

# A SCHUTZHUND LIFE Guide



## *Finding the Right Dog for IPO*

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[MYSCHUTZHUNDLIFE.COM](http://MYSCHUTZHUNDLIFE.COM)

Published 2017 by Carissa Kuehn

<http://www.myschutzhundlife.com>

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Cover photo: Carissa Kuehn's SG Ferox v Tehillah IPO3 CGC HCT-s, call name "Axel", during the 2014 Northwestern Regional IPO Championship.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to Kathy Moacanin and Louise Jollyman for their editing help; to Kjersti Dábakk, Wendy Schmitt, and Marlene Ferguson for their review of the Malinois, Doberman, and Rottweiler sections; and to Mike Diehl for his insight and review of the Importing a Dog section.

Thank you to those who provided photos for use in the article: Brian Aghajani, Louise Jollyman, Donna Haynes, Christina O'Kane, Marlene Ferguson, Wendy Schmitt, Munanis Photography, Glenda Pearson, Courtney McBride, Kjersti Dábakk, Kathleen Sanderson.

# A SCHUTZHUND LIFE Guide

## Finding the Right Dog for IPO



*Tracking, Obedience, and Protection. Photo Credits: Louise Jollyman, Brian Agbajani (courtesy of Marlene Ferguson), Glenda Pearson (courtesy of Courtney McBride).*

Somehow you have been introduced to this three-phase dog sport called Schutzhund. Perhaps you have a breed of dog that shows an aptitude for it. Or perhaps you heard about Schutzhund/IPO elsewhere and thought it looked interesting. Enter the first challenge: finding the dog that has what it takes for Schutzhund/IPO. What breed? Male or female? Puppy or adult? Do you have to buy an import, or can you buy a dog locally? Where do you even find a good candidate for IPO?

If this describes where you are with your Schutzhund journey, then this guide is for you! *Finding the Right Dog for IPO* will take you through the desired characteristics of the IPO candidate, the steps to finding the right dog, the most common breeds that excel in Schutzhund, the benefits and drawbacks of puppies and of older dogs, how to find a good breeder, and what to look for when importing a dog. This information will guide you in your search and help connect you with the right person to produce *your* IPO dog.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IPO DOG

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What does it take for a dog to succeed in Schutzhund? When you ask around, you get descriptions like “high prey drive”, “ball crazy”, “extreme toy drive”, but the dog needs more than just a love for prey and toys to succeed in Schutzhund (although those definitely help!).

Regardless of breed, the Schutzhund/IPO dog should possess the following:

- a stable temperament
- a discriminating character (ability to determine neutral from threatening)
- high trainability and athleticism
- a desire to work with and for the handler (biddability)
- drive and desire for the work (work ethic)
- some level of natural aggression, protective instinct, and courage

Many descriptions also include the word “social” to describe the Schutzhund dog. In this context, “social” means that the dog is stable and neutral toward other people. The dog is not aggressive, shy, or nervous, but also not overtly friendly or soliciting attention. This is tested throughout IPO, as the dog must be neutral to the judge, spectators, other handlers, tracklayers, and more.

## Drives

What about all this “drive” talk? The Schutzhund dog does need “drive”, the internal motivation that drives them to perform certain behaviors. Having enough drive for the sport means the dog is easy to motivate and wants to do the work, and this in turn makes it easier to train the dog. The Schutzhund dog should show an interest in food (food drive), interest in playing with and chasing toys and ball (prey drive), and a desire to work with and please their handler (pack drive).

Most importantly, the Schutzhund dog should also have a strong fighting instinct (“fight drive”) that is directed at their adversary; they enjoy the fight, just like a pugilist enjoys a boxing match. In a young dog, you may see this in the dog’s determination to win the toy from a sibling or from the handler. In a mature dog, this fighting instinct pulls from a variety of drives, and varies from dog to dog. Some dogs fight from prey drive and the desire to possess the sleeve, others from defense, and others from social aggression and the desire to control and dominate the helper, or a combination of these. Regardless of the source of the drive, the dog should have a natural desire to control the helper with a full, strong grip. The quality of this grip is graded in the protection phase of IPO.

## Character

The IPO dog should show a courageous and resilient character, with an ability to cope with and think clearly under stress. A dog with resilience bounces back easily from something that stresses it, and gets over it quickly. And a dog that can think under pressure and stress is a dog that exhibits excellent control and clarity in the protection work, even when in a state of high arousal.

This is where the term “nerve” comes in. We talk about a dog having “strong nerve” or “weak nerve”. This refers to the dog’s nervous system and its responses to stimuli, or how quickly that sympathetic branch of the nervous system is activated. This is the branch that controls the “fight or flight” responses in an animal; in other words, this is the branch that is activated by stress, and controls the animal’s responses to this stress.

A dog with weak nerve (also called “nervy” or “thin-nerved”) needs little stimuli or stress in order to show a response, while a dog with strong nerve requires a higher level of stimulus to respond. The dog with weak nerve becomes stressed easily even in normal situations, and often responds with anxiety, nervousness, and fearfulness to normal stressors. They become easily overwhelmed by small amounts of pressure, and may have difficulty thinking clearly when in this state.

By contrast, the dog with strong nerve is better equipped to handle normal stress in its life, and usually stands up to the pressure of training and trialing better. They do not go through life in a state of constant anxiety or worry like a weaker-nerved dog, and are able to respond appropriately in everyday, normal situations.

The Schutzhund dog must have a balance of nerve: not too weak, and not too strong. Too weak, and the dog can’t cope well with the stress and pressure of life and the sport. Too strong, and it becomes difficult to tap into any aggression that may be there, because the dog never acknowledges anything as a potential threat. There is an acceptable range between these two extremes that makes for a good Schutzhund dog.

Dogs that are shy, overly nervous, overly aggressive, reactive, and hostile do not make good Schutzhund/IPO dogs. Dogs must genetically possess the stability and strength of character required for IPO, which is why genetic temperament is of incredible importance in Schutzhund.

If you already have a dog and are wondering if this dog can do IPO, then you should do is [find a good club](#), make contact, and take your dog out there for [an evaluation](#). See what raw material your dog brings to the table, and go from there.

## STEPS TO FINDING THE RIGHT DOG

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The first thing you will need when looking for the right dog is *patience*. Like everything else in Schutzhund, finding the right dog doesn’t always happen right away. Good Schutzhund dogs usually are not available for instant purchase, especially if you are looking for a puppy. This is not a car where you can order the make, model, color, and special features to your liking. While some people simply “fall into” having a good Schutzhund prospect, most have to go through the process of finding the right dog for IPO.

If you are completely new to the sport, your process will follow these general steps:

1. Select the breed that fits you and your lifestyle.
2. Decide if you want a puppy or adult, male or female.
3. Decide if you want to buy domestically or purchase an import.
4. Find the right breeder or broker/importer.
5. Select or be matched up with the right dog.

# THE BREEDS

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While Schutzhund initially was developed for the German Shepherd Dog, many other breeds show a particular aptitude for it, including (but not limited to):

- Airedale Terrier
- American Bulldog
- American Pit Bull Terrier
- American Staffordshire Terrier
- Beauceron
- Belgian Malinois
- Belgian Tervueren
- Bouvier de Flandres
- Boxers
- Briards
- Cane Corso Italiano
- Dobermans
- Dutch Shepherds
- Hovawart
- Giant Schnauzers
- Rottweilers

Selecting a breed is a matter of personal preference. Most people fall in love with a breed first and then do IPO second, particularly if they compete with an “alternate breed”, which is any breed besides German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois. While the majority of dogs competing in IPO in North America are German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois, other breeds can and do compete successfully in the sport.

If you have not already determined which breed is for you, then investigate different breeds that appeal to you, research their characteristics, and talk with individuals who own that breed *and* who compete in IPO. Get the details on what it's like to train this breed of dog, compete with it, and live with it *before* you buy it!

The four most common and popular breeds for IPO are discussed below: German Shepherds, Belgian Malinois, Rottweilers, and Dobermans.

