

The German Breed Suitability Test

by Ottmar Vogel

A Breed Directive for the Dobermann

Ottmar Vogel is a DV, ADRK, SV Breed and Working Dog Judge, as well as a DV and ADRK Koer-Meister. The below extracts are from information sent to me in 1998.

Alison Kollenberg

Julie Stade has indicated that Ottmar Vogel is being asked to judge the Hutchinson Kennel Club's (HKC) show for both Dobermanns and Rottweilers in April 2002. The HKC spring show is held in Wichita, Kansas, as part of the Sunflower Cluster. In three days, there are four conformation shows for Dobermanns (one a specialty), four obedience trials (one a specialty), three agility trials, a WAC test, and lots of other interesting events to watch or participate in (a canine art show, herding, lure coursing, educational seminars, etc.).



I am glad to write to satisfy others interest in hearing about this most important of breed selections. However, in order to properly oblige, it is first necessary to more closely illuminate the history of our breed since I became involved in it.

I started dog training as a student in 1954. My first dog was a German Shepherd without a pedigree. A dog that possessed a difficult and nervous character. Therefore it came about I had already joined a dog club in my home town as early as 1955, in order to learn how one goes about training a dog. Although it turned out the level of knowledge concerning instruction and training of working dogs was not particularly high in that club, I nevertheless quickly recognized the importance of a dog's character. I attended my first dog show in Nuremberg in 1956 and it was here I first noticed the Dobermann breed. From then on my attention became focused on this elegant and yet powerful, muscular thoroughbred. In my many discussions with exhibitors and breeders I tried to acquire a more global level of knowledge and furthermore tried to find out how and where a Dobermann might be trained or entered in a working trial.

In those days many horror stories made the rounds about the Dobermann. From owners and breeders alike, not to mention the uninitiated. To put it bluntly, the Dobermann did not have a particularly good reputation. On one hand the dog was supposed to possess a great fearlessness, courage and toughness, coupled with loyalty and considerable obedience control, while on the other hand many claimed him to be untrustworthy and cunning and inclined with increasing age towards disobedience and aggressive acts, even against his master! The breed standard however, spoke, amongst other things, of a confident and courageous working dog, which fearlessly defends family and property while being easy to train and keen to work.

During my research I soon discovered that the breed standard and the reality often differed from each other

considerably. When I acquired my first Dobermann in the spring of 1960, I had already taken four different dogs to SchH3 level, among them some with difficult characters, such as a Collie with which I took to a SchH2. (The breeder and owner of this Collie also happened to be a member of my dog club and the challenge had attracted me.) Furthermore I was able to train and later qualify as a helper at my club and as such achieved nominations to serve at two regional working trials. Having created myself a sound practical basis I could now devote more intensive attention

to the Dobermann. By attending many shows and working trials I had the opportunities to study the breed up close. In addition to the Dobermann, I have always owned or worked with other working breeds and consequently I never failed to objectively assess our Dobermanns – any shortcomings or failings were not hidden behind a set of rose-coloured Dobermann glasses.

With only few exceptions, the majority of the Dobermann breeders understood little about the desirable character make-up, as hardly any of them involved themselves in the training or the working side. Character, however, can only be correctly assessed while working with the dog. Many times I discovered the most beautiful Dobermann at the show had unstable character and a suspect nervous costume.

Occasionally, when a breed judge felt that a character assessment ought to be carried out, faulty procedures were adopted. More often than not the aggressive dog was awarded the good character rating, as he reacted aggressively immediately, when subjected to but little pressure. Dog fights in the show ring occurred quite frequently, occasionally

resulting in minor injuries. Most of these attacks originated from fear related stress situations, or simply because the handler himself wanted to demonstrate "proper" character and temperament.

I always distanced myself from such activities. Compounding the situation was the fact that many leading breed judges and eminent Dobermann personalities of the day never professed their commitment to

the Dobermann as a working dog, and furthermore, held incorrect cynological opinions about the dog, which they nevertheless expounded to the Dobermann world. One would quite frequently hear from the then first Chairman and his Chief Breed Warden that character and



temperament were not inherited, but could only be acquired through training. Naturally this was absolute nonsense but it fitted in with the politics of the Verein of the day.

