

This article was written in the early 1990's and published in a newspaper called Northern Dog.

Attached photos accompanied the article, no dog's names given, apologies for the quality.

# ONE NAME – TWO BREEDS

A look at the German Shepherd Controversy by Roy Allan of the successful Shootersway Kennel



An early example of the breed C. 1900



A British bred champion male of the eighties

Most people in German Shepherds, and, indeed, many in canine circles beyond the boundaries of the GSD world are aware that in the United Kingdom at least, there are two types of German Shepherd being bred and shown. Why is this, and how has it come about?

Of course, many dog breeds are subject to type difference and variations. This can arise as a result of contrary influences from rival kennels and the bloodlines they employ, but most of all from the independent decision making which means that in the context of British Dogdom we can mate our bitches to whatever stud dogs we wish, though perhaps with an eye to what is currently winning in the show ring. This depends, of course, on the judges, but then they are often the breeders anyway.

This analysis applies to the German Shepherd world to an extent. In fact, considering the numerical strength of the breed, one would expect, on the strength of this argument to encounter an even greater number of different variations of type than is normally found in other, especially numerically smaller breeds.

Indeed, at one time, not so many years ago, one did refer to German Shepherds - or rather Alsations, as they were known then – as being examples of say the Brittas type, the Charavigne type, the Brinton type and so on.

## **DISTINCT**

One repeatedly, in the canine press, found occasion to read about the 'strains' in the 'Alsatian Breed': the Kentwood, the Letton and above all, the Evely strain. There were other 'strains'. Some like Druidswood, have stayed the course, and are still recognisable by their distinctive type.

In consideration of the foregoing, the words 'type' and 'strain' are interchangeable, and really mean the breeding concepts and practices of a number of kennels in any particular breed, in this case the German Shepherd.

If this was the situation in the breed until about twenty years ago, what has caused the polarisation which today is fact? Why has the German Shepherd Breed ranged itself into two distinct factions, each with its own dogs, breeders, judges and showing traditions, and never the twain shall meet, except by accident perhaps?

To find the key to this question one must go back to the early days of the breed, in fact to 1919 just when the First World War had ended. Officers returning from the trenches of embattled Europe told tales of the wondrous feats performed by German Shepherd Dogs under fire: as messenger dogs, as sentinels and, above all as search dogs, seeking out wounded soldiers on the battlefield.

## **IMPRESSIVE**

The German Army was employing skills which took account of the Shepherds natural characteristics: courage, endurance, acute hearing and scenting ability. These qualities had already been recognised and developed by the police.

To this impressive list of attributes may be added the GSD's love of master, the recognition of which quality resulted in the formation of the guide dog school at Potsdam, primarily to deal with the flood of soldiers blinded in battle, who, but for this new 'seeing eye' dog, would have been doomed to a life of hopeless dependence on others.

To have proclaimed officially that it was in Germany, of all places, that the talents of this wonder dog had been nurtured and developed; to have underlined that the GSD had 'fought' on the wrong side in the most terrible war history had ever

known, would have in the opinion of those who wished to launch the dog in Britain, so damaged their cause as to make the dog almost unacceptable.

The answer was found in a change of name, and a distortion of the breed's origins: 'Alsatian Wolf Dog'. Such expedient may have enabled the early enthusiasts to 'sell' the dog to the war weary and supposedly 'hun hating' British public.



A top winning male of British breeding early seventies



A British-bred champion male of the mid- seventies of 'advanced type for his day'

## DAMAGE

But this denial of the correct name and country of origin was to sow the seeds of confusion and mistrust and to encourage what has become ultimately a total division between two breed factions. The inclusion of Wolf Dog was hardly good PR and rebounded from the start. This part of the name was soon dropped. But the damage was done. Today, some people still believe that the GSD is part Wolf-cross.

But a factor other than denial of the name and birthplace of the GSD was to play an important role in the gradual process – and it was gradual – of splitting the breed. This factor could be called the British Breeder's right to do his or her own thing.

During the early days of the breed's spread beyond the shores of Germany, to Britain to the United States and thence to other English-speaking countries of the Empire and Dominions, breeding 'controls' as practised in the motherland of the breed, were no longer applicable. What are breeding 'controls'?