## German Shepherds



*Photo credits (L to R): Louise Jollyman, Brian Aghajani (Courtesy of Kjersti Dabakk), Christina O'Kane.*

Most dogs represented in IPO clubs across the U.S. will be German Shepherd Dogs. These dogs come from bloodlines with a history of performance, and descend back over dogs bred to the

European standards, even if bred domestically here in the U.S. These standards require that numerous criteria be met before the dogs are bred, such as achieving a conformation rating, working title, breed survey, and standard health tests for the breed. This has helped preserve the valuable genetic characteristics desired for this working breed.

| <i>German Shepherd Pros</i>   | <i>German Shepherd Cons</i>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intelligent and trainable</li> <li>• Versatile, athletic and energetic</li> <li>• Natural tracker</li> <li>• Biddable, works with handler</li> <li>• Balanced temperament, emotionally stable</li> <li>• Good family companion</li> <li>• Resilient and forgiving of handler mistakes</li> <li>• Doesn't bore easily in training</li> <li>• Can work in a variety of weather conditions</li> <li>• High stamina and endurance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several different “types” of GSDs, which requires a well-informed buyer</li> <li>• So much hair!</li> <li>• Can be strong-willed and push boundaries</li> <li>• Concerns with hip and elbow dysplasia, even in litters from tested parents</li> <li>• The 'longer than tall' structure predisposes them to spinal injuries in the sport</li> <li>• Can have large variability in temperament within the breed, sometimes even within a litter</li> </ul> |

## *German Shepherd “Types”*

The German Shepherd Dog is a divided breed, split by fashion, fancy, and history into several different “types”. A discussion of these types would take an entire book of its own, so what’s included here will be brief.

There is the American version of the German Shepherd Dog, which is the type typically seen at AKC conformation shows and events. This type normally does not excel in IPO sport, as they have been bred primarily for the AKC show ring rather than for their working attributes. Additionally, Schutzhund was not part of the development of the American German Shepherd once the breed arrived on U.S. soil, and it has not been valued by most breeders breeding strictly to AKC standards. This is especially apparent when it comes to training the protection phase, as many American German Shepherds have had the proper aggression and desire to confront a worthy adversary bred out of them.

Then there is the German Shepherd Dog bred to German standards, where Schutzhund has remained part of its heritage for generations upon generations of dogs. But this “German” German Shepherd Dog is also divided into types. You have German ‘show lines’ and ‘working lines’, with the working lines further divided into several types based on country of origin, such as West German, East German/DDR, Czech/Slovak bloodlines.

The German show line dogs are the black and red dogs that have been bred to excel in the conformation ring; while they still must be Schutzhund-titled in order to show in Germany and under German-style shows in the U.S., the show lines typically have lower drive, are softer in the work with less ability to handle pressure and stress, and can be more challenging to train in IPO. Working lines typically have higher energy, more drive for the work, harder temperaments, and a more athletic build, along with a wide variety in coat color (red sable, black sable, solid black, black and tan, bi-color).

The variation in type is one reason why there is variability in temperament within the German Shepherd breed, because each type has its own temperament characteristics or tendencies. Each type has benefits and drawbacks, so if you are seeking a German Shepherd Dog, research the different lines and see examples of the types that interest you in person (such as at an IPO trial). Do not be swayed simply by appearance and coat color! Ask questions of the handlers and breeders, and use their input to decide which type will best suit your goals and lifestyle.

## ***The German Shepherd in Schutzhund***

German Shepherd Dogs should be natural trackers, with an inborn desire and talent for using their noses to solve problems and to track their quarry. Many love to track just for the sake of tracking. Depending on the bloodline, their natural obedience can be eager and enthusiastic, or can range to plodding and lackluster no matter how you motivate them. The obedience work can be upbeat and beautiful, although it may not be as “flashy” or precise as that of the Belgian Malinois. In protection work, the German Shepherd Dog has better barking and better overall balance of temperament between prey drive, aggression, defense, and fighting drive than some of the other breeds, although they may not be as fast on the grips and in the long bite as the Belgian Malinois. On the whole, however, the German Shepherd Dog should be a powerful, versatile, balanced dog.

## ***Health Concerns***

Potential health problems in German Shepherd Dogs include hip and elbow dysplasia, degenerative myelopathy (DM), cauda equina, skin and allergy problems, and digestive problems (exocrine pancreatic insufficiency or EPI, poor assimilation of food).

## ***What to Look For in a Breeder***

Look for the breeders out there who produce the total German Shepherd Dog that has the whole package of temperament, working ability, structure, and health. They should have hip and elbow certifications on their dogs at the minimum, and may also have DM test results. Dogs should have a working title such as IPO, HGH, or RH before being bred. Since you are looking for an IPO prospect, go to a breeder who has experience in the sport, is active in training and titling their own dogs in Schutzhund/IPO, and has produced dogs that excel in Schutzhund.

## Belgian Malinois



*Photo credits (L to R): Brian Aghajani (Courtesy of Kjersti Dâbak), Donna Haynes, Brian Aghajani (Courtesy of Kjersti Dâbak).*

Malinois are also a favored IPO candidate, and are found placing very highly in trials across the U.S. They are intelligent, quick and athletic, and have great drive for the obedience work. They are fast and agile, and have incredible prey drive. Their high trainability and enthusiasm for working non-stop make them excellent IPO candidates as well as police and military dog candidates. This can, however, make them difficult to live with, as “relaxation” may not be in their vocabulary.

Nerve strength and environmental soundness can be an issue in the Belgian Malinois; some Malinois may have a super work ethic, but demonstrate nervous, spooky, and flighty temperaments, startling easily at sounds and other environmental stimuli off the field. The sensitive nature of this breed can also result in a diminished capacity to handle the stress of change. Their high drive and high bite satisfaction can help them overcome some of this, which may allow the Malinois to work well on the field in Schutzhund even if the dog is nervous and anxious off the field.

| <b>Malinois Pros</b>   | <b>Malinois Cons</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intelligent and highly trainable</li> <li>• Very active, with seemingly unlimited energy</li> <li>• Driven and motivated to work with the handler</li> <li>• Fast, agile, and athletic</li> <li>• Sensitive to the handler</li> <li>• Resilient and forgiving of handler mistakes</li> <li>• Doesn't bore easily in training</li> <li>• Can work in a wide variety of weather conditions</li> <li>• High stamina and endurance</li> <li>• High bite satisfaction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nerve strength and environmental soundness can be an issue</li> <li>• Can be too sensitive, can lack resilience</li> <li>• Can be tightly wound and difficult to live with due to inability to “settle”</li> <li>• Can be hectic in the work</li> <li>• Less overall balance in temperament</li> <li>• Can have difficulty with strong, sustained barking in protection</li> <li>• High bite satisfaction often means food and toy are less-satisfying motivators</li> <li>• Can have difficulty with tracking</li> <li>• Emotionally sensitive, can be disturbed easily in times of stress</li> </ul> |

## ***Belgian Malinois “Types”***

Fortunately, the Malinois has yet to gain popularity as a house pet and show dog due to their extremely high energy levels and desire to work. This translates to less variation in “type” compared to a dog like the German Shepherd Dog. However, the Belgian Malinois has different lines related to country of origin and preferred sport. There are the KNPV (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiebond Vereniging*) dogs from Holland that excel in the Dutch Police Dog trials, dogs that excel in French Ring, dogs used in Belgian Ringsport (NVBK), and more traditional Schutzhund/IPO lines.

Size, levels of sharpness and aggression, reactivity, and even quality of grips can vary based on the line, so if you are interested in Belgian Malinois, talk with those who own and compete with Malinois to get a better feel for which lines will suit you better. Generally, if you are competing in IPO with your Malinois, find a dog from lines that have at least some IPO titles in their immediate background.

## ***The Belgian Malinois in Schutzhund***

Tracking is not always a strong phase for the Malinois. Some are excellent trackers, but good noses have not always been selected for within this breed. Their use in KNPV, Mondioring, French Ring, and other bite sports without a tracking component mean the traits for strong protection work and obedience have been given precedence over tracking. Additionally, the need for calm, focused behavior for tracking make this phase difficult for many Malinois, and the genetic drive or desire for the track itself may be lacking.

