

Conditioning the German Shepherd Dog, Part 1

Contributed by Administrator
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This essay is limited to dogs that are German working lines or German show lines.

In 1965, while stationed at the sub base in New London Connecticut, the military assigned me to run the Harvard Step Test (HST) at the Navy's Medical Research Laboratory. This test was designed at the famed Harvard College to measure motivation. In this particular application the HST was to be used to measure the physical motivation of military personnel applying for Nuclear Submarine Service. Upon the conclusion of the test, the Navy claimed a correlation existed between those that scored high on the (HST) and those that did well in Submarine School.

I believe a similar correlation exists between the Gravity Treadmill Test and dogs embarking upon a career as police or working dogs.

Few challenges test nerves like a Gravity Mill. If you have a yearling dog that masters the mill in one session, that dog's nerve is plenty thick. A high probability exists that this dog's confidence will prove true in the field as well as in actual Police/ Military combat. It is important to note, when a yearling GSD is put on a mill his Hazard Reaction Time is working against him. The converse would be true in the case of a six-week-old pup whose Hazard Reaction Time is in the embryonic stages of development.

Here is a constructive way to exploit a 42-day-old pup with positive results and reduced stress. The key is to place the six-week-old pup on the mill. Encourage him to play and hang out. Both verbal anesthesia and rubbing are important. I also like to let the pup shake a rag or play any enjoyable biting game. Within several days the pup is as comfortable on the mill as on solid ground. He now assumes Terra Firma is not his only home. A truly priceless assumption.

My assertion is simple, the younger the dog the faster the pup will adapt to the mill. Within a week or two the pup's athleticism and confidence will move from walking to running.

I feel so strongly about a dog's mill performance, I am comfortable suggesting the issue of mill – work play an important part in breeding considerations.

For many years I have worked the GSD in a manner that is unique to the breed. Many view my approach with an open mind and have benefited. However, other folks primarily from Europe, Perceive my work with suspicion, perhaps even contempt.

The German Shepherd Dog is a solid candidate for Gravity Treadmill Training (GTT). The appliance or mill should have wooden slats. These slats are attached to a soft belt (not tight) that reduces the dog's walking - running impact as well as frame harmonics. The belt is the most important part of the Mill's action. The Tread Mill's frame should preferably have an adjustable incline and be made of rigid materials, preferably steel. In addition, it should be large enough to accommodate the dog's width, but more importantly, it is imperative that it addresses the Shepherd's unique length.

When a mill is well constructed with a properly fabricated geometry, the dog or athlete will feel unrestricted, capable of turning 180 degrees or sitting if desired. The dog should be given every opportunity to rest when needed. Never force a dog to run a mill! Should your dog not perform up to your expectations do not allow your annoyance to become visible. Never let your dog know he has failed. Your dog's mill imprint must be positive. Tomorrow is another day.

The advantages of this type of training are often subtle. Careful observations will suggest milling benefits are both anatomical and psychological. In addition to the obvious improvements i.e. endurance, stronger shoulders, spine and rear quarter. However, another improvement is quietly developing, (most of the time) without detection. The athlete begins to demonstrate gyroscopic motor skills, more confidence and a healthier look.

On a humorous note, once a dog is broken to the mill, it is common for dogs to become vocal and make repetitious vertical jumps prior to running. I refer to this behavior as mill addiction.

Decoys and helpers often notice more confidence and fight in dogs that are exposed to the GTT strategy. When a dog's air and motor skills are improved by the GTT strategy the dog tends to put more pressure on the decoy/helper.

My experience (with properly milled dogs) asserts that milling neither promotes nor reduces skeletal problems. Dogs with health problems should not be milled. A dog in a basic keep should not be milled more than 2 or 3 times per week. The time duration determined by knowing how to read the dog. In reading the GSD correctly you will avoid over use

problems and eventual injury.

Obviously, this essay reflects how passionate we feel about milling the GSD. It is predicated on opinion and based on anecdotal evidence.