

Where did it all go wrong for the German Shepherd Dog? Where to from here?



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Given the quite expansive brief from 'Our Dogs', nothing short of an historical recount and candid summation of present day practices and attitudes can provide the answer to these two questions.

Where does one start? It starts with the written standard.

The written standard provides the documented blueprint and reference source for the German Shepherd Dog. Notwithstanding the occasional SV amendment, the standard is non negotiable. If you don't like what is written in the standard you are probably in the wrong breed!

If we have a documented blueprint, and a fairly detailed one at that, why would there be such great disparity in opinion about the breed? Not just outside the German Shepherd Dog breed but also within it, not just between the breed's enthusiasts but also between the breeds 'experts', of which there is great abundance.

The primary reason for disparity of opinion is that the standard, in many areas, leaves descriptions open to an individual's interpretation and or preferences and this makes the assessment of a German Shepherd Dog 'subjective' not 'objective'.

A '*subjective*' perspective is one open to an interpretation that is based on personal feelings, emotions, aesthetics, etc. An '*objective*' perspective is one that is not influenced by emotions, opinions, personal bias or personal feelings - it is a perspective based on fact, in things quantifiable and measurable.

Putting aside the impact this interpretative latitude has on assessing and judging dogs, this is critical to understanding how a breed of dog, any breed of dog can change over time. How in extreme morphing, this can change a breed's 'type' and when this happens a breed "*in the context of its original reason for being*" can be lost, sometimes irretrievably.

The word 'type' is an important word in understanding the German Shepherd Dog's journey and why the common misuse of the word as a way of "describing a dog in a word" has not helped the breed's current situation.

Notwithstanding the recent, and very welcome, leadership initiatives of the President of the SV and WUSV Professor Dr Heinrich Messler, the current situation for the GSD globally and in Germany is not a healthy one. I try very hard to be an optimist in regard to the breed, but in my opinion if there is no significant correction during Professor Dr Messler's tenure the breed will continue its downhill trajectory.

Type

- In conformation judging health, temperament, and performance aside, ‘type’ is the most important thing to identify and promote.
- In using the correct dictionary and grammatical terms the word ‘type’ defines one breed of dog from another, not one same breed of dog from another.
- ‘Type’ comes first and foremost and then within type there are “styles” of dogs.
- The standard articulates ‘type’ using descriptive and to varying degrees, quantifiable words and terms. As a living thing, genetically each dog is a totally unique individual, an inherent amalgam of many thousands of dogs commencing with the Grey Wolf. As small variations in construction and colour are of no impediment to function, breed standards leave room for variation and interpretation. This latitude creates various ‘styles’ of dog within a breed.

Some examples of the interpretative latitude that creates variations, that creates ‘styles’ within a breed are the words; *'moderately long'* - *'slightly sloping'* - *'gently curved'* and remarkably, even the word ‘straight’. There are others, but these are the most relevant to todays issues. Because of this, conformation show judging is highly subjective and consequently the definition of breed type and its evolutionary direction, within reason, is subjective. This is why it is a mistake for anyone to expect judging of dog’s to be objective and why there are variations of opinion and variations in the placing of dogs in dog shows, its to be expected, its normal!

- To my observation too many people misuse the word ‘type’ or more precisely the word ‘good type’. In todays specialist show environment the word is often used to describe any German Shepherd Dog where its most prominent features are; *deep red and black colour, a highly alert & highly animated disposition in stand and gait, a curvature of the spine, excessively sloping topline in the walk and trot, deep hind angulation and dynamic side gait all topped off with an excessively long and preferably bushy tail!* For too many judges “soundness” and I mean true soundness, is not part of this mix and that is because you can’t have excessive hind angulation and absolutely sound, efficient, stable hocks and hindquarters. One negates the other. I should have added to the mix a well-angled forehand, but I didn’t, and that’s because this has been totally disproved via recent events! What I am saying is a dog being described as above may well be a dog of good breed type but what is being described is the ‘style’ of the dog. This is seen in the following collage of dogs all of which represent ‘breed type of varying styles’.

When looking at the following dogs it is important to contain your bias, and for some people that will be utterly impossible to do. It is also important to keep in mind we are not talking about which dogs are considered to be the closest to the standards ideal in their construction, nor are we talking about what their grading classification might be. We are talking about the word ‘type’ and ‘style’ in the context of their true grammatical meaning and dictionary definition.

For obvious reasons I have started the collage with the 2015 German and 2016 Italian Siegerin Cristal di Casa Massarelli.



