

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a green corduroy jacket, leaning over a dog. The dog is looking up at the man with its mouth open, showing its teeth. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

**THE ORIGINS OF THE MODERN AMERICAN POLICE K9**  
***THE K9 SPORTS OF EUROPE***

BY JERRY BRADSHAW, TARHEEL CANINE TRAINING



If you are working with an imported German shepherd dog or Belgian Malinois from Europe, it is important to know what your dog already knows so you don't confuse him in your training program with feedback that runs counter to his prior training. Virtually all dogs imported into this country from Europe got their start as sport dogs in the various dog sports of Europe. Your dog may have been started as a sport dog in one of these clubs if he is a fairly young green dog, or if he is actually a titled dog, your dog may have a lot of very particular training geared toward these sports. Understanding some of the particularities of these sports will help you understand your police dog that much better.

In Europe there is a history and a large network of dog dealers that starts at the grass-roots of the sport clubs in every country. Dogs are bought and sold all the time, and because there are literally hundreds of thousands of people competing in dog sports across Europe, and a 110 year history of breeding performance dogs in Europe for these sports, this is where our dogs come from. The small dealers visit clubs and individual breeders and buy dogs to sell to mid-level dealers, who then take groups of dogs to the large international dealers based in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, and Slovakia for purchase and resale to trainers and police dog vendors in the US as well as police and militaries in countries all over the world.

When these dogs come to you, the handler, they have a history and a foundation of training that is often particular to where they come from. In this article we take a little tour through Europe to understand these origins and some of the performance requirements particular to the K9 Sports of Europe.

## **Holland (The Netherlands)**

For 30 years Holland has been well known as the country of origin for many police dogs here in the US, in particular Belgian Malinois. Most of the world's largest canine vendors who sell all around the world are based in Holland. In Holland the national dog sport is the KNPV, literally translated as the "Royal Dutch Police Dog Association." The sport, founded in 1907, is practiced all over the

country in KNPV clubs that are sanctioned by the government in Holland. These clubs, like virtually all dog sport clubs in Europe, are comprised of private citizens (some are police officers) who come together to train their dogs and certify them at competitive trials as a hobby. Trials are hosted during the year in clubs and then the season culminates with various regional championships and finally a national championship. Most competitors start with a puppy and train the dog up through the PH 1 certification, or Politehond 1, literally translated as Police Dog Level 1. Many green dogs imported into the USA have been started in the KNPV program of training but for one reason or another they are sold prior to completing the PH 1 certificate. Though called a police dog certificate, it is not the end for a dog that will be used on the street in Holland. All dogs accepted into police dog training programs in Holland must be certified as a PH 1 prior to beginning training for the police department. Thus the PH 1 is a beginning rather than the end of a Dutch police dog's career.

The KNPV organization offers certifications in many areas. The PH 1 certificate is not a title. This is why most dogs are sold after they have achieved the PH 1. If the handler were to show the dog in a trial, other than a regional or national trial, and subsequently fail, the certification is pulled. Therefore most PH 1 dogs are sold to the police in Holland or to dog brokers in Holland who then sell the dogs to vendors in the US or other countries around the world. There is a PH 2 certificate, object guard certificate, and various tracking and search and rescue certifications as well.

In the KNPV program, most of the exercises do not come with a lot of pressure from the decoy except for the courage test, called by the Dutch the "stok stellen" or stick attack. In this one exercise, there is a hit with a six-foot willow stick across the dog's withers prior to him biting the decoy in the front shoulder or legs. This test of courage includes a send of about 60 yards prior to the impact and is a very spectacular exercise in the PH 1 certification. Many of the other exercises include fleeing attacks where the decoy agitates and then runs away, or pedals away on a bike for an apprehension on a bicycle.

A KNPV trial is organized with the obedience, agility, retrieving





and swimming exercises done first thing in the morning, followed by what they refer to as the “small” bite work which includes transports, object guarding, and food refusal exercises. The “big” bite work is normally viewed together by everyone at the trial, while the other exercises are rotated through during the morning and early afternoon. The big bite work includes the stick attack, fleeing attack with gunfire, bicycle attack (fleeing), call off (recall) and the reviere exercise (This exercise mimics the stick attack but the decoy goes passive and the dog must not bite but hold and bark. It used to be referred to as the extra exercise, but has since become a mandatory exercise). In the stok-stellen exercise, once the stick hit is delivered and the dog is in the grip, there is little or no pressure put on the dog by the decoy. On most of the other exercises the pressure put on the dogs is minimal. Therefore if you have a PH 1 dog or a dog trained in the KNPV program he will be generally used to targeting in the left bicep area on frontal attacks as his normal target area and the triceps on fleeing attacks. The dog may be trained to bite legs on handler attacks, so be careful working only in a jacket top. His training will be primarily on a bite suit. He will generally have had no formal tracking training, but will likely have been exposed to article search. The dog is given clear targeting on entries. All exercises are conducted outside on a field or in the woods, and no buildings are used in trials.

