



BUYING THE RIGHT BITE SUIT FOR THE POLICE K9 UNIT

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Buying a bite suit for your K9 unit can be an intimidating proposition because it is, aside from the dog and the vehicle, the most expensive single piece of equipment out there, and there are many options. The basic suit styles you can choose from are the Dutch Training Suit, French-Cut Ring Training Suit, and Kimono Training Suit. There are many other brands and some other styles, but these styles are the most prevalent and popular.



DUTCH TRAINING SUIT

The Dutch Training suit is based on the model of the KNPV (Royal Dutch Police Dog Association) trial bite suit. A KNPV trial suit is often referred to as “leather and Jute” because there is leather under-suit that is placed on the decoy, and then a jute cover goes over the leather. It is not a one piece construction, and is cumbersome to take on and off as one might in training. The Dutch training suit was developed as a mimic of the KNPV suit, but made in its construction out of layers of material into a jacket and pants set that is easy to get on and off. The style of the suit is to look just like a KNPV suit, there is very little to no padding in the chest and back areas. All the upper padding is in the biceps and shoulder area, where the dogs are commonly taught to grip. The pants are not very mobile. The jute material in the best suits of Dutch design is a lot harder and slicker than typical French or Belgian suit designs. I have had many comments that dogs trained only on Belgian or French suits made of French linen have a hard time biting the Dutch training suits. They often slip out of the grip, because the Dutch suit is much more challenging to bite. Therefore, I like it as a training jacket, and for foundation work in training with the suit. My decoys do not prefer it for trial work because it lacks mobility, and they can’t run as freely, or use their arms as freely. The Dutch suit arms are also not tapered toward the hands, and usually have a large opening at the hands and the suit comes long in the arms and covers the hands. Many decoys do not like this because they like their hands to be out in order to use them to manage sticks and distractions. These suits also usually have the feature of jute covers over the arms, to provide a double layer of jute in the arms, so that the covers can be replaced and sewn over the suit itself. Therefore when the cover begins to wear, the suit doesn’t need major work, just a new cover.

RING TRAINING SUITS

The Belgian and French ring training suits come generally in a French Cut style and a Kimono Style (a distinctly American preference catered to our market by the suit manufacturers in Europe and American manufacturers). A true Belgian Ring suit is not generally used anywhere outside Belgium. This is because in Belgian Ring, dogs bite only forearm and/or shins in the trial, and the suits are made in a French cut style (the jacket and pants constructed like a French ring suit to be form fitting to the body), with very little padding anywhere but in these designated target areas. In fact in a Belgian suit, the forearms and shins are heavily reinforced with jute covers sewn over the suit material. This cover is made thick and hard to challenge the dog’s grip. In Belgian Ring the grip is heavily pointed, so the grip is heavily tested by this construction. In the versions of the Belgian suits sold to US customers, there is no jute reinforcement. So in essence there is little difference between French ring suits and Belgian ring suits made for the US market.

Ring suits also come in different weights. There is a competition weight (lightest with least padding). A semi-competition weight, and a training weight (heaviest padding and weight all around). Many skilled decoys choose to buy pants in the competition weight to allow running and maximum mobility with the least restriction, and the jacket of a semi-competition weight maybe with some additional reinforcement in the bicep/tricep area where many of the grips are taken and proper targeting is encouraged. Lighter weighted suits can be reinforced with neoprene gauntlets or better with horse-wraps (the felt wraps sold in packs of 4 rolls used to wrap the legs of horses), applied to target areas in the bicep, forearms, or legs to disperse bite pressure, but preserving the feel for the dog of a real human extremity.

Therefore, the ring suits we see in the United States are French Style or Kimono Style without the jute reinforcements. The French cut suit is usually made to form fit the decoy without a lot of excess material in the shoulder or trap area. The legs and bicep areas are more padded than in the Dutch suits. The arms are usually tapered through the forearm and lack padding there, making it painful to take bites in the forearm. The suit is padded fairly well in the bicep and shoulder areas, and often these suits are custom made, and extra padding like Kevlar can be put in the target areas that get the most use. Further low profile suits like these ring suits in semi-comp and comp style can have jogging suits put over them to create realistic hidden equipment to complement the hidden sleeve.



KIMONO STYLE SUIT

The Kimono style, generally sold to US police only, features a large jacket and pants set with a lot of excess material in the legs, arms and the shoulders and body. The arms attach to the jacket in more of a “flying squirrel” style. The arms are not separate but blended into the body of the jacket, with no seams in the shoulder. There is a lot of excess material in the arms, biceps and shoulders which keeps the decoy from feeling the grip. Some people like these jackets because it provides a lot of extra protection for the decoy. This is in my opinion a huge mistake for police K9 applications. These suits create dogs that are satisfied with material bites and never feel the human underneath. This kind of suit can make a dog a “clothes-ripper” on the street. The dog should, in my opinion, grip into the decoy not just the suit. If the dog only gets material, and is satisfied with that, he will seek the same on the street, in fact backing out of a grip on an arm or leg to find material only.

Some US suit manufacturers market the suits to US Police K9 units as suits in which you will not feel the bites. If you don't feel the bites, you won't create good police dogs with an affinity for the man rather than material. Further, encouraging dogs to bite “anywhere” without proper targeting is another topic of discussion I have addressed elsewhere. Kimono suits with their padding everywhere, lead handlers to think that allowing their dogs to get grips everywhere and anywhere on the body is good training. It is absolutely not a good idea, but that is a topic I covered in another article in another magazine, available on my website with the link at the end.



CONCLUSIONS

I like to train with a combination of Dutch suits and French cut ring suits in semi-comp for training. You should have your suits made to your measurements, so that you are working in a suit that allows you maximum mobility and fits you properly. Many K9 units in an effort to save money will buy one big suit that everyone works in, however, for the smallest guy in the training group, the suit fits poorly. It is best to buy a couple of suits so that each decoy has a pretty well fitting suit, allowing proper mobility not just for the dog, but for safety as well. Having the ability to react to the dog properly in a suit that fits will reduce mistakes and potential injuries to both the decoy and the dog. It will allow the dog to feel the human under the material and produce a dog who seeks to feel that in training and then that will transfer to the street. If you create a material biter in training you will get that same behavior on the street. Proper equipment such as proper sleeves to build grips, allow targeting in the upper bicep area, legs, and hidden sleeves that are very low profile are critical to the training mission of the police dog. Dogs that willingly and convincingly engage a man with no equipment on is the ultimate goal of our training. Choosing the right training equipment to reach these goals is imperative as is proper decoy training.

For a suggested list of proper training equipment based on the Tarheel Canine Training System™ feel free to email me at jbradshaw@tarheelcanine.com as well as check the articles on our website regarding targeting in the bite suit and man-orientation training at: www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/ for training articles and for upcoming decoy seminars at www.tarheelcanine.com/events/ and on www.facebook.com/Tarheel.K9

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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.

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/

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