The breed in Germany was, and is under the direction of the SV, or the Breed Society for German Shepherd Dogs, founded in 1899 by Rittmeister von Stephanitz for the express purpose, at the end of the pastoral era, where the guarding of flocks would no longer be a prime function for the breed, of finding a new role for the dog in a modern industrial society.

Von Stephanitz said 'To breed a German Shepherd is to breed a working dog'. Thus emerged a new all-purpose working dog for the twentieth century, whilst retaining its position as the number one herding dog on the plains and in the hills of its native land.

Von Stephanitz knew that if he were to develop the breed as a modern working dog he must fashion manageable tools to guide the progress of the breed, and at the same time obtain a mandate from the breeders and users to impose strict controls on breeding material and to adopt a cooperative rather than a competitive approach to breeding, which is a feature of Anglo-Saxon dogdom.

## REJECTS

To achieve this Von Stephanitz established a Stud Book for all German Shepherds, not just those who had qualified by show wins, as is in the case of the British KC Stud Book, or the American Register of Merit through winning progeny.

This was rather a Breed Book or Register (Zuchtbuch) for each GSD showing proof of its origin. The next step was to set up a Breed Survey of all German Shepherds on establishing the age of two years. Dogs were divided into those recommended for breeding, those suitable for breeding, and the rest – these were the rejects, dogs not suitable for breeding by reason of faults of character and temperament or of anatomy

Breed shows were designed to be part of the process of improvement and were complimentary to the Breed Survey. The task of the judge was to categorise the dogs into breed grades rather than to find the most beautiful dog and declare a winner. This would be a help to breeders in the selection of breeding stock. At the Main Breed (Sieger) Show, held annually, a dog's breeding value would influence the final placings of top winners.

To attain a high placing at the Sieger Show, a dog must anatomically correspond to the requirements of the Standard as well as pass tests for courage and for working and must have good hips. The small select group (VA) from both sexes, will be those dogs who, having passed all the tests, have either established a 'track record' as good producers or show promise as dogs likely to improve the breed.

## SPLIT

Now, contrast this highly integrated hierarchical system for both men and dogs, whose one aim was breed improvement, and to maintain the GSD as an all-purpose working dog, with the situation in Britain and in other countries of the English speaking world. Put quite simply, the breed became fragmented into separate spheres of influence.

Those interested in the working dog for the most part split off from the show people. Brave attempts were made at first to resist this trend. The GSD League started working trials in 1924, but soon specialist working clubs took over the development of trials and obedience. The later inclusion of other breeds into these groups tended to hasten the breakdown of the GSD corporate identity.

Soon, specialist GSD clubs sprang up all over the country to deal with the needs of local GSD communities. This decentralisation of what to become the numerically strongest breed, had its good points on the principle that local government deals better with local affairs.

But what about the direction of the Breed on a national level? Where was it heading? The early twenties were taken up with 'stocking up'. Did the imports come from Alsace? Of course not. They never did unless you count the initial trickle.

No, they had to come from Germany, and they came in great numbers. Of the 75 Champions made up in Great Britain up to 1930, a total of 31 were bred in Germany. This figure does not include champions from imported parents. Many more German imports gained one or two challenge certificates during this period.



'VA' Excellent Select German male of the mid-eighties

## CORRECT

What price the 'Alsatian' against the background of these facts. A bizarre note was struck when one finds that a second challenge certificate was won in 1926 by a bitch called of all things: Nazi of Millgar.

That the Kennel Club should deny the breed the right to use the correct title of 'German Shepherd Dog' and allow a name like this to be registered, is truly mind boggling, but in 1926 the 'mandarins of the Kennel Club thought the Nazis were respectable – a bulwark against the 'Red Terror' perhaps!

During the twenties, an improvement of type was achieved in the motherland. From the rather square, almost terrier fronted Shepherd of the early years, a deeper bodied more angulated type of dog was to emerge. The new type epitomised in the 1929 Sieger Utz. His son, Voss v Bern was imported into Great Britain by the Brittas kennel. Arno v Bibliserwald was imported by the same kennel. These two imports are of the greatest significance because they reflect the close cooperation which existed between Britain and Germany at the time.