## Belgium

The national dog sport of Belgium is Belgian Ring Sport. Belgian ring is sponsored by two different organizations, the NVBK, or National Verbond, and the Belgian FCI Registry (like our AKC) St. Hubertis. The rules are essentially the same with well-defined exercises in all levels. However the environmental distractions can change dramatically from one trial to another. If you watch videos of Belgian ring sport you will see that a premium is placed on environmental distractions. The dogs must go through water distractions, unstable footing, curtains of bottles and streamers, and other situational distractions. Belgian Ring has categories of competition from Level 3 to Level 1 with Level 1 being the highest level of competition, and Level 3 being the lowest. Typical exercises include obedience routines, face attacks (courage tests), and protection of master when he is touched by the decoy, transports, call offs, searches for the helper (decoy) and object guarding. There are

muzzle attacks in Belgian Ring where the decoy wears only civilian clothes. Decoys in Belgian ring typically will put very little stick pressure on the dog once his is on the bite. A full, hard grip is highly valued in the point system, and decoys do not try to eschive the dog, or make him miss the bite as he approaches the decoy as they do in French Ring. The dogs are used to being given stable targets upon entry. Dogs are used to biting the forearm target area exclusively in Belgian ring, or the shin area on the legs. Belgian ring dogs may have never been exposed to bicep targets.

Mondio Ring is also very popular in Belgium and many other countries in Europe. Mondio ring means “world” ring, and as such is a sport that crosses international boundaries. When it began it was billed as a “combination” sport of Belgian Ring, French Ring, KNPV and Schutzhund (now IPO). There are clubs all over the world, but in Belgium many competitors compete both in Belgian Ring as well as in Mondio trials. Targets are also provided in Mondio and the pressure from various distractions used by the decoy can be more challenging than Belgian Ring. Dogs are expected to target multiple areas on the suit, including biceps in both arms, and perform a variety of exercises from obedience, agility, and protection work with tests of courage, call-offs, retrieving, transports and searching. The pressure is moderate, and the dogs are also expected to face environmental distractions as in Belgian ring.

## France

French Ring is the national canine sport of France, however, Mondio Ring, as well as a sport called Campagne, is also popular. French ring is unique among dog sports because French Ring is basically a competition between the decoy and the dog, where the decoy is attempting to steal points from the dog by making him miss the grip in many of the exercises, through a technique called the eschive. The decoy will attempt to make a very athletic move, at the last second, to cause the dog to shoot by the decoy. Missing the entry to the grip costs the team points. This is why most French Ring dogs are taught to target high on the legs, or in the torso, making it more difficult for the dog to fall for the eschive. Decoys typically put a lot of stick pressure on the dog once he is in the grip. Because the object is to ‘steal points’ from the dog, the fullness of the grip is not highly valued in the points system. Obviously, targets are not given, and the dogs often are used to getting frontal grips, and many do not



adjust or counter to fuller grips for fear of losing the grip and losing points, thus for the purposes of full grips to cause pain compliance, ring sport dogs are not often bred for their grips.

There is no tracking in the ring sports, although there are scent discrimination exercises. There is no building work, and while the Belgian ring dogs are exposed to many kinds of environmental distractions on their competition fields, many of them only train and show in competitions at their home fields. This it is important to see these dogs perform in neutral places to really evaluate their value as potential police dogs.

## Germany

Germany has always been known as the land of Schutzhund, which in 2012 was officially renamed IPO and made an international sport under one set of rules. Prior to 2012 IPO existed in other countries around the world but was called schutzhund in Germany and the USA. IPO is a sport that encompasses tracking, obedience, and protection in very stylized routines, which grow in complexity from IPO 1 to the highest level IPO 3. Each routine is worth 100 points and top competitors often come close to perfect scores at major competitions. The protection work in IPO is all done on an exposed sleeve. There are no bite suits or hidden sleeves used in IPO. Converting a dog from IPO to Police work must involve training the equipment orientation out of the dog (sometimes referred to as the dog being “sleeve happy” as he is used to all his biting taking place on this one piece of equipment), exposing the dog to working in buildings, and getting the dog to understand that human scent rather than only ground disturbance in tracking is important.

## Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, including the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic (which are two very big exporters of German shepherd dogs to the US), there is the SVV (Slovakia) and the ZVV (Czech Republic). These titles are very similar to Schutzhund or IPO titles but are sponsored by state organizations, and include some other exercises in the agility and protection work that has more of a police work flavor to them. There are levels from SVV1 through SVV3 and ZVV1 through ZVV3. IPO under FCI rules is also very popular, and overtaking the traditional state sports for the most part, though some die hard competitors will title their dogs in both SVV or ZVV and IPO.

I encourage you to ask your vendor where your dog is coming from, so you can learn more about the various sports that are the foundation of your police dog's prior training. Take a look at youtube videos of these sports so you can see what these dogs can do and what they are expected to do. Know what the commands are that your dog already knows! Changing commands or giving the wrong or mispronounced commands is a big problem. When we go and do seminars and see that handlers are giving the wrong commands to the dog, often changing the command to what the dog expects can solve a lot of conflict problems in a hurry! If your vendor tells you the dogs are born and bred for only police work in Europe you are not being told the truth. In Europe there are literally hundreds of thousands of people participating in dogs sports across all the major countries of western and eastern Europe, and the vast majority of dogs that make it to the US to be used in our police dog training programs

spend some of their life in sport training clubs, or their trainers are members of these clubs and the style of foundation training depends a lot on the country of origin. If you buy a titled dog, you must know what your dog knows (you should receive a score book with the official title and scores recorded in it) so that you don't confuse him or expect him to do something he knows in a particular context. In IPO the blind search for a passive subject will result in a bark and hold not a bite, so if your titled IPO dog fails to engage a suspect in plain sight during a building search and starts to hold and bark you know why! If that same IPO dog has trouble with the hidden sleeve or engaging a suit, you will know why. If your dog that was started in a KNPV program bites a sleeve poorly because he was started on a suit rather than on a sleeve you might know why. If your dog was started in IPO and excels at tracking it may have something to do with his prior training, just as a dog from Holland or Belgium may be confused the first few times you try to offer him food on a track (because of food refusal exercises in those sports).

In our handler courses we spend time showing these various sports to them so they can place what they do every day into the context of these European sports. There are hundreds of videos to watch on all these sports on YouTube.

Useful Links: [www.knpv.nl](http://www.knpv.nl) • [www.nvbk.org](http://www.nvbk.org) • [www.germanshepherddog.com](http://www.germanshepherddog.com)  
[www.usmondioring.org](http://www.usmondioring.org) • [www.psak9.org](http://www.psak9.org) • [www.ringsport.org](http://www.ringsport.org)



Jerry Bradshaw is Training Director & President of Tarheel Canine Training, Inc. in Sanford, North Carolina. Jerry has been training dogs for competitive protection sports since 1991, and has competed in National Championship trials in both Schutzhund and PSA, winning the PSA National Championships in 2003 with his dog Ricardo v.d. Natuurzicht PSA 3. Jerry has trained many Belgian Malinois to the highest titles in the sports in which he competed including Arrow of Tigerpaws, SchH 3, BH; Ben von Lowenfels, SchH 2, BH; Rocky de la Maison Des Lions PSA 3; and Ricardo v.d. Natuurzicht PH 1, PSA 3.

Tarheel Canine Training Inc. is a nationally renowned training facility for police service dogs, and has placed trained police dogs at federal, state and local law enforcement agencies nationally and internationally since 1993. Jerry is often a featured speaker at national police K9 conferences, and travels extensively giving seminars to police departments, the US Military, and sport trainers across the United States. Jerry has written a book, *Controlled Aggression*, which is rapidly becoming the standard text for understanding the fundamentals of canine aggression training for police service, personal protection, and competitive dog sports. Jerry also maintains a free blog at [www.tarheelcanine.com](http://www.tarheelcanine.com).

Many of the training concepts mentioned in this article are covered in depth in published articles available on the Tarheel Canine website at [www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/](http://www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/)

Please feel free to make your handlers, trainers, and training groups aware of this resource.