In obedience, their sensitive nature, athleticism, and drive combine to create a beautiful and precise picture unrivaled by most other breeds. And their high bite satisfaction and energy levels make the protection work a favorite phase. They are very fast to strike the sleeve, demonstrate strong grips, and show superb speed on the long bite. However, because the protection work is often performed from a root of extremely high prey drive, the barking and guarding can suffer, as these find their root in aggression. This, too, can vary based on bloodline.

## ***Health Concerns***

Health concerns include hip and elbow dysplasia, as well as skin problems and allergies. Back problems—particularly spondylosis—are also a concern.

## ***What to Look For in a Breeder***

Look for a breeder who is experienced with the Belgian Malinois breed and actively trains and competes with their dogs. The breeder should have hip and elbow certifications on their breeding dogs, as well as spinal x-rays to prove the dogs free of spondylosis. There should also be a low prevalence of known allergies in their lines. The dogs should have a working title on them before being bred. Look for stable dogs that show little sensitivity to strange sounds, surfaces, and

surroundings. Since you are looking for an IPO prospect, go to a breeder who has experience in the sport. Titles in other protection sports are good, too, but you want to know that their dogs can also track.

## Rottweiler



*Photo credits (L to R): Munanis Photography, Brian Aghajani (Courtesy of Kathleen Sanderson), Donna Haynes.*

Rottweilers can be surprisingly sensitive and affectionate dogs. They are also very intelligent. Repetition bores them, and they will either shut down, lose interest, or find “better” ways of performing an exercise. Rottweilers are powerful dogs, but their stamina and endurance are much lower compared to German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois. Working in hot, humid temperatures can be more problematic for this breed than for some of the other IPO breeds. With their shorter muzzles and heavier build, Rottweilers tend to become winded faster, and have a higher risk of overheating, even on a day with mild temperatures.

| <b>Rottweiler Pros</b>   | <b>Rottweiler Cons</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong and powerful dogs</li> <li>• Sensitive and affectionate</li> <li>• Intelligent</li> <li>• Perpetually smiling on the field, big clowns</li> <li>• Generally good-natured dogs</li> <li>• Natural defensive aggression</li> <li>• Good companions with an ability to “settle” in the home</li> <li>• Good “off” switch</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repetition bores them</li> <li>• Long memories for negative stimuli</li> <li>• Can be less forgiving of handler mistakes</li> <li>• Lower stamina and endurance</li> <li>• Body style puts them at risk of overheating</li> <li>• Willfull and stubborn</li> <li>• Slower to mature</li> </ul> |

## ***Rottweiler “Types”***

There is a moderate split between Rottweilers bred for the AKC conformation ring, and the Rottweilers bred to the German standards that require a conformation rating, working title, breed survey, and appropriate health tests before the dog can be bred.

Rottweilers bred for the show ring have a larger emphasis on “type” and structure, on making sure the dog looks like and is built like a Rottweiler. Given the breed’s divergence in appearance from the wolves from which domestic dogs originally descended, the physical characteristics specific to the breed must be selected for continually, or else the Rottweiler doesn’t really look like a Rottweiler anymore. Show Rottweilers are of a larger size with heavier bone and huge heads, but with shorter muzzles that can create gripping and breathing problems. Rottweilers bred for the work have a more athletic body type with a longer muzzle, are more lightly built, are not as pretty in appearance but usually are more stable in temperament when under pressure.

If you wish to do IPO with a Rottweiler, the biggest factor is finding someone who does bite sports with their dogs, not just AKC agility, weight pulling, or obedience. The Rottweiler is a versatile and utilitarian dog that can do well in a variety of sports, but when it comes to IPO, a Rottweiler will struggle in the sport unless they have been bred for it and have a history of it in their immediate background. If you want the best of both worlds (conformation and working ability), then the dogs to look for are those that have had their Koerung, which is an advanced breed test that tests the temperament, working ability, protection work, and conformation of the dogs.

## ***The Rottweiler in Schutzhund***

Rottweilers tend to be natural trackers and show good drive for this phase. In obedience, their size and substance may make it appear as if they are not as “flashy” as a lighter-boned breed. However, they can be enthusiastic, spirited, and happy obedience dogs that often look as though they are constantly smiling through the whole routine. Their enthusiasm and clownish nature show through marvelously in this phase. In protection, a good Rottweiler is incredibly impressive, demonstrating power and grip unmatched by any other breed. They make the helper truly work out there on the field! The Rottweiler is not necessarily “fast” at anything in IPO compared to some of the other breeds, but they are strong, determined, and powerful dogs.

## ***Health Concerns***

Common health problems in Rottweilers include cancer, hip and elbow dysplasia, eye issues, cranial cruciate ligament tears and ruptures, cardiac problems, skin problems, epilepsy, and bloat.

## ***What to Look For in a Breeder***

Select your breeder and your bloodlines carefully; look specifically for a puppy bred from Rottweilers that excel in IPO, demonstrating that they genetically possess the aptitude for it. Look for a puppy

that comes from dogs with good longevity and health, and whose parents and grandparents are still healthy even in old age.

The breeder should screen for hip and elbow dysplasia, as well as for cardiac, thyroid, and eye problems. Standard tests for this breed include certifications for hips and elbows, cardiac tests for SAS (Subvalvular Aortic Stenosis), CERF eye tests, thyroid tests, and a new DNA test for JLPP (Juvenile Laryngeal Paralysis and Polyneuropathy). You should also inquire about the incidence of cranial cruciate ligament/ACL injuries and tears in the breeder’s lines.

## Doberman



*Photo credits (L to R): Kjersti Dâbakk, Donna Haynes, Wendy Schmitt.*

Dobermans are a highly intelligent and sensitive breed. They are not as forgiving in training as some of the other breeds, but they can be very eager to please their handlers. Some lines show more sharpness and suspicion than others, and while they may be big softies with their family and friends, they may show a more reserved attitude with strangers. They can be very protective of property and family.

| Doberman Pros   | Doberman Cons  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly intelligent</li> <li>• “Thinking” dogs</li> <li>• Biddable and sensitive to the handler</li> <li>• High trainability</li> <li>• Affectionate with their handlers</li> <li>• Good companions with a great "off" switch and ability to settle</li> <li>• Natural sharpness</li> <li>• High fight satisfaction - brings natural “fight” to the helper</li> <li>• Very little hair</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking dogs – can be challenging to train</li> <li>• Can be overly sensitive or sharp</li> <li>• Long memories for negative stimuli</li> <li>• Less forgiving of handler and helper mistakes</li> <li>• Can have a difficult time with change</li> <li>• Not as well-adapted for cold environment</li> <li>• Emotionally sensitive, can be disturbed easily in times of stress</li> </ul> |

## ***Doberman “Types”***

A good Doberman that can actively compete in IPO can be hard to find. Unfortunately, this breed has suffered greatly due to indiscriminate breeding and the quest for beauty over working ability, particularly here in the United States. There also is a split between a working line (European) Doberman, and the American show line Dobermans.

Dobermans bred for the American show ring have lighter bone, longer and more elegant necks, and more angulation in the rear. Their overall picture is one of refinement and elegance, lacking the substance and strength of the working Doberman. The working or European Dobermans have a more compact and athletic body style, with thicker bone and better muscling, and with a much more substantial head. Cropping and docking is still accepted in the U.S. for the Doberman breed, but dogs from Europe or that have been bred to European standards will have natural ears and tails.

The temperament is one of the largest differences. Prior to breeding, European-bred Dobermans and Dobermans bred to German standards in the U.S. must pass the ZtP, a rigorous test of temperament involving protection work as well as conformation evaluation. This has helped preserve proper temperament in this breed. As a result, working Dobermans tend to have a temperament that is better suited for IPO, showing more stability and overall strength of character than the American show line.