These were the circumstances under which the DV Chief Breed Warden constructed a so-called Breed Suitability Test (ZTP), which, in consequence, led to totally incorrect assessments, due to lack of proper examinations and a clear line. Dogs of sound character and disposition, as seen from today's view, were classified as 1B, because they reacted openly and without aggression when subjected to normal pressure while at rest. Aggressive and unstable dogs were awarded the desired 1A grading, without anybody ever conducting a test of their courage or defensive strength. Neither was their sensitivity to noise ever assessed.

It was against this background I was elected onto the Executive Committee of the Dobermann Verein (DV) in 1969, as the Chairman of Training and Working Disciplines. At this point in time I had already trained a number of Dobermanns (seven to be exact) and taken some to inter-district qualification trials and as high as National Sieger Working Trials. Contrary to the general opinion, it was clear to me that a number of drastic measures had to be taken if the standard and the reputation of the Dobermann as a working dog was to be improved.



Dr. Pezzano, Jens Kollenberg OTTMAR VOGEL

In 1969, after the cancellation of the German Working Trial Championship for Dobermanns (DV Meisterschaft) on account of insufficient quality and quantity of entries and of certain articles published in the Verein's journal (Unser Dobermann), a survey of the breed was conducted. As a consequence I established for the Verein the first standard for a Koerung, together with a manual for procedure, which enabled us to identify the "elite" in character as well as conformation - where it still existed. In order to maintain uniformity of assessment these Koerung tests were always conducted by the same Koerung Committee. The assessment of the character and nervous disposition rested mainly with me. In addition I was responsible for the selection of suitable helpers, who, for the benefit of the Breed, had to be fair, but at the same time had to work strictly in accordance with prescribed procedures.

In the early Seventies we sometimes had a failure rate of more than 80% from those dogs entered for character assessment. The Sieger dogs of the conformation ring hardly ever presented themselves for this test and it was not unusual for such dogs to fail to comply with the required character image of the breed standard. But at the Working Championships we also had to bemoan the number of failures, which, almost without exception, could be ascribed to nervous instability and the inability to withstand pressure.

In 1971, against the will of the DV President, I achieved, with the support of the membership of the Verein, a ruling

that the Sieger title at the annual DV Sieger show and Bundessieger show could only be awarded to dogs which had achieved a minimum working qualification of SchH1 and also had passed a ZTP. I considered the ZTP of that day to be inadequate and consequently I designed a new ZTP test, together with a manual of procedure, which is still in force today. The criteria of this new ZTP, which was accepted by a 2/3 majority at the 1975 AGM in Wiesbaden, was designed with the view of improving the self-assurance, nervous disposition, stability and natural drives in our dogs, and in doing so I also had to overcome the resistance of the Executive Committee.

As our breed is frequently endowed with a rather high temperament and as many judges are incapable of distinguishing between correct temperament and nervousness, I also had to offer enlightenment in this regard. The assessment of these crucial points could only be carried out successfully by means of an isolation test using highly skilled breed judges. Here too I had to adopt unpopular measures for the benefit of the breed. Judges, who themselves are not free of inhibitions and not strong of nerve, cannot correctly conduct this isolation test. Therefore only certain breed judges were selected by me for training and subsequently nominated as ZTP judges. (Footnote: In 1998 Ottmar Vogel spoke publicly at a Landesgruppe Bayern meeting criticizing the Executive for appointing judges who were not properly qualified for their job.)



It is acknowledged worldwide today among Dobermann experts that since the inception of the ZTP in 1976 there has been an enormous improvement in the character of our breed. Naturally a similar interest in improving the conformation has been a goal to foster as well.

Today, some 22 years after the inception of ZTP, we've seen great leaps forward in our aim for creating a beautiful Dobermann of sound character. And we also find ZTP tests, in

compliance with the German model, are being held in fellow IDC member countries, such as Italy and South Africa. As the acquisition of a ZTP is NOT a breeding prerequisite in these countries, great responsibility rests with their individual Breed Specialty Clubs to ensure that only robust, stable Dobermanns of sound character and correct working temperament are considered for breeding.

Uncomplicated and healthy Dobermanns promote our breed and future Dobermann lovers and enthusiasts will be disappointed by nervous and unstable dogs, resulting in a loss of interest in our breed. It is the duty of all persons in charge of our breed to uphold and maintain these values for future generations.

Ottmar Vogel, Ansbach - April, 1998