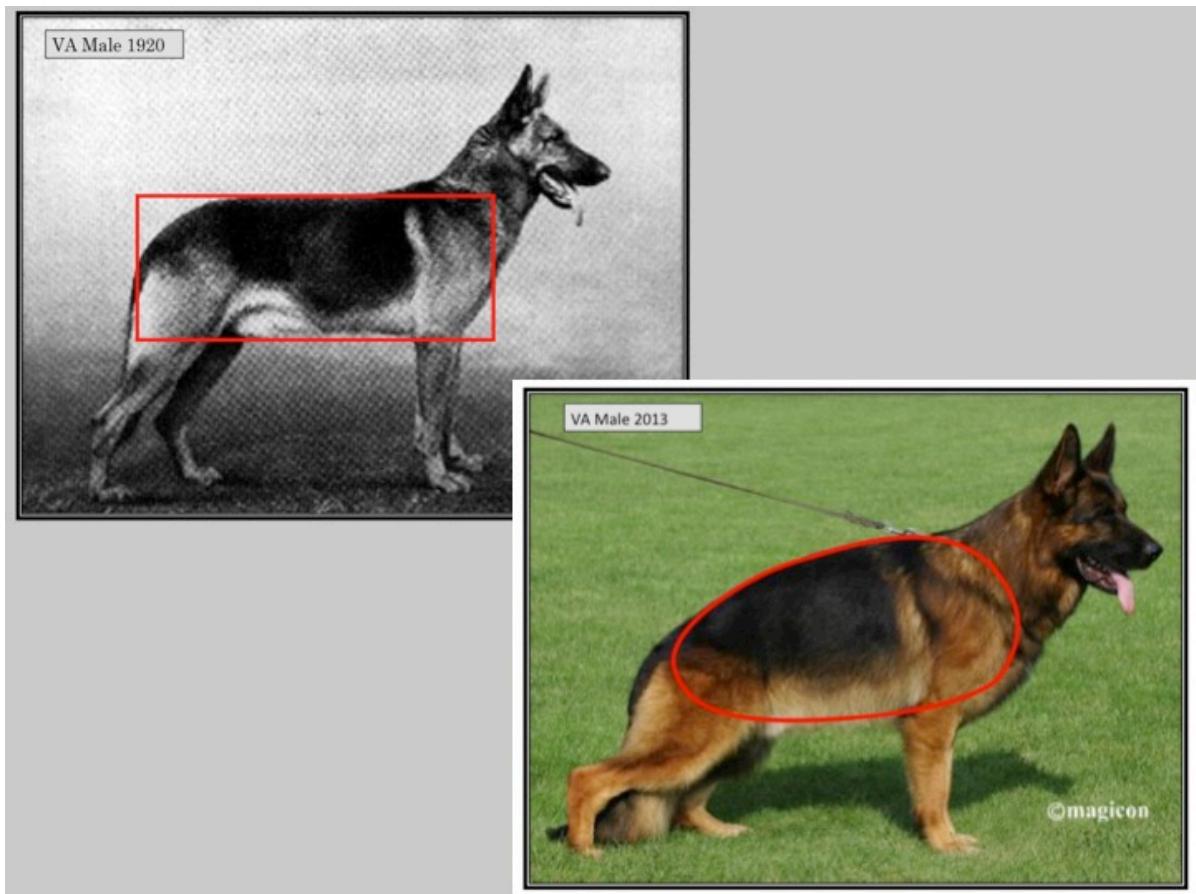


I fully appreciate there is absolutely no chance of the word ‘style’ replacing the word ‘type’, even though in the German Shepherd Dog it would benefit by doing so. The relevance is that this has played a significant part in the area of misinformation, misunderstanding and more particularly, maintaining the very destructive divide that exists within the breed. A divide that is defined as ‘show dog’ v’s ‘working dog’. Not only does the breed have an army of critics outside its ranks, it has an army within its ranks! No organization, not even the SV stands a hope of changing the public’s perception of the breed when such an internal split and too common displays of often appalling disrespect toward one another and each other’s dogs are in such active and increasing play.

An example of why the misuse of the word type is such an important point; In the above collage there would be many show dog enthusiasts who would not describe a number of the dogs as being ‘typey’. By true definition this is stating those dogs are not an acceptable reflection of the breed standard that they do not look like a pedigree German Shepherd Dog!

The beginning.

In broad developmental terms the German Shepherd Dog has evolved from being skeletally a dog of rectangular form to one representing an egg form.



The GSD as a recognized breed of dog originated in Germany in 1900 from a broad and very diverse array of German Sheepdogs. Its primary purpose as translated into the written standard was for it to be a 'superior sheep herding, trotting protection dog'. The purpose of dog shows other than for social entertainment and competition was for 'experts' referred to as 'dog judges' to give breed direction and through that process keep the breed on track relative to the written standard. Breed judges are the breed's primary guardians and as such they are expected to be idealists, people who put the best interests of the breed ahead of self-interest in all its guises.

Max von Stephanitz, the breed's creator stated:

"The basis of all judgement shall, must be, the service which is demanded of the dog [as a working, protection service dog]. Shy and weak nerved animals are to be marked as injurious to the breed".

This comment is repeated many times by von Stephanitz in his written works i.e. firm, outgoing, confident temperament is "non negotiable", weak temperament is inexcusable. Strong, confident, outgoing temperament is the cornerstone of the German Shepherd Dog as a breed and other than 'type' i.e. it has to conform to the written standard in that it has to look like a German Shepherd Dog, this characteristic comes ahead of all other traits.