## ***The Doberman in Schutzhund***

Dobermans generally possess excellent noses and a natural ability to track, and enjoy the tracking phase. Their sensitivity, however, requires the handler to be patient in this phase, as a poorly timed correction on the track can create issues with conflict and anxiety later. Dobermans are also one of the breeds that are capable of the upbeat, enthusiastic, and precise obedience that can rival the Belgian Malinois’ performance. Dobermans work for their handlers and usually are responsive to even slight corrections. Because they are a more sensitive breed with a long memory, and show a high degree of fight drive – desiring the fight with the helper, not the sleeve – Dobermans may require a different approach when working in protection. This breed tends to work more defensively than some of the other breeds, “thinking” more about the man or adversary, rather than working for the prey of the sleeve. This does, however, translate to powerful barking and guarding!

## ***Health Concerns***

Common health problems in Dobermans include cardiac problems (very prevalent in Dobermans), thyroid problems, bleeding disorders, eye problems, and cancer.

## ***What to Look For in a Breeder***

Temperament problems are common in this breed due to indiscriminate breeding, which is why you must carefully research breeders and their dogs before purchasing a puppy. Look for a breeder whose

dogs have been successful in IPO sport to increase the likelihood of obtaining a Doberman IPO prospect. Also look for a breeder whose dogs have good longevity. Appropriate health tests like certifications for hip dysplasia are a must, as well as tests for genetic cardiac and bleeding problems. These include cardiac tests like an echocardiogram and a Holter test, as well as a DNA test for von Willebrand's disease, which is a form of hemophilia. Thyroid tests and CERF eye exams should also be performed on breeding dogs. Also inquire about cancer in the breeder's lines, and about any cases of cardiomyopathy.

## What About Alternate Breeds?

Other breeds—including mixed breed dogs—can succeed and do well in IPO. However, it is harder to find a dog for IPO if the breed has not been bred for this type of work. People have competed successfully with other working breeds such as Giant Schnauzers, Boxers, Bouviers, Airedale Terriers, Australian Cattle Dogs, Border Collies, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, American Bulldogs, American Pit Bull Terriers, Presa Canarios, and more.

Generally, people fall in love with a particular breed of dog, and then decide to pursue Schutzhund second. And that's perfectly okay! Schutzhund becomes a sport both of you can do together. It builds your relationship, develops the genetic skills of your dog, and brings you into an amazing community of working dog people. What this means for training, however, is that you, your helper, and your training director must be flexible and adaptable in your training, as each breed works differently and may need a unique approach to training in Schutzhund. If your dog possesses the traits described earlier and shows aptitude and enjoyment for the protection work, then there's no reason why you can't try IPO.

## PUPPY OR ADULT?

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### Puppies (8-20 weeks)

It is hard to resist the allure of cute little puppies with their adorable faces, spontaneous spunky energy, and sweet puppy breath. Puppies contain so much potential just waiting to be brought out through their raising and training; they provide the joys and trials of the entire experience, from puppy raising all the way to IPO3. While being the least expensive yet most difficult option for getting involved in IPO, bringing a dog along from puppyhood to an IPO title is also the most rewarding.

Starting with a puppy may not be for everyone. There are both benefits and drawbacks to purchasing a young IPO prospect.

### *Benefits*

- **Cuteness** – Even when they are being destructive and obnoxious little beasts, you still love them because they are just so adorable.

- **Clean slate** – Puppies offer a ‘clean slate’, with little to no previous training experience. You can mold them however you choose.
- **Greater control** – You control the socialization, training, and raising of your puppy. You can tailor this to your environment and your needs, and have direct control over the puppy’s early experiences.
- **Faster bonding** – You develop the dog-handler bond from the very beginning, during a time when it is easiest to bond with a dog.
- **Build your own foundation** – You lay an early, positive foundation that sets you up for success later on. You know exactly what your dog has been taught since the beginning. There is no guesswork of “maybe he learned this behavior from his other owner”.
- **Less expensive** – This is the least expensive way to get into the sport, as puppies usually cost less than young or titled adult dogs. However, you can still expect to pay about \$1500-\$2500 for puppy from titled, health-tested, proven parents.
- **Easier transition** – Puppies adjust faster and are easier to integrate into your lifestyle and household. In some ways, they are also easier to introduce into multi-pet households or households with children. The puppy then is raised in this environment from the beginning.
- **Sense of personal accomplishment** – Taking a dog from puppy to IPO titles is a huge accomplishment, and brings intrinsic fulfillment and pride. When you finally earn that title, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you successfully conquered the most difficult path to that title.

## Drawbacks

- **Whirling dervishes of energy** – Working breed puppies may be cute, but they can be little Tasmanian devils. Don’t let the cuteness fool you; they are bundles of trouble.
- **Time-intensive** – You must dedicate a huge amount of time to the raising, socialization and foundation training of your puppy in that first year or more. Additionally, you must wait patiently for your puppy to mature before starting some of the more formal parts of IPO training.
- **Heartbreaking gamble** – You may invest time, money, heart and soul into this pup, only to have x-rays reveal orthopedic problems like hip and elbow dysplasia. Right now, you cannot fully determine what that young pup will be like when he gets older; it's possible that he may not have the proper temperament for the work once he matures.
- **Impressionable** – This can be a benefit if you are training things correctly, but if you lay an incorrect foundation or provide negative socialization experiences (such as repeatedly overwhelming the young pup with strangers in an attempt to "socialize" him), you may fight problems *you created* for the rest of your dog’s IPO career.
- **Obnoxiousness** – It is a puppy, so it will do annoying puppy things like nipping and biting with its little puppy teeth, yapping and barking when left out or when crated, pottying in its

crate or on the carpet, picking up *everything* off the floor, chewing and eating anything he can fit in his mouth. He must be potty-trained, socialized, and taught the basics of how to live with humans.

- **Fragile stage in life** – We don't always see our crazy working puppies as being fragile, but they are. From 8-16 weeks, the puppy is most at risk for disease, even if vaccinated. Additionally, their bones and joints are still growing, requiring that the owner be ever mindful of not letting their young puppy catapult off the couch or leap off the top of the porch stairs. One bad fall can potentially create lasting joint damage.

Puppies are wonderful, but there is no guarantee that the puppy will actually work out for IPO, even if he comes from IPO/Schutzhund-titled parents. Puppies are, in the words of many veteran breeders, a “crapshoot” or a gamble. You will need good parents, good genetics, good puppy-raising, and a bit of good luck.

## Older Dogs and Older Puppies

This is the route that many serious competitors take. They will purchase young untitled dogs (green dogs) or dogs that have obtained their BH. The dogs are either imported from Europe, or purchased from U.S. breeders who kept a puppy back to grow it out a little, or who had a dog returned due to a mismatch in homes (such as being sold for a pet home, but being too much for them to handle). Some competitors will also import trained, titled dogs and continue to train and title them. While this option is more expensive, it provides better odds of getting a dog that will succeed in IPO sport. But just like any other option, this one has both benefits and drawbacks.

### Benefits

- **Better evaluation** – You can better evaluate the dog's personality, temperament, strengths, weaknesses, and aptitude for the work with an older puppy or adult. This increases your chances for having a successful prospect for the sport.
- **Orthopedic checks** – Preliminary x-rays can be taken and submitted for dogs under two years of age through OFA, or hips and elbows can be certified prior to purchase on the older dogs through OFA, SV, or other similar organizations.
- **Avoids the puppy stages** – The dog has grown out of the most time-intensive puppy stages. You avoid much of the obnoxious puppy behaviors, and usually end up with a dog that has already been socialized, vaccinated, potty-trained, crate-trained, and more.
- **Existing foundation** – With an older puppy or adult, the dog may have a preliminary foundation on which you can build. Older titled dogs have an entire foundation plus more advanced training, plus trial experience.
- **Faster progress** – An older dog with a foundation will progress faster with the training. You also have less time to wait for the dog to reach mental and physical maturity. For an already-titled dog, the training can begin immediately once the relationship is built.

- **Milder learner curve** – With a titled dog, you learn how to handle and trial a dog rather than learning everything at once: how to train the dog, how to train oneself, how to handle, how to trial, etc. This can be a good option for helping a brand new handler learn the sport and learn how to handle a working dog.