Von Stephanitz believed that Utz demonstrated the purest form of an efficient and serviceable Shepherd dog .... Powerful but without too much weight. The sire of Utz was the 1925 Sieger Klodo v Boxberg, the Brittas kennel established the Kloo/Utz type, ie the correct type in the British Isles. But there were those who objected to these breed trends. They wished to retain the taller, leggier type of dog they were used to. A leading light to 'put the clock back' was F N Pickett, who vehemently objected to the words 'German Shepherd Dog' being appended to the name 'Alsatian' in 1936.

## PRECISE

Ironically, as we shall see later, those who object to the present wave of German bloodlines (they have even formed a club to preserve our 'glorious English Alsatian' have themselves line bred to Utz through Avon Prince, Danko v Menkenmoor and Ingo v Piastendamm. Is the split in the breed due to stubborn resistance to change, especially when it comes from Germany?

The standard for the breed drawn up at the outset by Von Stephanitz is a very precise 'blueprint' for the German Shepherd. Angles and proportions are clearly laid down. This does not give much leeway for individual interpretation by the breeder or judge. But two facts must be borne in mind.

First the SV see the process of breeding to be one of constant improvement toward the ideal, ie the embodiment of the Standard: second until 1982, Britain did not use the original Standard for the breed, but one drawn up by the original enthusiasts in agreement with the KC. In the opinion of the FCI (International Canine Federation) commission for Breed Standards of which Britain is not a participating member, this British Standard, last amended in 1950, was not a Standard for the GSD.

In their view, the British version was too vague and imprecise. We shall see later how Britain came into line and adopted the original German Standard for the breed. It was supremely ironic that the impetus to take this historic step should have come from the KC at the first Congress of Kennel Clubs held in Scotland.

One would have expected breeding to have drastically curtailed during the period of WW2. Quite the contrary for three main reasons. First, at the beginning of the war registrations were at a low ebb, due to bad publicity in the thirties. There is no doubt that despite attempts to place the breed in Great Britain on a firm footing by responsible breeders, the rise in popularity had encouraged ignorant and unscrupulous operators to flood the market with anything that would sell under the label 'Alsatian'

### **MIXED**

Second, the British Alsatian Association had established a national network of branches to encourage people to work their GSD`s. The BAA along with other GSD societies, provided a focal point for breed identity and 'esprit de corps', and afforded a good opportunity for newcomers to meet genuine 'breeders' as opposed to 'puppy farmers'

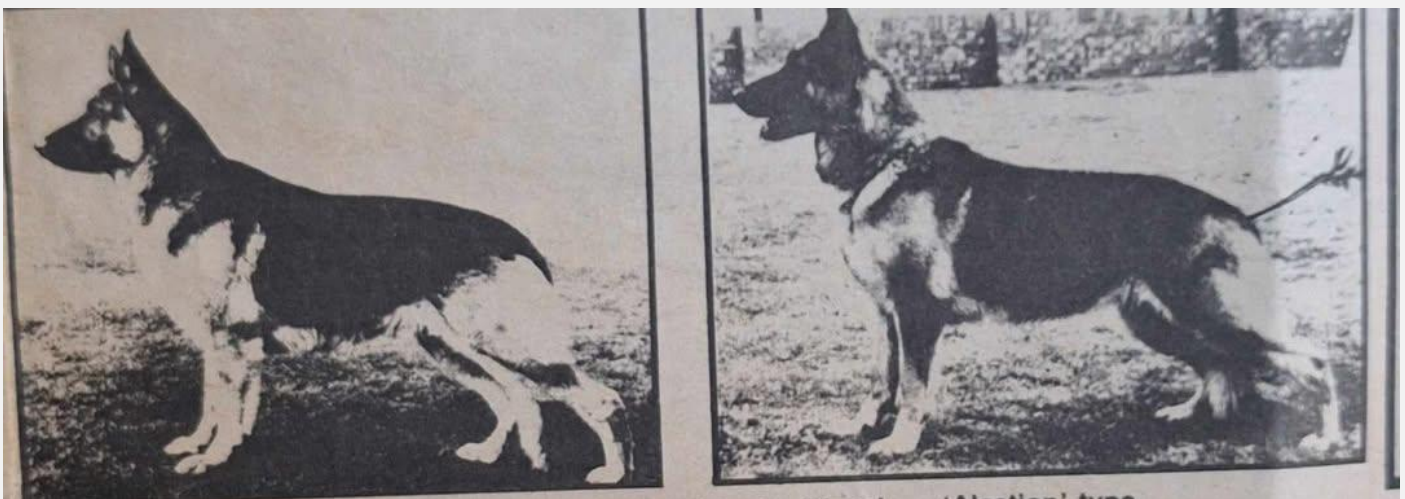
Third, the arrival in Britain of a real German breeder Joseph Schwabacher, a fugitive from Nazism, whose advent on the scene we must regard as very much of a mixed blessing, for he brought with him his bitch Franze Secretainerie in whelp to Ingo v Piastendamm.