Other statements von Stephanitz made in relation to the judging of the GSD relevant to today's breed problems are as follows:

- *The dog must stand on all four legs in a manner that distributes its weight evenly and naturally, i.e. four square.*
- *On no account are the hindquarters to be placed unnaturally by overstretching – an unacceptable practice which a number of dog photographers attach great importance to thus confirming novices in their wrong view.*

Notwithstanding one rear foot placed ahead of the opposite rear foot is a natural weight-bearing configuration for the German Shepherd Dog, and the more hind angulation the greater that distance will tend to be, ‘overstretching’ of the nearside rear pastern [hock] and excessive forward under placing of the far side rear foot started in the early 1900’s. This was a period when many dogs were overbuilt or dead level over the backline and in stance [not in movement] a ‘slight slope’ to the topline not a dead level one was determined by von Stephanitz to be developmentally desirable. Consequently a ‘sloping topline’ was considered by many owners and handlers as being necessary to get a high placing in SV shows. That fact, coupled with the inevitable ‘more is better’ syndrome was captured in photographs by the obliging and well-paid photographers. This interplay continues unabated to this day. As it was with von Stephanitz, what a judge states as being desirable is too often taken on board by owners and breeders as meaning more of it has to be better, that more of it has to be more favoured by the judge and therefore more advantageous to winning the coveted blue ribbon. The belief was if a ‘slightly sloping’ backline was stated by a judge of note as being desirable then a ‘sloping backline’ has to be even better! That very early perception and straddling placement of the rear feet and captured on photographs continues today, but with a significant difference. Notwithstanding dogs in the early photographs were very often overstretched, what you saw in the photo of the dog actually existed in the flesh. The vast majority of handlers today still overstretch their dogs when they present them, and for the same reasons, but now we have further exaggeration of “perceived desirable traits of the topline and hind angulation” via the use of Photoshop techniques. It is now an illusionary and often grossly misleading double dose created firstly by handlers positioning of the dog and secondly, by the photographer’s manipulation of the photograph to further exaggerate the handler’s exaggeration. Photoshopping is compounding the breed’s PR problems at a general public and All Breed level.

These are some of the pertinent guidelines set down by von Stephanitz for us to follow and in doing so maintain the fundamental objectives he established for the German Shepherd Dog:

- *The dog must be held in a free and natural position during the individual examination.*
- *The back should be straight. Curvature of the spine diminishes the power of endurance and speed and is therefore a serious handicap for efficiency. The back should be straight and level with the ground during the trot.*
- *A disproportionately long second thigh [overangulation created by an overlong tibia] is to be regarded as ‘extremely unsuitable’*
- *Tails should only reach to about the mid hock as a longer tail hinders movement as the tail bounces on the dog’s hocks when it runs.*

When considering the GSD in the context of its purpose, anatomically speaking the dog seen in rectangular form from 1920 required some significant improvements in order to attain the 'superior working dog' status. Even for the most die-hard critics this should be very evident. It certainly was to von Stephanitz, the breed's creator!

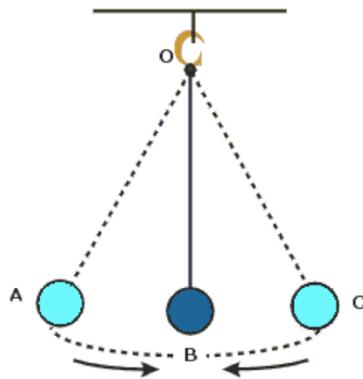
Now, to the pointy end of the stick.

Many people are influenced today by their childhood, the 1950's and 1960's and understandably for many people of that era it established the image they have of the ideal GSD. This was the Rin Tin Tin era. For many people today, especially the general public 'their family dog' from the 60's was perfect and given the breed's stage of development it may well have been a very good specimen, a Crufts winner even! For many of these people their dog or their friend's dog back then had no faults, they were perfect. Show dogs they see today are nothing like their dog or other dogs they saw from that period and that has manifested itself in the descriptions we have all heard; 'half dog half frog', 'shuffle when they walk', 'carry their hindquarter too close to the ground' 'have a curved back', 'have unstable hocks when they stand and walk' and 'they look like a hyena'. Like it or not, justified or not, these comments have become deeply embedded in the minds of the public at large and it has taken a huge toll on the breeds popularity.



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Looking at the above two photos, and yes we know they are photo's, and yes we know they are not dogs you can actually touch, as past German Siegers they are a fair representation of the best of German Shepherd Show Dogs of two eras, the 1960's and the 2000's. Given that, is there any factual basis for the descriptions referred to in the previous paragraph?



Many show dog enthusiasts would say there is not a shred of truth in any of the criticisms covered earlier, but like many things in life, the truth in opposing arguments can often be found to lie somewhere in the middle, or close to it.

If I were to articulate the individual traits that have changed since the 1960's, a period when 'all was acceptably well' in the GSD show dog world' they would be as follows. And I use the term 'show dogs' because 'working dogs', which are predominantly wolf grey in colour, have remained much the same as they were since the 50's. This working dog lag has been to the breed's detriment in a number of areas, but as I said, this 'freezing of time' holds great attraction to a great many people who consider the anatomical under development to be more acceptable than the over development, the exaggerations.