## Drawbacks

- **More expensive** – An older puppy may cost upwards of \$2,000, and an older dog may be \$6,000 or more, especially if they have had some training. Titled dogs are even costlier, and if you are bringing the dog in from overseas, count on additional expenses.
- **Less control** – You have no control over the prior socialization experiences and upbringing of the dog. Instead, you are trusting that the breeder or puppy-raiser did their job with socializing the puppy. You may need to perform additional socialization to help the dog adjust to its new life and environment, with the dog now at an age where it is less accepting of “new” experiences.
- **Bad habits** – The dog may come with ingrained habits that can be hard to break, such as fence-fighting, constant pacing, spinning, barking, chewing of food bowls and crates, extreme possessiveness over food or toys, or independent attitudes developed from a lack of early training and handling. If the dog has learned how to entertain himself without humans, it may require extra work to teach this dog to play with you.
- **Longer bonding** – The bonding period can take longer with an older dog, particularly for aloof or sensitive breeds. Some dogs will show hesitancy, suspicion, and caution when first arriving in their new home; you must be patient and give the dog a chance to adjust, bond with and trust you. Most older dogs will bond readily with their new handler, but the full process takes anywhere from several months to one year.
- **May require retraining** – The training or foundation may not be good, requiring you to do ‘patchwork’ to fix the holes, or even requiring that you completely retrain the dog. Retraining a dog with a poor foundation requires a tremendous amount of time, effort, and skill.
- **Scam risk** – You run the risk of a young IPO “prospect” or titled dog being pawned off due to undesirable or poor temperament, training issues or health problems. There are people out there who get rid of sub-par dogs by selling them overseas to unsuspecting buyers.
- **Extra checks for legitimacy** – You must check ID, temperament, titles and health certifications both before *and* after you get the dog, particularly if importing a dog. Make sure that dog in the crate really is the one you bought! You may also have to x-ray hips and elbows again to ensure they are free from dysplasia, even if the dog has “passing hips and elbows” in their country of origin.

Older dogs may seem like less of a gamble than getting a puppy. However, you must have reliable connections in order to ensure a quality dog. The puppy buyer has to find a good breeder; getting an older dog requires that you find a good, honest broker.

# MALE OR FEMALE?

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There are many generalities and stereotypes surrounding the gender question, including the characteristics described below. There are always exceptions, of course. But when it comes to selecting gender, it really comes down to preference. Which gender do you prefer to work with? Which would work better for your household and lifestyle?

## Males

Many handlers have males, and enjoy working with them. Males are bigger, stronger, and show more physical power and aggression in the work, which makes them a more popular choice for Schutzhund. However, they do mature more slowly than females, both mentally and physically.

| <i>Pros</i>   | <i>Cons</i>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No heat cycles and accompanying hormonal changes</li><li>• Tend to be bolder, more confident, and more assertive</li><li>• Larger size, more physical power</li><li>• Tend to be less emotionally sensitive</li><li>• Harder temperament, stronger under stress</li><li>• Stronger aggression</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mature more slowly than females</li><li>• Remain goofy adolescents for a longer period of time</li><li>• More “into” exploring their environment and surroundings</li><li>• May be more likely to be dog aggressive</li><li>• Increased tendency to mark, if the handler doesn’t curb the behavior</li><li>• Easily distracted by a female in heat</li><li>• Can be insensitive to the handler/handler-hard</li></ul> |

The issues typically ascribed to males, such as marking and being more dog-aggressive, vary based on the dog itself and on the way the handler has raised or trained a dog. Male dogs mark on everything if they have been allowed to. So do not let him! As for dog aggression: males can exhibit same-sex aggression, particularly among dogs that are similar in age and status. However, many females also exhibit same-sex aggression, but in a more intense and dangerous manner than males. When females fight, it gets ugly—and even deadly—very quickly.

## Females

Other handlers prefer working with females instead. Females tend to be more sensitive, more perceptive and more in tune with their handlers. Females can have good aggression and power in the work as well, although it may not be at the same level of a male (but there are some strong females out there who put many males to shame!). For many handlers, one of the biggest drawbacks to females

is their heat cycles, particularly if competing at the Championship level, where females in heat practice *and* compete last at the end of two or three days of competition.

| <i>Pros</i>   | <i>Cons</i>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More sensitive toward and perceptive of their handlers</li> <li>• More biddable</li> <li>• Medium size lends quickness and speed</li> <li>• Mature more quickly than males</li> <li>• Do not go through the protracted adolescence that males do</li> <li>• Not as distracted by environment</li> <li>• Usually not distracted by other females in heat</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat cycles can interfere with training and trialing (particularly at Championship levels)</li> <li>• Can be overly emotionally sensitive</li> <li>• May be more possessive of handler</li> <li>• Can be snarky toward other dogs</li> <li>• May not show as much power or aggression in the work</li> <li>• May have a softer temperament that does not stand up well under stress</li> <li>• Extreme aggression toward other females</li> </ul> |

Intact females go through heat cycles anywhere from two to four times per year; the hormonal changes accompanying these cycles can influence her temperament and work ethic (but not always!). Some females are more sensitive, clingy, distracted and even uncertain during her heat cycles. Other females, however, remain unaffected. Obviously spaying a female will prevent heat cycles, but this procedure should not be taken lightly, as these hormones are essential for proper physical and mental maturation in the working dog.

Physically, females will be smaller in size than their male counterparts. While their more compact size works well for some people, others want a bigger dog that can show more physical power. However, there are some very masculine females out there who show a larger size and exceptional power!

So why aren't more females at the top levels of the sport? There are several reasons for this:

1. It seems more difficult to find a female with the strength of temperament, aggression, and power needed to compete at the high levels.
2. Many female dogs are being titled in order to be bred, and so competing at the higher levels is not as big of a priority. A female that competes at the high level and produces her strengths in her puppies is considered quite exceptional!
3. Simple math: males seem to be a more popular choice for many competitors.

All this being said, a good strong female is a sight to behold, and is worth her weight in gold as a brood bitch if she can pass on her strengths to her puppies!

## So Which Do You Choose?

There is no right or wrong answer here. It just depends on your preferences, lifestyle, and goals. For a brand new handler with little dog experience, a big, strong, assertive male might not be the best choice. Have a household of female dogs already? Then it's wise to avoid adding yet another female to the mix. If you are thinking about breeding eventually and want a female for this purpose, then **get a male**. Raise him, train him, work him, title him, and learn the sport and the working side of your breed first before you ever consider becoming a breeder. It's difficult to own a female with the intent of breeding her *and* to hold fast to proving her breed worthiness objectively first (Should she really be bred? What value does she add to the breed?). Too many people are tempted to just breed the female they have, without asking those hard questions.

## DOMESTIC OR IMPORT?

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Can a good Schutzhund dog be found locally? Is it better to search domestically, or to import a dog? Much of it depends on your selected breed, your needs, and your budget.

### Buying Domestic

Depending on your chosen breed, you may find dogs of excellent quality being produced domestically. For example, in the United States, five of the top ten dogs at the 2016 USCA GSD IPO3 National Championship were bred in the USA, and the top two dogs were both USA-bred. Additionally, USA-bred dogs have consistently represented the United States at the WUSV World Championship, the FCI World Championships, the FMBB World Championships, and more.

### *Benefits*

Buying a dog domestically for Schutzhund is now easier than it ever was before. One of the largest benefits of buying a dog domestically is the amount of first-hand knowledge you can glean prior to purchasing the dog or puppy. Purchasing domestically provides you with opportunity to:

- See the dog in person
- Visit the breeder
- See the dam and possibly the sire
- Observe siblings, half-siblings, and other relatives working in other clubs
- Talk with handlers, helpers, and trainers who have seen these dogs and worked with them
- Obtain first-hand knowledge of what the genetics and health behind the dog are like

Additionally, the costs should be more affordable for both purchasing and shipping the dog. Travel arrangements are easier to make, with less restrictions. You also have more freedom over the method of travel, since you can opt to drive home with your new dog instead of fly. You also have more

support if your breeder is in the same locale or even same country as you, and you usually have the option of returning the dog to the breeder if things aren't working out. You, in turn, are providing support for domestic breeders of good quality dogs. Working dog breeders are thrilled to have their puppies in working homes, including the homes of first-time Schutzhund handlers.

