.

According to § 17 a person will be punished with imprisonment up to three years or with a financial penalty if the person intentionally

1. kills a vertebrate without reasonable grounds or,
 2. inflicts upon a vertebrate
- significant pain or suffering out of crudeness (brutal mistreatment of animals) or
 - significant pain or suffering repeatedly or for a longer period of time ("tormenting abuse")

National Legislation

Animal Protection Law

§1 ... Nobody may inflict pain, suffering or damage upon an animal without reasonable grounds.

§2 Abs. 2: ... It is illegal to limit the species appropriate movement in a way that pain is inflicted upon the animal or in a way that avoidable pain is inflicted upon the animal.

§3 Abs. 1: ... It is illegal to demand performances and activities from an animal that it cannot cope with or which exceed its forces.

§3 Abs. 1a: ... It is illegal to carry out treatments in order to conceal a state of reduced performance ...

§3 Abs. 1b: ... It is illegal to take measures such as training, competition or similar means, which entail pain, suffering or damages in order to increase the performance.

§3 Abs. 5: ... It is illegal to educate or train an animal if this inflicts significant pain, suffering or damage upon the animal.

§3 Abs. 8a: ... It is illegal to train an animal toward aggressive behaviour that leads to pain, suffering and damage for the animal affected, or which leads to pain, suffering or damage when in contact with conspecifics for the animal itself or for the conspecific, and if the keeping of the animals is only possible under conditions that lead to pain, suffering or damages for the animal.

§3 Abs. 11: ... It is illegal to use a device that limits the species-appropriate conduct through direct electrical pulse ...

§11 Abs. 1 Nr. 8f: (Statutory permission requirement for dog trainers)

And also, the animal-welfare dog regulation act states:

§8 Abs. 1: (...to care for and take care of the animal's health)

² Statutes of the Main Club § 3, 2n, 3

³ Statutes of the Local Chapters § 3, 2n, 3

⁴ Statutes of the main club § 3i

The animal protection laws in § 3, clause 5 stipulate the following:

„It is illegal,

...

5. to educate or train an animal if this is associated with significant pain, suffering or damages,

...“

The characteristic described as „significant“ is already considered to be fulfilled if minor pain and suffering is inflicted upon the animal. In this connection the auxiliary means are only of secondary importance since almost every object that is used in an abusive and exaggerated way during the training can lead to an animal protection law relevant issue and thus entails a violation of the aforementioned law.

With regard to spiked collars the higher regional court of the town of Hamm already decided in 1985 that a repeated pulling back of a dog with a collar featuring spikes at the inside of a contracting collar is to be considered a violation of animal protection rights and not at all acceptable as a means in terms of dogs training.

As aforementioned, also the usage of a variety of other objects that can be used as auxiliary means for training can lead to a violation of animal protection laws if used in an abusive manner. For instance, considerable pain and suffering can be inflicted on an animal if sensitive organs (such as eyes, nose, genitals) are repeatedly and for a certain period of time and with intensity subjected to treatment with a simple wooden club (ranging from a toothpick to squared timber). The same applies for a whistle that is being used permanently and near the ear of a dog. Lamentably, this list could be continued and extended at random. It becomes obvious that this is not about the one or the other auxiliary means. What is at issue is that the respective animal is not made subject to substantial pain, suffering or damage during the training. And for that particular reason the legislator – apart from electrical stimulation devices – did not explicitly refer to the individual auxiliary means which are considered unlawful. Since the local chapters comply with their responsibilities under consideration of animal protection laws according to § 2, clause 3, the usage of any kind of auxiliary means must be rejected if the specific and exaggerated usage hereof during the training leads to a violation of animal protection laws and are thus not permitted. Primarily the respective handler is responsible to comply with animal protection laws, both in terms of training in particular and dog keeping in general.