- The upper arms became longer and better angled.
- Heads became stronger and at the same time we saw more dogs with a misalignment of the skull and foreface – a dished face. The standard has been amended to accommodate this previously determined 'fault'!
- Dogs and bitches became too large and the majority of show dogs now stand at the maximum size and one too many notable ones stand above it!
- Males and females became more substantial
- The colour rich red and deep black sometimes at Rottweiler degrees of intensity predominated at the demise of wolf grey colour
- The antecostal region of the back rose in relation to the withers and diminished the withers slope, its definition and to a degree its efficiency.
- The lumbar spine developed a downward bend. This created a lower hip and knee position, less efficient drive, gave the topline a curve and, in many cases, the classic peak at the thoracic/lumbar transition point.
- Overangulation of the hindquarter increased to the point of becoming the norm and acceptable to most judges and enthusiasts. This caused close standing, close stepping unstable hocks, unstable hindquarters and during movement the full or partial rear pastern coming in contact with the ground instead of only the pad of the foot. Parcel it all together and in the extreme cases you have dogs with excessively sloping top lines that have a shuffling

close to the ground sometimes with nail scraping movement and footfall timing problems

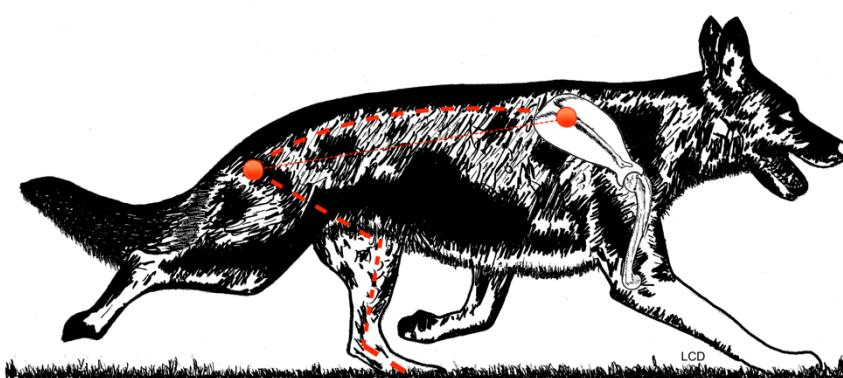
- Chests became deeper
- Tails became too long
- Ears became very large and many are weak

A further comment:

- Double handling originated when dogs were gaited hour on end and toward the end of the class, not surprisingly, required some encouragement by their owners. This has got totally out of control and I mean totally. This double handling phenomenon now encouraged with double rings at many shows literally masked the anatomical problems associated with the spine and overangulation such as infirmness going away. It contributed to the alienation of GSD's by other breeds at All Breeds Shows!
- Photographic image manipulation (Photoshop) got out of control and exaggerated the breed's public image problems of the curvature of the spine and overangulation of the hindquarter.



Low hip position and deflected transmission



High hip position and straight transmission line

So why did the changes happen, more importantly, were the changes for the good of the breed or to its detriment? Did the changes make the German Shepherd Show Dog more efficient in regard to its functional parameters and one should add, did it make a dog with these traits healthier?

In the case of colour it is no more than a fad where the downside for the breed is the loss of the wolf greys. I say this because wolf greys don't produce colour paling whereas black and reds do. This fad is a tragedy for the breed in my opinion.

Oversize is topical of course, lots of chest thumping, but its not a health issue and without diminishing my concern for oversize, it is a problem that has to be dealt with, in my opinion it is an issue that is being reacted to at the expense of far more important issues such as overangulation and the curvature of the spine.

Big, often-soft ears are a problem showing absolutely no sign of abating. Hardly mentioned now by judges because just like large size it's endemic. Again, not a health issue but like light eyes it spoils the dog's expression and removes the iconic stamp of great nobility. It is a significant and growing problem but having said that it's a matter of where does it fit in the order of importance and order of importance should be determined on the basis of 'how does this impact on the dog's core function, its reason for being'. Aesthetics come behind temperament, function and health.

What do you say about tails? Given the standard states the tail should not reach past the middle of the rear pastern you would expect to see a mention of overlong tails in at least one critique out of thousands wouldn't you? Again this is so endemic it is now normalized, it's accepted, and as such just like the amendment to remove the requirement for parallel planes of the skull and foreface it would not surprise me to see a move to make an amendment to the standard to accommodate long tails at some point in the future.

I did not mention temperament declining! I can see hands being thrown in the air now! Notwithstanding the Crufts debacle with the over reaction by many people outside the breed and too many responses from people within the breed justifying and even excusing the display of weak temperament, I have not mentioned it because other than hard liner 'temperament police' opinions it hasn't really changed that much over time and I refer here to basic socially acceptable temperament. Having said that there is no question that the working dog lines are far superior to show dog lines in regard to inherent character, temperament, prey drive and protective instincts.

The two areas that really concern me relate to the curvature of the spine created by a downward lumbar spine bend and overangulation of the hindquarter.

Why would the SV, the breed's primary guardian go down a path that has led to the majority of the German Shepherd Show Dogs dog's backs being curved not straight, arguably having 'kyphosis' of the spine?



High antecurvature spine position with a downward lumbar spine bend = curved back

Why would the SV allow a situation where the majority of German Shepherd Show Dogs today are overangulated in the hindquarter and impeded to varying degrees by the collateral effects of overangulation?

People often ask me why did and do the SV promote dogs that have a curvature to the back and overangulation of the hindquarter? They ask me why are these characteristics considered by not all, but a great many SV judges, by senior SV judges to be better than a straight back and moderate hind angulation?