The resultant litter produced Ingo's son of Errol, whose grandson Ch, Avon Prince of Alumvale was to exert a far-reaching influence on the post war development of the breed, especially when incorporated into lines from Ch Danko v Menkenmoor.

The overuse of what was a formula for producing winners involved line breeding on the faults rather than the virtues of Ingo and of Utz himself and did much to destroy the legacy and to undermine the foundations laid down by the responsible breeders of the twenties and thirties. Not for some years, not in fact until the sixties, was there any significant attempt to put the breed back on the right path.

The reader will perhaps wonder at this stage how differences of interpretation within any breed can run so deep as to bring about a situation such as we know it today in GSD`s. The actual 'parting of the ways' has, it is true happened only in the last decade, but this could never have come about, but for the underlying anti German feeling with which this breed had been devilled since it was brought into this country.

Furthermore, it is a feature of Anglo-Saxon Dogdom, which allows a breed from overseas to be altered to suit the tastes of breeders whether in Britain or America. Look for example what happened to the Cocker Spaniel. It went to the USA to come back to this country as another breed. The American Cocker.



Two examples of modern breeding of the traditional 'Alsatian' type

### **ACCEPTED**

In this article we have seen, following the initial attempts to stifle the birthright what is after all a German breed of dog, that something of a 'backlash' movement has evolved after the breed became established in Britain, to counter the direct influence from Germany.

The situation remained 'in balance' until the period after the Second World War, when German influence declined, if only for the reason that one could only with difficulty travel to the Occupied Zones; at the same time German breeders had little stock to spare, engaged as they were in building up their own breed after the ravages of the war years.

Furthermore, a new generation of breeders had emerged in the past war period at a time, it must be emphasised, when German influence was at its lowest ebb. The Avon Prince/Danko type dominated the rings and became the accepted norm to all but the very few.

But it is to the very few, led by Nem and Percy Eliot that we owe a debt for the regeneration of our breed, which had by the end of the fifties reached a 'watershed'. At the BAA championship show of 1961 judged by Sven Hyden from Sweden, the greater part of our top GSD winning stock was pronounced by the judge to be found deficient not only in confirmation but also in temperament. We were breeding untypical German Shepherds and something had to be done about it.

The struggle to bring the breed in Great Britain back to the 'mainstream' of international type has been told often, and even a summary of the main events along the way would take too long to recount in an article of this type.

Suffice to say that the 'milestones' were as follows: cementing of close contacts between British and German breeders; the rise of German imports, the increased number of German judges, visits to the annual Sieger Show, League improvement schemes, especially litter recording, adult assessments and hip scoring, the League scheme for training judges, British membership of the WUSV (World Union of GSD Clubs).

## **BACKLASH**

And perhaps above all a conviction amongst responsible breeders to respect the Standard for the breed, in order to keep the German Shepherd at the forefront as the universal working dog, widely used by the police, armed services, in security work of all kinds, as mountain and avalanche rescue dogs, not to mention guide dogs for the blind and guardians of the family against intruders, just as they protected their flocks – and still do – in the motherland of the breed.

What triggered off the 'backlash' to this movement to bring the GSD back into international/mainstream is difficult to pin down exactly. Perhaps it was the change of name from 'Alsatian' to 'German Shepherd Dog' forced on the KC from the floor at an AGM and led by Dr. Malcolm Willis.