## ***Drawbacks***

Drawbacks of purchasing a dog domestically vary based on breed. If you have a less-common breed, then you may not have many breeders from which to choose. You may not find what you like or the bloodlines you want. For example, if you want a Rottweiler that comes from parents that both have their Koerungs, then you may have to go overseas in order to fulfill that requirement. Other drawbacks include:

- Encountering “breeder prejudice” at clubs
- Greater potential for a volatile or soured relationship with the breeder, should something not work out with the dog
- Potential over-involvement of the breeder, particularly if they are also in your IPO club

## **Buying an Import**

Imported dogs—whether they be adults or puppies—can provide access to highly desirable bloodlines that are not readily available here in the U.S. Additionally, it may be easier to find an adult overseas for your breed than to find an available adult domestically.

## ***Benefits***

Other potential benefits include:

- Dogs used for breeding are often subject to stricter standards in their countries of origin
- Access to dogs from top-performing kennels and bloodlines in Europe
- Opportunities to “see” how this dog, its sire, dam, and relatives are performing in Europe or elsewhere
- Greater number of puppies in working homes in Europe compared to U.S., offering more opportunity to “see” what the breeder produces

## ***Drawbacks***

There are some big drawbacks. With imported dogs, you are relying on videos, second-hand stories, trial results, and the general reputation of the dog, breeder, or broker/seller rather than firsthand knowledge. Unless you travel to see the dog in person, you must rely on this second-hand information when making your decision.

Additional drawbacks include:

- More expensive for both purchase price and shipping
- More stringent travel requirements and greater difficulty with travel arrangements
- Less opportunity to see the dog, sire, dam, siblings in person
- Less opportunity for support
- Must have a trusted contact or seller who understands what you want
- Greater potential for being “scammed” or sent a sub-par dog
- Added expense of x-raying hips and elbows again to ensure dog is free of hip and elbow dysplasia, unless dog has legitimate “a” stamp rating from SV

Contrary to what some people believe, just because a dog is imported does not magically make the dog of better quality and superior to any dogs found domestically. There have been many sub-par dogs unloaded on unsuspecting buyers from breeders and brokers overseas. Additionally, these deals are usually final. If you don't like the dog, you may be stuck with it, and it's up to you to re-home or re-sell it. Thus, having a knowledgeable and reliable connection is essential to importing a dog. If you pick wisely, this person will be instrumental in locating the right dog for you, but if you pick poorly, you will be conned into paying huge amounts of money for a less-than-stellar dog.

## **What about Rescue?**

Rescued dogs—both purebred and mixed breed—can and do compete in IPO. Occasionally well-bred purebred dogs get surrendered to shelters due to their high drive, lack of leadership, lack of training creating “behavior problems” that their owners are ill-equipped to handle, and lack of breeder support (another reason to choose a good breeder whose greatest concern is their dogs, not money.).

However, rescue dogs are often limited by poor genetics, poor training, and poor upbringing. A poor genetic foundation creates a dog that is nervous and easily stressed, afraid of new situations, people, loud noises, changes in the environment, or surprises. In most cases, it is not abuse; it is poor genetic temperament and lack of socialization combined with the stress of being in a shelter setting. Many of the temperament and behavioral issues seen in rescue dogs will exclude them from successfully competing in IPO sport.

However, if you have your heart set on acquiring a dog from a shelter or a rescue, you must be very exacting with your standards for both the rescue and the dog. Consider connecting with a purebred rescue for your breed. Your best bet for success, however, may be to search for a reputable working dog rescue that specifically takes in the high energy working breeds and searches for suitable active or working homes. Whereas a regular rescue might be horrified that you want to train the dog in IPO protection work, a working dog rescue should support your goal to pursue Schutzhund.

Look for a dog that shows a stable and social temperament, has good drive for food and for toy, shows resilience and is not overly “soft” in temperament, and has good energy with a natural

orientation toward the handler. Have the dog evaluated by someone experienced in IPO before purchase, such as the training director or helper at the local club, or another experienced club member.

If you purchase your IPO prospect from a rescue, you must obtain permanent identification on the dog in order to trial, which means either a tattoo or a microchip. This permanent ID must be verified and recorded with your chosen organization when you register for the dog's scorebook. Additionally, you should have the dog's hips and elbows x-rayed before subjecting the dog to the extreme rigors of Schutzhund training, which requires a dog of sound mind and sound body.

## THE BREEDER

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Good puppy prospects for Schutzhund do not just “happen”; they must be carefully bred for by conscientious breeders who understand the value and attributes of good *working* dogs, not just pet dogs or show dogs. This requires the breeder to invest a lot of work, effort, research, and experience into their breeding program. Thus, when looking for that future IPO prospect, you are not just finding a puppy, you are finding the right *person* to produce that puppy. So how do you find the right person?

### Characteristics of Good Breeders

While there are many things good breeders do that separate them from the hordes of so-called “breeders” out there, there are four main characteristics that can quickly identify who these breeders are. At the minimum, your potential breeder should meet the characteristics listed in this chart below:

#### *Quick Reference Chart for Good Breeders*

- **Breeder is active with their dogs**, taking an active role in training and trialing
- **Standard health certifications/tests on all breeding dogs**, such as hip and elbow certifications from OFA, SV (Germany), and other tests that are standard for your chosen breed (Holter tests, von Willebrand's test, etc.)
- **Working titles** (IPO, HGH, French Ring, AWD, RH, etc.) or authentic real work certifications (Search and Rescue, Explosives Detection, Police K9, etc.) on their breeding dogs
- **A producing breeding program** that has yielded dogs successful in IPO and other venues

## ***Breeder Active in IPO***

Why look for a breeder who does dog sport activities—particularly IPO/Schutzhund—with their dogs? The breeder who actively trains and works their dogs:

- **Exposes their dogs and breeding program to public scrutiny** – The breeder who trains and titles their dogs does not just sit at home and breed their dogs to produce more puppies. Instead, they put themselves and their dogs out there for public scrutiny and for evaluations of the dog’s temperament and working ability by an objective party (the judge). They are not hiding their dogs in their yard and saying how great they are without ever proving it.
- **Builds a verifiable reputation** – The breeder who works and trials their dogs builds a verifiable reputation in the working dog world. This also indicates that they are in good standing with the registry for their breed or country, and belong to a legitimate organization for their breed and sport, such as USCA, AWMA, UDC, USRC, etc. This breeder’s reputation can be verified by working titles on their dogs, trial results, word of mouth, and people working and handling dogs from this breeder in various IPO clubs.
- **Actively evaluates and tests their breeding dogs by subjecting them to the rigors of training and trialing in IPO** – Training a dog for IPO reveals an incredible amount of information about their dogs that can then be used to make an informed breeding decision. Training and titling also helps a breeder prove their dogs’ working ability, and gives them intimate knowledge of each dog’s genetic temperament. Conversely, a breeder who just imports titled dogs or sends their dogs off for titles is less likely to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their individual dogs.

Two of the most revealing questions you can ask a breeder is: **“What have you personally accomplished with your dogs?”** and **“Which local Schutzhund club do you belong to?”** These two questions weed out those breeders who do not title their dogs, and those who simply import titled dogs and breed them without ever working the dogs or their progeny themselves. It reflects poorly on a breeder’s program if the breeder produces puppies but never wants to keep or work anything they produce! If they don’t want to keep and work dogs of their own breedings, why should you?

## ***Appropriate Health Certifications***

There are objective tests for a variety of genetic health conditions such as hip and elbow dysplasia, Degenerative Myelopathy (DM), von Willebrand’s Disease, inherited cardiac problems, and more. These tests allow the breeder to make informed breeding decisions, and help them provide their puppies with the best genetic start in life. Research which tests are considered standard for your breed, and only select breeders who meet or exceed the minimum standards. These tests, once completed, come with valid paperwork from the certifying organization; copies of these certifications should be available for all breeding dogs.