The answer from me to such requests is actually quite simple. It wasn't necessary and it definitely isn't better! In my opinion the promotion of these traits was not based on developmental breed need nor was it based on scientific fact. It was based on aesthetic preference underscored by a good dose of self-interest and self-promotion of one's own dog/s. There is a history of this within the show dog sport in many countries including the UK, but in a global context we have to look at Walter and Herman Martin who initiated this and the rich black and gold colour trend. Having made that comment, in the context of 'guardians' responsibilities to the breed we also have to look to others who came after Walter and Herman and carried the exaggeration of the hindquarter and downward lumbar bend to even greater heights and levels of genetic frequency than Herman would have envisaged never mind allowed. Herman and Walter are often stated as the culprits in this field and yes they started it but to blame Herman in particular for what exists today is to

do him an undeserved, unwarranted disservice. It is certainly true Herman was not a man who had trouble narrowing the German Shepherd Show Dog blood base and in that process increasing the genetic frequency of specific traits, he was a master at it, but he also knew where to draw the line and he would have, unquestionably!

A straight back is strong, as strong as it needs to be and a curved back gives no additional advantage to back strength in the context of the German Shepherd Dogs functional needs. By the SV promoting a small number of dogs and via that process narrowing the blood base, today most show dogs have a downward sloping lumbar spine and therefore they have a curved spine. This curvature has lowered their hip and knee position, and notwithstanding an overlong tibia this has increased their hind angulation.

I said none of this is better and the reason it is not better is as follows:

"The increased angular articulation and increased distance that is required of the femur and tibia in the lower hip position [and knee position] is to the detriment of endurance because it consumes excessive energy and impedes manoeuvrability. A lower hip position creates a lower rear pivot point and this increases the hip joint angle to cover the same stride length as with a high pivot point. The hip joint extension is 15°- 20° higher in the "show" line (low pivot) than in the "working" line. [high pivot] ref; Prof. Martin S Fischer. Author of Dogs in Motion"

If that is not enough, I add this comment; the world's most efficient trotting endurance canine is the German Shepherd Dogs ancestor, the Grey Wolf, and it has a high hip position and straight spine.

Many enthusiasts are convinced that when they are watching a dog with the lower hip and knee position trotting the hindquarter drive they see is superior to a dog with a high hip and knee position. What they see isn't superior nor is it greater efficiency; what they are seeing are more things happening in the hindquarter, just as described by Professor Fischer. When more things happen more energy is consumed. The attraction to highly articulated movement is associated with the same attraction people have to watching a handler running their dog too fast. It is all illusionary and it is borne of a fundamental lack of understanding of a trotting dogs movement and it is with complete disregard for the great importance that has to be accorded to a trotting dogs powers of endurance.

Overangulation - The promotion of overangulation, and there are various forms of it, tends to be based on the belief it creates a more powerful more efficient rear drive. This belief is not based on scientific fact but an aesthetic preference underscored by self-interest and the lemmings blindly and willingly following the leaders. Gullibly believing everything one is told by the 'breeds authority'. Why blindly follow the leaders, the breed judges? It is because they hand out the blue ribbons, that's why! In all fairness the lemmings of the past didn't have a great range of choice. It was simply fall in line or bugger off and most fell in line. Most fell in line as they sang the praises of overangulation and the judges who promoted it. If they had doubts, like; is a curved spine, even though it is totally contrary to the standard, really better than a straight one, they said nothing publicly because that could jeopardize their next blue ribbon. **Saying nothing publicly epitomizes today's environment, maintains today's problems and impacts on the breeds future.**

In regard to overangulation, as a guide once the front toes of a vertically positioned rear pastern exceed around 70mm from a vertical line dropped from the tail root, the dog's hock joints and lateral stability are affected. The greater the excess distance, the greater the instability of the hock joints, especially at high speed. Overangulation in varying degrees is manifested as follows:

- Rear pasterns positioned too close together in stance and in movement
- Rear pasterns showing a cow hock position in stance and in movement
- Unstable hock joints in movement
- Rear pastern making contact with the ground in movement on the step down position at the fully extended fore swing
- Rear pastern not opening out fully on the rear swing cycle
- Rear paws travelling too close to the ground
- In extreme cases the rear pasterns hit each other or even cross one another in movement. This is often seen in young puppies and as they develop thigh muscle it does get 'a little better'.
- Footfall timing is affected and this is usually manifested in the dog lifting its forelegs high from the elbow in the trot in an endeavour to co ordinate the footfall of the rear feet with the fore feet.

