

## **The origin of the German Shepherd Dog**

By Ulf Kintzel

The origin of the German Shepherd Dog is, as the name indicates, the duties on a flock of sheep. Our unique breed was bred out of different types of the breed Old German Shepherd Dog (Altdeutscher Schaeferhund). These dogs are not old fashioned or old styled German Shepherd Dogs, it is a separate breed. Since sheep herders in every region in Germany needed a certain type of dogs depending on landscape, predators, climate and such we find many different types of this breed.

Max von Stephanitz was impressed by many natural characteristics of this dogs such as diligence, willingness to obey, weather resistance, and endurance. He used different types of these dogs to create a new breed - The German Shepherd Dog.

The first competitions for this new breed were herding competitions. Because of many characteristics that these dogs brought with them they became soon and fast popular for other kinds of work and later also for dog sports such as Schutzhund training.

German Shepherd Dogs herd sheep in a very different way than for instance Border Collies. They inherited this tending or patrolling ("Wehren") instinct from their ancestors.

To understand the way German Shepherd Dogs tend sheep one needs to know the sheep farming system in Germany. The flocks are large (800 to 1200 sheep) and are usually not kept in fenced pastures. A shepherd tends the livestock in open grazes. Those pastures are often beside fields with crops. To keep the sheep in the pastures and out of the crops, dogs are used. The dogs which are preferred for this work such as German Shepherd Dogs and their ancestors are those that stay on the borders (the natural line of definition) between what is a field with crops and what is pasture for the sheep and that work there independently and patrol these borders. When the graze is eaten down the shepherd leads the sheep to the next pasture. This is very often done on roads and farm roads and pastures are often several miles apart.

The grazes are often public areas where there is an interest to keep the landscape open and keep it from overgrowing. It is called landscape care.

Another reason for using tending dogs is the transhumance system. That means, the flocks of sheep graze in the hills during the summer and in the milder valleys in the winter. In the fall, on their way down to the valley or in the spring, going up to the mountains, harvested fields, including hay fields are used to feed the sheep. This journey is done every year by foot. The distance may range from approximately 20 miles up to 100 miles.

The only efficient way of managing this system is by using these tending dogs. The main breeds being used are Old German Shepherd Dogs with its numerous varieties, German Shepherd Dogs and German Sheep Poodles.

In Germany exist two different kinds of sheep herding competitions. One is sanctioned by the SV, the other one by the sheep breeders association. They are extremely similar. These competitions are based on real life sheep herding. In fact, they are demonstrating a shepherd's

day in a miniature. The components are exit from the pen, narrow road including the sharp corner, bridge, wide graze including the placement, traffic, narrow graze, and the re-pen. Also the dogs abilities get judged such as obedience, diligence, independence, and the grip. The handler may compete with one or with two dogs. At the end is a protection test done.

For every component there is a maximum number of points available. The total number of points available in the SV's competition is 100. When a dog receives a qualifying score of 60 points or more it earns the title HGH (Herdengebrauchshund), which means herding utility dog.



Ulf Kintzel with his first two dogs: Lukas (black) and Felix (Black and tan), both are Altdeutsche Schaeferhunde.