Hip and elbow certifications are an absolute minimum for nearly all breeds used in IPO; these can be completed once the dog is two years of age through the Orthopedic Foundation of America (OFA) in the U.S. Alternatively, hips and elbows can be certified through Germany at one year of age (“a” stamp program). The breeder should provide the authentic certificates proving these tests have been done, or you can view the ratings for OFA hips and elbows online in the [OFA database](#).

Excuses such as “my vet said the hips are fine” and “they just received a clean bill of health from their vet” mean nothing when it comes to proving a dog is clear of testable genetic conditions. These tests require more than just a vet exam. For example, hip and elbow dysplasia can only be conclusively diagnosed through x-rays, because we must look at the bones of the hip and elbow joints. Bleeding disorders like von Willebrand’s require that DNA samples are sent to a lab, and cardiac problems require specialized tests like an ECG or a Holter exam. So a veterinarian cannot magically pronounce a dog free of genetic conditions just by looking at it in the exam room.

Good breeders have knowledge of the genetic problems in their selected breed, and in their own bloodlines (although sometimes surprises still do pop up!). No bloodline is perfect, no breeding is perfect, and that there are lots of “land mines” to walk around when breeding dogs. But the breeder should know their dogs’ health inside and out. They perform appropriate health tests for various genetic diseases for their breed, so that they can have the most information possible about their dogs.

## ***Working Titles on Breeding Dogs***

“Titles aren’t everything” is a common refrain on Internet discussion boards. True, titles aren’t everything. But they should be the *minimum* standard! Those who make this claim usually are the same ones breeding their dogs without titles while stating: “Of course they can do Schutzhund, and their puppies can too!” Of course, simply stating it does not make it true.

What do working titles show? IPO titles show that the dog:

1. Has the basic elements of a proper working temperament.
2. Has been evaluated against an objective standard in a public setting by an objective third party (the judge).
3. Has been through the stress of training and trialing in a public setting outside its home, and has handled this stress successfully.
4. Has what it takes to successfully be trained and titled in IPO, increasing the chances that your puppy will too.

## ***A Producing Breeding Program***

There’s a common adage: “The proof is in the pudding.” So it is with breeding working dogs. The proof is in the quality of dogs that the breeder has produced. A strong breeding program produces dogs that excel in IPO and in other working venues. The breeder should not just be a “one-hit

wonder” with one token rock star; multiple dogs from their breeding program should be found trialing successfully and earning titles. Even if a breeder is not active in an established club at the moment, dogs from their kennel should be found working in IPO and other venues.

A good breeder goes beyond just looking at scorebooks and just breeding to a big name stud in order to sell puppies. They strive to produce dogs that remain within and exemplify the breed standard set for their breed. The dogs they have bred should showcase and support the breed as a whole; they should be good representatives of your selected working breed.

Yes, it is challenging for many working dog breeders to find working homes for their pups, and many of their puppies go to active pet homes. But there should be a number of progeny performing in some working venue, even if it's not all IPO. If a breeder breeds frequently but has very few successful working progeny to show for it, then consider going to a breeder with a stronger track record for producing good working dogs.

## What To Expect

**Expect this process will take both time and effort**, because you are not just finding a puppy, you are finding *the right person* to produce that puppy. You may need to travel a considerable distance to get the right puppy from that right person, particularly if you want a less popular breed for IPO.

**Expect to pay about \$1500-\$2500 for a well-bred puppy**, and possibly more than this if you are looking at an unusual breed (or are importing a dog). And while you may be looking for a puppy within the next few months, you might wait longer than that. Good breeders do not constantly breed their dogs and do not always have a litter available “right now” for you. However, a good puppy is worth the wait!

**Expect a good breeder to take exceptional interest in you**, asking you many questions about your lifestyle, your plans for the puppy, your household, your past dog experience, etc. They won't pressure you into taking a puppy sight unseen. Instead, they will get to know you and get a feel for you, your personality, and what type of home you will be for their puppy. It will feel a little bit like an extensive job interview, where you must complete a questionnaire, provide references (and they will call them!), and interview with the breeder over the phone or in person. A good breeder will use this information to determine if they want to sell you one of their puppies. *A breeder has every right to refuse to sell you a puppy if they feel you aren't the right match for their dogs.* Their primary concern is the dog itself, not that your feelings might be hurt or they might be missing out on your money.

**Do not expect to pick out your particular puppy, particularly if you are new to IPO.** The breeder will use the information you provided to help them match the right puppy with the right home. In every working litter, there is variation in temperament and drive that will make puppies suited for different types of homes. If you are set on gender, then the breeder will generally respect your choice, but they will take their extensive knowledge of their puppies and their knowledge of you to match the two of you together.

**Expect to stay in contact with your breeder as your puppy grows.** They want to support their puppy buyers, answer their questions, and serve as a valuable resource for those new to their breed. And they want to make sure that their puppies are in good homes, that the puppy is doing well, and that you are happy with your dog. As long as you are not being exceptionally pesky with your questions, they should answer your calls and emails about your puppy, and they look forward to your communications about the dog of their breeding, especially when you get your IPO titles!

## **Where to Find a Good Breeder**

Fortunately, finding a good breeder is not as difficult as it seems at first. Good breeders can be found through a combination of Schutzhund clubs, personal references from other handlers, trial results, and Internet searches.

### *Schutzhund Clubs*

Visit nearby IPO clubs, and attend their events. Look closely at dogs that you like. Ask questions about them, such as who the breeder is and who the parents are. Most handlers love to talk about their dogs, and will offer this information readily. Look closely also at dogs that you don't like, and see if you can figure out what, exactly, you do not like about them. You may find that the dogs you like (or don't like) all have something in common, such as a similar genetic lineage or pedigree, or perhaps they are all from the same breeder. This can guide you to a good breeder(s), and can also let you know what breeders you need to stay away from.

The Schutzhund club can also put you in direct contact with breeders, but don't feel pressured into having to buy one of their dogs, just because it's their club. The people at the club who are in the sport can be an invaluable source of information for telling you which breeders are producing nice dogs, as well as which breeders to stay away from!

### *Personal References and Trial Results*

When it comes to finding an IPO dog, personal recommendations from other handlers, trainers, or helpers is a good way to go, and can help you avoid the frustration of sorting through all the "breeders" out there. Take a look at the kennels/breeders other competitors are using for their dogs. Review trial results, particularly from trials in your area, and see which kennels are being utilized. How are the dogs performing? If you see different dogs from the same kennels earning their titles at various clubs across the country, then that is a good indication of a producing breeding program

Talk with people who are working dogs of your chosen breed, and they may guide you to a reputable breeder. But always evaluate your source. They should be someone who has experience in Schutzhund or is actively training their dog with a reputable helper at the moment. Many folks new to Schutzhund chime in with how wonderful their puppy is and how happy they were with the breeder, without having any real clue if this puppy is able to do Schutzhund or not, or if their breeder was actually a good one. Some of the ones who "gush" the most over their breeder bought a pet quality puppy from someone who fails to fulfill the four criteria mentioned earlier!

## Internet search

The Internet is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can be horribly misleading when searching for a good breeder. What shows up first in a Google search is not the quality of the breeder, but the quality of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for a person's website. The first page of search results often displays the "breeders" who invest in a good web designer and have optimized SEO content, *not* the best breeders who truly invest in your chosen breed.

But the benefit of the Internet is that you can verify breeder reputations, trial results, and more. You can search the breeder's kennel name, and see what comes up. Good reviews, bad reviews, complaints on Ripoff Report, trial results from across the country, pedigrees listed in online databases (which may also have trial results listed), etc.

You *can* use the internet to help you find potential breeders, but realize that you must aggressively sort out the commercial breeders and sub-par breeders who rely on a good website to sell their puppies. If visiting one of the popular message boards and online groups discussing bloodlines and breeders, you must also filter out those "breeders" who advertise puppies from unproven parents with no health tests and no titles. If you want a dog for IPO, you need to go to someone who does IPO, not someone who claims their puppies can succeed in this challenging sport without ever proving that the parents themselves could do it!

Be a savvy buyer, and take your time. Don't rush into getting a puppy. If you use the Internet to help you find a breeder, compare every breeder's website against the four characteristics listed earlier to sort out the bad ones. Ask for breeder recommendations from those already in IPO. The better informed you are as a buyer, the greater the likelihood that you will find a good breeder and get a healthy, well-bred puppy that will excel in Schutzhund.