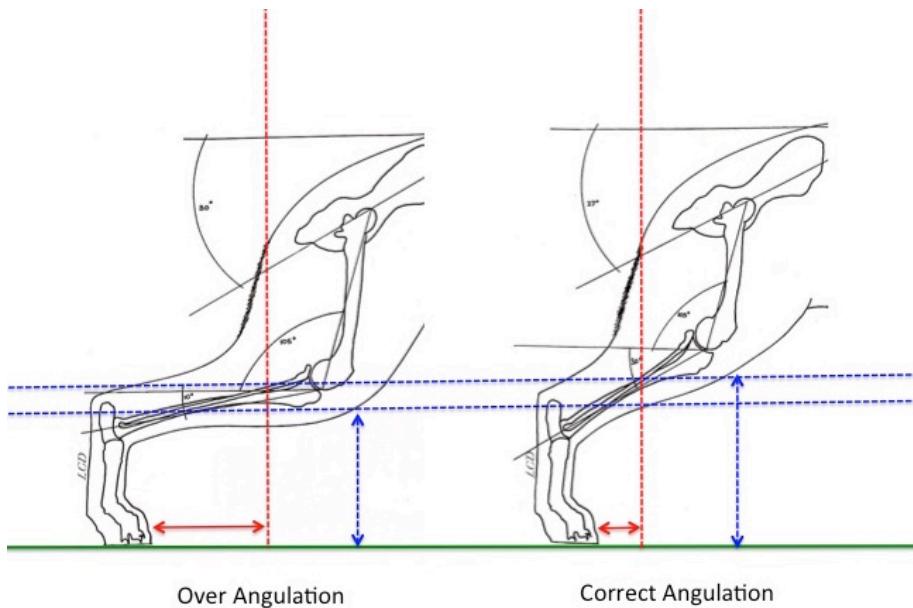
The bottom line is that overangulation, especially excessive overangulation with its associated too low hip and knee position, creates instability of the hocks and consequently far less efficiency in regard to powers of endurance. Exit the medium speed, moderately angulated and balanced trotting dog with great powers of endurance and enter the fast moving, overly articulated and exaggerated show dog.



Downward lumbar spine bend and overlong tibia = overangulated hindquarters

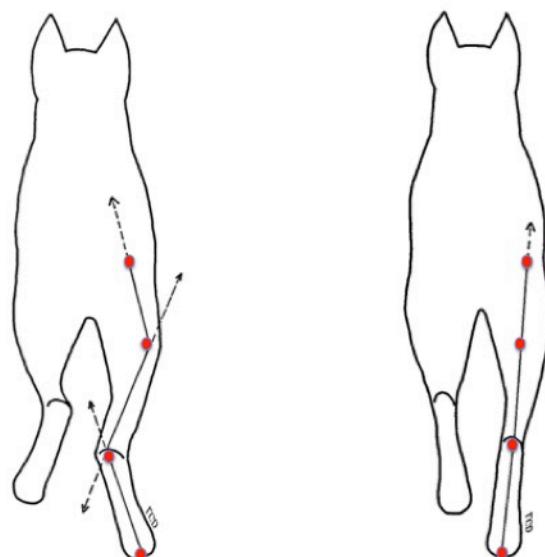
In the diagrams seen below the 'correct angulation' measurement [red horizontal arrow] is about 70mm or about the width of the dogs foot and the 'overangulation' measurement is about 120mm. The lower hip and knee position, levelling of the tibia angle and steeper inclination of the croup can also be seen here.

To understand the weakness of overangulation, while looking at the drawing on the left in your mind's eye imagine pressing your hand down on the croup and as you push the croup down visualize that downward pressure on the dogs knee and then replicate that mental imagery on the dog on the right. Visualize the femur and tibia as scaffolding supporting a load on the hip joint. Your hand pressure equates to the weight of gravity and this gravitational weight increases as the rear pastern moves rearward away from a vertical line under the hip.



Over Angulation

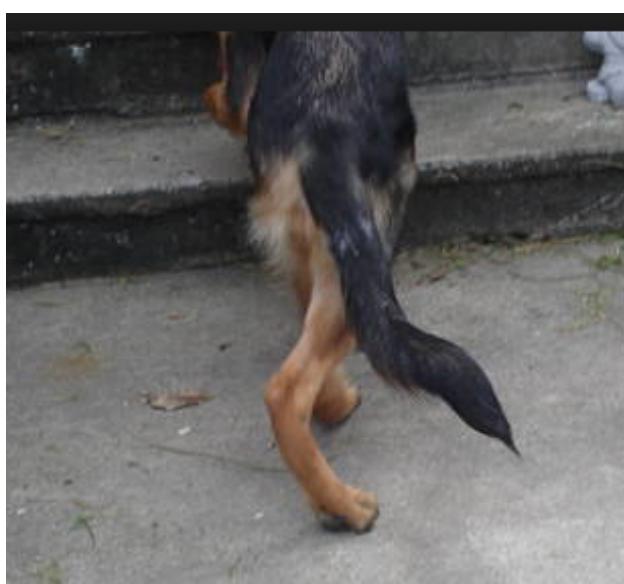
Correct Angulation



Correct hind angulation = a straight transmission line, firm straight stepping hocks and stable hindquarters. **Overangulation** = a deflected transmission line, buckling and closing together of the hocks, additional pressure and stress on the dogs joints and unstable hindquarters.

