



IPO PROTECTION WORK

The test of Schutzhund, or IPO, was originally developed specifically for the German Shepherd Dog in the early 1900s, in order to provide breeders with a method for evaluating temperament, character, trainability, and mental and physical soundness. The protection phase of IPO is crucial for evaluating the temperament of our German Shepherd Dogs. This test has helped shape the German Shepherd Dog for the majority of the breed's history; the traits valued in this breed are the very same traits that have been preserved through Schutzhund/IPO over the past 100 years. However, the protection work draws many questions from those unfamiliar with IPO. Before we address several of the most commonly asked question about protection, we must first begin with a discussion of the original intent and purpose of protection work.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF IPO PROTECTION WORK?

The purpose of IPO protection work is to test and develop the dog's genetic temperament, character, and strength of nerve (*see sidebar, "What is Nerve?"*), not to create an "attack dog" or a dog that views everyone else as a threat that must be neutralized or repelled. The traits developed in IPO protection work allow the dog to better discern the difference between threat and non-threat, and give him the ability to control himself appropriately during encounters that appear threatening. This is accomplished through the various exercises of the protection phase. Each individual exercise within IPO protection has a purpose in revealing and testing the different facets of the dog's genetic temperament.



The dog shows self-control and discernment in assessing the threat of the helper.

guard him convincingly, holding him in place with strong barking and alerting the handler to his presence. After being called out of the blind by the handler, and upon the attempted escape of the helper, the dog must apprehend, restrain, and control the helper with a firm, full grip on the sleeve while actively preventing the escape. Every grip is graded by the judge, and



WHAT IS 'NERVE'?

One of the most important genetic traits tested in IPO is the dog's nerves. Anyone who has ever struggled to remain calm and think clearly while experiencing a high level of stress might appreciate what strength of nerve means for the behavior of a dog.

The nervous system, or "nerves", controls the level of excitement, stress, aggression, fearfulness, and nervousness the dog feels, and determines what behaviors the dog will display as a result. It is a key component of the dog's genetic temperament. Strong nerves allow the dog to react appropriately to his environment, and allow him to remain composed while under pressure or threat. Dogs with strong nerves will have a greater ability to "think" and make proper judgments. All of these are characteristics desirable not only in working dogs, but in companion dogs as well.

reflects the courage, nerves, and temperament of the dog (see sidebar: “Why A Full Grip?”). Once the helper submits (stops moving and attacking) and the handler commands the dog to “out”, the dog must let go immediately. The dog will revert to guarding again, as the helper is once again passive. This demonstrates the proper assessment of the situation and the proper response by the dog, as well as showing his self-control and power.

After only a few seconds of guarding, the helper attacks the dog. The dog must escalate to meet an attack from the helper, firmly and convincingly defending himself and his handler. The helper pressures the dog with the stick hits (with a padded stick) in order to reveal the dog’s courage and commitment under threat, and to reveal the dog’s composure and strength of character during the attack. This is followed by yet another “out” at the handler’s command once the helper submits; this exercise demonstrates the dog’s ability to think under pressure and to continue to respond appropriately to the helper’s escalation and de-escalation of aggression.



The side transport

The side and back transports reveal the dog’s ability to remain alert to a potential threat, but obedient to the handler. The dog must remain clear in his job of escorting the passive helper, without engaging the helper unless he attacks the dog or handler.

The long attack at the end of protection tests the dog’s courage and commitment while repelling yet another attack from the helper, this time at great distance from the handler; this further tests the dog’s temperament, nerve, and courage. When the helper de-escalates the aggression and becomes passive, the dog must reassess the situation and respond appropriately, releasing at his handler’s command and continuing to guard the helper until the handler arrives.

Unlike in “attack training”, in IPO the dog’s genetic temperament and mental stability are being tested with every exercise. The dog is expected to remain clear, courageous, powerful, engaged, and obedient throughout the entire protection phase. IPO protection work, when done properly, demonstrates a stable dog and reinforces the dog’s genetic judgment of knowing when to bite, and when not to bite. IPO protection work should create dogs that are confident, stable, and reliable.



WHY A FULL GRIP?

A full grip is a genetic trait in German Shepherd Dogs, and is part of their heritage as a herding dog. A full, calm grip was required to subdue and control stubborn sheep without harming them. A hectic or partial grip, on the other hand, could hurt the sheep and incite a struggle.

*In IPO, each grip should be full and calm, because this type of grip is the most controlling, and reflects the temperament and strong nerves of the dog. The purpose of the grip is to control and subdue the “bad guy”, **not** to ‘attack’, injure, or maim him. Additionally, the calm grip indicates confidence and strong nerves, and is tested during the stick hits. Here, a weaker dog will lose its composure under stress, and may shift, weaken, or even release its grip. A strong dog is unfazed.*

DOES PROTECTION TRAINING CREATE AN AGGRESSIVE DOG?

IPO is designed to continually test the genetic nerves, temperament, and stability of the dog, not to make a dog ‘aggressive’. A dog with a weak temperament will often perceive a threat very quickly when no threat exists, or become very easily excited, overstimulated, and nervous. This dog cannot think as clearly, and responds fearfully and/or aggressively even when the situation does not call for it, and this is the opposite of what is desired in a dog



The IPO dog should be stable, clear, and confident.

trained for IPO protection. The IPO dog should be genetically stable, with solid nerves that have been inherited over generations from parents and grandparents and great-grandparents tested through IPO (or HGH herding).

The IPO dog remains composed under stress. Whether this stress is a potential threat to his home or handler, or simply activities in everyday life such as loud noises, children, or other dogs, his temperament plays a huge role in how he handles all of it and how he responds. The dogs who are most difficult to handle for their owners are those who are more fearful of everyday occurrences and are easily stressed in daily life, often responding inappropriately in stressful situations. Because strength of nerves and temperament are largely genetic, the German Shepherd Dog should be tested for nerve strength before they are bred; it is important that the people breeding them possess the knowledge of the dogs that IPO training provides.

CAN IPO-TRAINED DOGS STILL BE RELIABLE FAMILY COMPANIONS?

Yes. One of the myths surrounding IPO training, particularly the protection portion, is that a dog trained in IPO is not a safe and reliable dog. However, IPO training requires a stable dog with good temperament, and then furnishes this same dog with excellent obedience, control, and responsiveness to its handler. Dogs with these qualities not only make outstanding working dogs in all disciplines, including police, military, herding, and more, but also make excellent companions and pets as well.

All of these qualities above allow the dog to make proper judgments concerning who is and is NOT a threat to their home and family, and give him the ability to control himself appropriately during encounters that appear threatening to the dog. Dogs trained for IPO are far more likely to be a good canine citizen than a dog that has not received this same level of training.

Most IPO-trained dogs live in the home with their families, as part of the family dynamic. They are not only competition dogs, but wonderful and valued family companions as well.



IPO-trained dogs can make wonderful, active companions that are involved in all of the family activities.