## IMPORTING A DOG

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There are several different ways to approach importing. People can either do it themselves directly (with or without the help of a knowledgeable friend), or use a third-party broker.

### Importing A Dog Yourself

Importing a dog yourself can be a risky maneuver if you are new to Schutzhund! If you are set on importing a dog yourself, you may want to work with someone who has imported dogs before successfully and can help with this process, such as a fellow Schutzhund club member or your Training Director. Look for someone who is knowledgeable about the breed, has imported dogs successfully, and has trusted contacts overseas who can help locate good dogs.

Thoroughly vet the person from whom you are importing the dog. If this person is a breeder, hold them to the same high standards that you would a domestic breeder. Breeders in Europe title

their dogs before breeding them, so this criteria should already be met. Now look at the breeder's program. What have they produced from their program? Do they have a good reputation? Are there other dogs from their kennel here in the United States? If so, how are those dogs performing? What are they like? The more information you can gather about this breeder, the better.

If you are purchasing an older dog from a breeder or from another competitor overseas, then look at the dog very critically. Why is it being offered for sale? Ask for videos of the dog, and watch them with someone else who is knowledgeable about Schutzhund dogs, such as your Training Director or Helper at the club. Review the dog's pedigree with someone knowledgeable about your breed and bloodlines. Glean as much information as possible about this dog and about the person selling it. If you are purchasing an adult dog from a European broker, then a reliable, trustworthy vendor is essential!

## Using a Vendor

Most third-party dog brokers or vendors are already well-established in the working dog world and are in the business of importing dogs. They have a network of people in Europe from whom they purchase dogs. However, there are two different types of third-party vendors. There are those who "warehouse" a number of dogs that are already imported but not yet sold. They bring dogs in without necessarily having a buyer for them yet, and advertise them for sale once they are stateside. They may have what you want already, or they may not. But this means they will either try to convince you that one of the dogs in their kennel really is the perfect dog for you, or they must go out again to find and import what you want. Then there are the vendors who bring in only a few dogs at a time based on client needs, waiting until they have client requests before importing. This type of vendor is less common, but may be a more reliable way to ensure you are getting a good dog. They aren't in a hurry to move or sell dogs.

## Characteristics of Good Vendors

The most important thing when selecting a vendor is to find one with a stellar reputation. The best way to do this is by referral from someone who has used them before and trusts them.

There are several characteristics that separate good vendors from the rest. Good vendors:

- are knowledgeable about the dogs and the traits needed to succeed in IPO
- have reliable contacts for sourcing good dogs in Europe
- have a solid reputation for good business practices and dealings
- have satisfied customers who are pleased with the dogs they received
- answer questions and support their clients even after purchase of the dog
- ask you many questions to get a full picture of what you're looking for
- guarantee satisfaction upon delivery of the dog

Investigate any potential vendor thoroughly. Google their name and their business name. Read through both the good and bad reviews. See if they show up on Ripoff Report or other similar sites. Find someone who has used them before, so you can talk with them directly about their experience. Online IPO groups like those on Facebook can be an excellent way to do this, and increase the likelihood of finding someone who has used your particular dog broker.

## Red Flags

Below are some warning signs that may indicate a shady broker:

- Poor reviews from former clients
- Slow responses or no responses to your questions
- Emails from more than one address
- Pushing a dog on you that you don't really like
- Pushing dogs they have in their kennels right now as "the perfect dog" for you ("Any of these dogs would work for you!")
- Asks few questions, doesn't take the time to understand what you are looking for
- Does not guarantee satisfaction on delivery of the dog
- Has a poor reputation of support (refuses to answer questions after sales, no support if people have a concern or problem with the dog, etc.)

Choose your broker wisely! Remember that there is no guarantee when importing dogs. Anyone who is selling a dog will tell you "This is a good dog!" But it may not be the best dog for *you*.

## What To Expect

Every broker is different. For example, while it is an acceptable practice to ask for a deposit, some will ask for it, and some won't. Some will have a written contract, and others won't.

Once you make contact with the vendor, you will begin discussing your price range and the specific details of the dog you want. Be very clear on what you want, and be sure the terms of any agreements or deals are very clear for both the purchase and delivery of the dog. Expect the vendor to ask you a lot of questions; if they don't, that's a red flag.

Expect this process to take a little time. It can be anywhere from two weeks to several months before the vendor finds the dog that might work for you. The vendor may send you video of potential dogs, if they are finding more than one that might fit your search. Or they might just call and say "Hey, we found a dog that might work for you. Come take a look at him."

If you are purchasing the dog without seeing him in person first, then the vendor should be sending you several different videos showing the dog, his current level of work, and his general demeanor toward other people and his environment. If you are seeing the dog in person, then the vendor shouldn't just leave the dog in the crate or kennel when you come to visit. He should take the

dog out so you can look at him, evaluate his reaction to the environment and to you, see how he moves and acts, etc. The vendor may even work the dog so that you can see what training or foundation the dog already has, see his grips, and see his drive for the ball or tug or food.

## **Where To Find A Good Broker**

The best way to find a good broker is through personal referral. This means you will need to find someone who can give that recommendation. Schutzhund clubs and other competitors are your best bet for finding a good recommendation.

### *Schutzhund Clubs and Events*

Visit nearby IPO clubs, and attend their events. Talk with the people there. Some may already have experience with importing a dog or purchasing directly from a breeder overseas. Those who have been in the sport for a while can also tell you which dog brokers to avoid, as well. You may even find a connection within the club who can help you find a dog (they might charge you a finder's fee, because it takes a lot of work to locate a suitable dog). Make contacts at trials, at seminars, and at training. Hopefully you are part of a good club with helpful members and a knowledgeable training director, as this already puts you in contact with people who can help you on your search.

### *Other Competitors*

If you see a handler competing with a dog you like, and find a way to introduce yourself and talk to that competitor. See where they got their dog; it may be an import, or it may not. Connect with other folks who imported their dogs, and discuss the process with those who have done it successfully. Be sure you talk with those who are experienced at this, not just the new handler who completely lucked out with their first dog!

### *Internet*

You cannot rely on using a Google search to find a reliable broker. Just like with using the Internet to find a breeder, those brokers with the best SEO content will show up first. Search engine algorithms care little for the quality of a living product like a dog, only for the content of the website, so someone with an awesome website and great Search Engine Optimization will pull up first, even if they have a poor product. But the Internet can be a great tool for checking up on a potential broker as long as you sift through information critically.

## **CONCLUSION**

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There is much that goes into finding that right dog for IPO. But the more time you invest up front in researching and finding the right person to produce your dog, the better likelihood of finding a good IPO candidate and canine partner.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Finding a German Shepherd Puppy

[Prezi Presentation](#)

Unpacking a Pedigree

[Prezi Presentation](#)

United Schutzhund Clubs of America

[www.germanshepherddog.com](http://www.germanshepherddog.com)

American Working Malinois Association

[www.workingmalinois.org](http://www.workingmalinois.org)

United Doberman Club

[www.uniteddobermanclub.com](http://www.uniteddobermanclub.com)

United States Rottweiler Club

[www.usrconline.org](http://www.usrconline.org)

United States Boxer Association

[www.usboxer.org](http://www.usboxer.org)

The Working Riesenschnauzer Association (Giant Schnauzers)

[www.workingriesenschnauzer.com](http://www.workingriesenschnauzer.com)

Federation American Bulldog

[www.federationab.com](http://www.federationab.com)

North America Working Bouvier Association

[www.nawba.clubexpress.com](http://www.nawba.clubexpress.com)

Working Dutch Shepherd Association

[www.workingdutchshepherd.org](http://www.workingdutchshepherd.org)

Working Pit Bull Terrier Club of America

[www.wpbtca.com](http://www.wpbtca.com)

Cane Corso Association of America

[www.canecorso.org](http://www.canecorso.org)

Working Dog Rescue

[www.facebook.com/workingdogrescue](https://www.facebook.com/workingdogrescue)