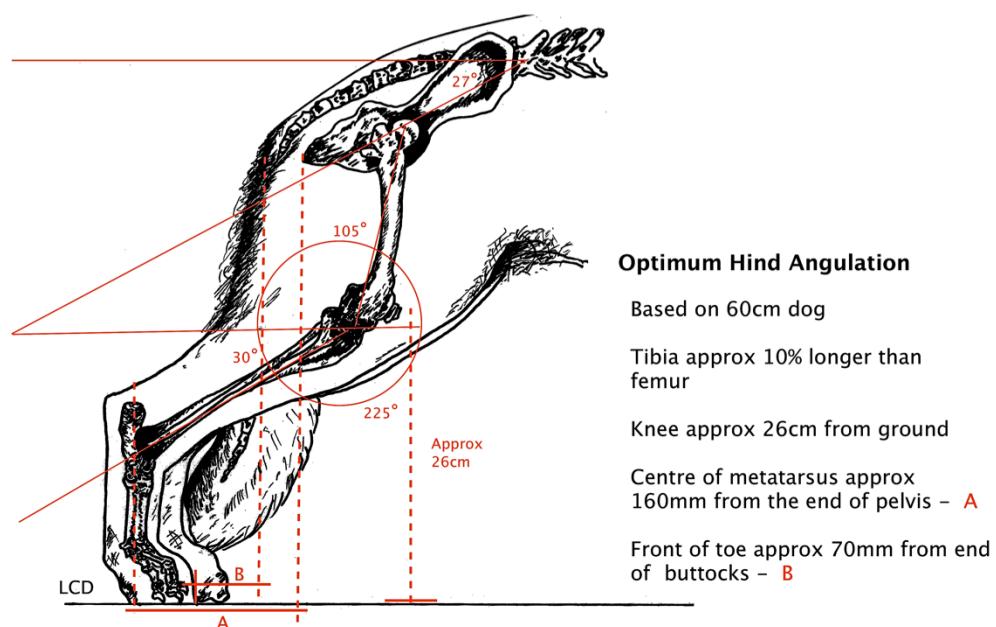


Overangulation top photo and correct angulation lower photo. Note the height from the ground to the knee and the rear pastern positions.



What we don't want to talk about or acknowledge exists. The ones we don't see at dog shows. This is an example of 'extreme overangulation' in a puppy; an example of what we don't talk about and many of us want to believe doesn't exist. What you see at shows is the lesser-overangulated animals and therefore fewer dogs with less instability and this can create a reduced sense of awareness and reduced level of concern. The very long rear pastern seen here bending, is in my opinion a genetically linked trait to 'very long' tibias. The tail's articulation to the right is a balancing offset as the puppy's rear end literally falls to the left.

How does one quantify overangulation? How do you actually define it? I stand corrected but to my knowledge no one has done that, and that is a problem when you are trying to deal with it. My opinion of optimum hindquarter angulation in a quantifiable form is seen in the following diagram. In relation to a 60cm bitch I have shown an approximate optimum knee height of 26cm and approximate optimum angulation of 225 degrees but any increase in the distance denoted as 'A' [approximately 160mm] which equates to 'B' [approximately 70mm tail root to front of toe] in my opinion diminishes optimum function, and the degree of diminution is not generally in direct proportion to the increase in that distance. In simple terms overangulation is an impediment because any instability of the hindquarters functional parts creates misdirected and or wasted energy and therefore an impediment to the dog's hindquarter efficiency and its powers of endurance.



So the big one asked of me by the editor – where to from here?

The only way forward in regard to correcting the problems that are now endemic in the German Shepherd Show Dog is to promote at major breed shows dogs that do not exhibit or pass on these faults and penalize dogs that do have the faults, and to broaden the blood base. Not an easy thing to do, many would say impossible to do. And on that score let me say we all know about the baby and the bathwater and we all understand the need to apply ones intelligence in affecting application!

The very first problem in changing the breed's direction is getting the majority of the breed's core show dog enthusiasts to accept there is a major problem and accept that a straight back and a moderate hindquarter is superior to a curvature of the back and overangulation of the hindquarter. Because the problems are now so endemic, so accepted this is a significant first barrier hurdle to overcome. For most people in the show dog environment a dog with a straight back, slight slope to the topline and moderate hind angulation, [just as the standard states] is almost impossible to imagine never mind accept! The vast majority of the breed's current enthusiasts know nothing other than what they see in front of them today. Their dog in all likelihood has a curvature to the back created by the lumbar spines downward bend and to some degree it is probably overangulated in the hindquarter. Many of these enthusiasts are now 'breed experts' and in their mind people like me, the minority, are living in the past!

But to the big question notwithstanding the difficulties, can it be done? Yes, it can be done and done quite simply if the will and idealism is there.

The SV, or more precisely a very small number of men within the SV created the global problem and they are the only people in the world that can influence the breed globally to remove it. That is an extraordinary statement to make but a truer statement was never spoken. The general exhibitor in most countries, consider an SV judge, even the most inept one to be superior to any judge in any other country including their own country. If an SV judge says its white, even if logic, common sense, science, or even observation says its black, white prevails and white is symbolized by a blue ribbon handed out by an SV judge at a dog show, and that show is usually the countries most prestigious breed show. If the most respected judge in a particular country tried to make breed corrections in his or her country one SV judge, even an inept one, could and has destroyed everything that person has done or is doing in the one single action of handing out a blue ribbon! What I am saying is the upside to the problem provides the solution to how it can be "un-created".

There have been suggestions that the way forward is to breed 'working dogs' and 'show dogs' together to get the universal German Shepherd Dog, but that won't work.