The formation of the 'Alsatian GSD Club of the UK' against the wishes of the majority of GSD Breed Clubs, was seen by breed 'progressives' as establishment backing for the 'old order'.

Clearly a large segment of the GSD community was opposed to the new breed trends; and so, the battle lines were drawn up. But what was the conflict really about? Objections to German Influence had existed in earlier decades; but in one important instance – the attitude towards Utz – what had started as an objection turned later to acceptance to a degree of saturation.

The point is that hitherto, admiration of the SV, its principles and practices, had been confined only to the influential few. Now it became a mass movement with the advent of modern communications. But those who declined to 'worship at the feet of the Sieger' (as one breed columnist sarcastically put it) saw the movement only as a sinister invasion of our shores by Teutonic hordes, albeit four footed, bringing alien traditions and concepts, which would serve to undermine British Dogdom, and in particular the 'British Alsatian'.

Had it been purely a conflict of opinions over the type of dog we should be breeding, no doubt, with time, the matter would have been resolved amicably as it had been in the past.

But this time it was different. Confrontation became the order of the day, which was frequently played out at shows, in the press, and at meetings. Suspicion reigned everywhere.

It developed into a 'them and us' situation with no middle ground. Old associations and friendships floundered on the rocks of changed breed loyalties.

## **WORKING**

At the heart of the controversy was the 'new' standard which the KC had called for as part of the revision of standards approved at the first congress of Kennel Clubs. This was a heaven-sent opportunity for the GSD breed clubs produced the original German Standard for KC approval which had been translated into English by a working party from the League and BAGSD (formerly the BAA).

This Standard, approved by the SV, the WUSV and FCI was accepted in November 1982 by the KC for the use of GSD breed clubs. Its own version would be shorter but based on the breed club version. Thus, with an exact and detailed 'blueprint' for the breed, there would be no excuse in the future for subjective interpretation of the actual words.

It was all there, angles, proportions, relative length of bones etc. Any judge who ignored the provisions of the Standard would be caught in a trap. No longer was it possible to rationalise the promotion of the worst of the Danko/Avon Prince inheritance dogs, with long weak backs, short front legs, flat withers, bad temperament, short croups, incorrect gait as being a matter of opinion. In German Shepherds, if you don't judge to the Standard you judge against it.

There is no room for compromise. Yet, attempts have been made the League, and now by the GSD Breed Council to incorporate the 'UK Club' and the handful of clubs who support them to form a common front for the breed.

But the 'Alsatianists' refuse to join the Breed Council, to take part in the Annual Judges conference organised by the League, or indeed to join any activity which has any connection with the World Union.

## **SENSIBLE**

As individuals, many of them are sincere people of long standing and great experience, who have in past periods of time contributed much to our breed. But now they are caught up in inward-looking, isolationist movement whose undemocratic

mode of election to membership is based on the 'blackball' system. In this way, the 'progressives' are excluded from their ranks.

For the first time 'political' labelling takes precedence over sensible breeding decisions. This is why the breeding philosophy of the 'UK' movement can only result in deterioration and eventually disaster.

The strength of British breeding has always rested on the premise that you look at the female, decide on the faults and virtues, and then find the male to correct the faults and enhance the virtues. This classic formula has been abandoned by the 'Alsatianists' because they must heed the instructions of their leaders, whose watchword is 'British is Best'. And it should be added, anything other than British is not merely frowned upon but actively discouraged.

The German Shepherd is a breed which originated in Germany. When it spread to the rest of the world, it suffered from varying influences, but gradually, in most countries, the realisation dawned that unless we returned to the original concepts and practices, as laid down by the breed's founder, Rittmeister von Stephanitz, the German Shepherd would as a breed decline.

## **LOVERS**

The WUSV or World Union of GSD Clubs is a voluntary organisation which cuts across race, language, national cultures and political spheres of influence to unite all peoples with a love and interest in the German Shepherd Dog. We invite all adherents of the 'UK' movement and all participants in their breeding policies to ask themselves whether they are lovers – or betrayers – of this king amongst canines.