Why wouldn't it work? They are after all pedigree German Shepherd Dogs, all ancestors of Horand von Grafrath. I say it wouldn't work not because it couldn't but because it could not be done in an acceptable time frame. In meaningful genetic frequency terms there would be too many steps backward before achieving a break-even point never mind making a step forward. It would be too long a period of too many dogs characterized by ordinariness. It's a concept that has a very nice ring to it, a logical ring many would say, but there is a more logical way forward. In my opinion there are sufficient show dogs in Germany and that includes a number of cross show working line dogs that can deliver the goods! Dogs of anatomical quality that inherently posses a straight back and are not overangulated in the hindquarters.

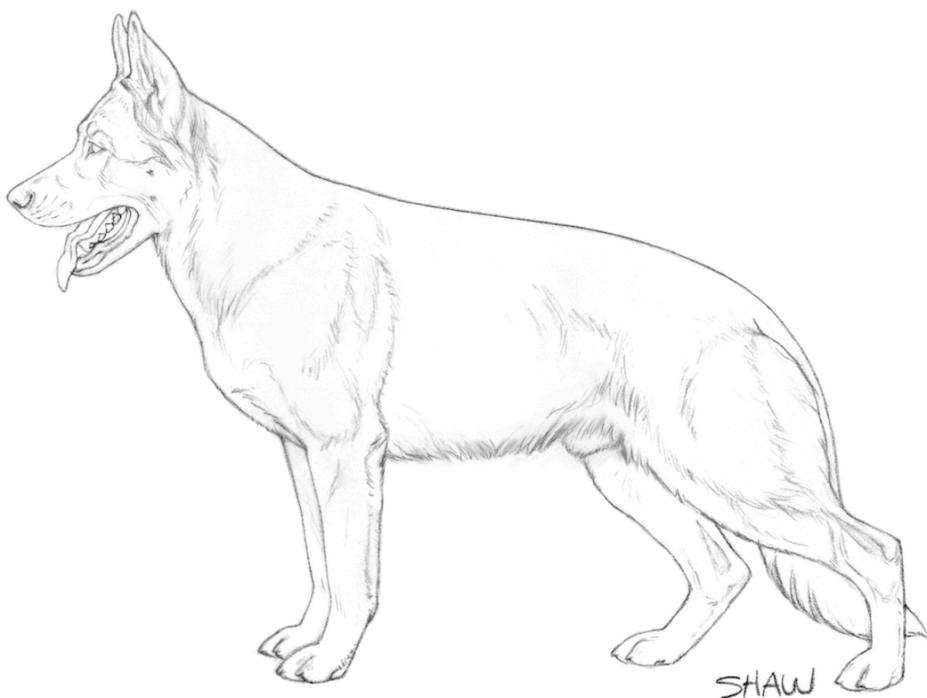
What it means in practical terms is that a 'clear and unambiguous road map and sensible time frames' needs to be developed by the SV and directives emanating from that work publicly published, closely monitored and regularly reported on globally in meaningful terms. It means dogs with the desired traits being promoted. It means there would be significant and clearly articulated changes to 'typical placings' in the VA group and a significant opening up of the blood base. I am very familiar with the 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' defense when it comes to this issue, it's why nothing is happening other than hearing the same old intelligence insulting rhetoric! But at the German Sieger Show and any other 'Breed Shows' such decisions would have to be made and the reasons for those decisions clearly articulated by the judge on the day and in his critiques. There is no easy route given many of these problematic dogs are in all other respects very often superior in their overall construction to the dogs that are free of the problem/s and that is why at the breed shows especially the big ones, the baby does have to be thrown out with the bathwater. This is why at the German Sieger Show it means a dog that today would be included in the VA group would be placed in the V group, in practical terms in the early stages of the program placed in the top section of the V group. The route is one that would see judges criticized for penalizing dogs disproportionate to their fault, it would see friendships strained and even friendships lost but lost for the betterment of the breed.

Because of the “do not publicly question SV judges” phenomenon that exists in the GSD show dog sport and the undisputed following SV German domicile judges command, judges in most other countries would follow suit. In turn this would direct the breeders who would then follow or leave, and we know from experience the vast majority won’t leave. They will start breeding dogs they believe SV judges will award the blue ribbon to. That is historically what creates broad anatomical shift in a breed’s development and style.

The SV/WUSV President Professor Dr Heinrich Messler has publicly stated his concerns for the breed and that includes his concern about double handling and the manipulation of photographs. His public statement represents the potential for a significant breed correction. It is now a matter of delivering and in my opinion the future well being of the breed hangs on how effective that delivery is. If Professor Messler cannot get the support he needs; if the self interest, the lack of idealism, the apathy and/or fear to speak out publicly by ‘breed guardians’ both within and outside Germany, including the UK, continues I believe there is little to no chance of a meaningful correction, not in my lifetime anyway.

I will conclude by saying; in the context of construction what I define as a beautiful German Shepherd Dog is one that is constructed in such a way as to allow it to fulfill its inherent function as a superior endurance trotting, sheep herding, protection dog.

The following drawing is the manifestation of my interpretation of the written standard provided as a written brief to my very talented artist friend Linda Shaw. As stated earlier, because the standard allows latitude in a number of its descriptive words this is only one of a number of drawings that were done. The slightest tweak here and there having a quite surprisingly profound visual impact, but each reflecting my interpretation of the standard.



Louis Donald – January 2016