

DEVELOPING GREEN POLICE DOGS FOR PATROL: PUSHING & PUNISHING GRIPS

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BUYING GREEN DOGS NOW & THEN

The landscape of buying green dogs for police work has changed dramatically over the last decade. Eastern Europe has supplanted Holland as the primary supplier of dogs for police and military uses. Though the world's largest police dog vendors are still in Holland, their buying pattern has shifted from inside Holland to Eastern Europe as their primary source for large numbers of police dog candidates. The dogs are getting younger and younger at the time of sale to vendors. This means end users are buying younger dogs for police dog classes. Comparing the dog you started class with 10 years ago and the new dog you just started class with today is unfair because the dogs of today tend to be younger and less mature and have had fewer encounters with decoys, pressure and environmental challenges than dogs of 10 years ago. They may have tons of drive and be genetically gifted but they are still relatively young and immature.

Holland is the home of KNPV and the dog sports of Eastern Europe are primarily IPO and the Czech and Slovak sports of ZVV and SVV are fairly similar to IPO. Believe it or not, this information matters and police dog trainers need to know the dog sports





of the world. The fact is there are no European “police dog breeding kennels.” Brokers across Eastern and Western Europe buy dogs for resale. The reason there are so many dogs in Europe is a combination of the tradition of using dogs for work and the many dog sports that exist in each country. Belgium has Belgian Ring, Holland has the KNPV, France has French Ring and Germany has Schutzhund (now called IPO worldwide). In fact, every country in Europe has the sport of IPO. Even relatively small countries like Holland and Belgium have large numbers of people participating in dog sports, so to supply the demand for dog sports, working puppies are being bred and often washed out of competition. Because of the close availability of quality breeding stock, if a young dog isn’t going to make the points in the sport, handlers often sell the

young adult to a dog broker and get a new pup. Those dog brokers then sell the dog to vendors in the US. In Eastern Europe, some IPO competitors often raise puppies along with training their competition dogs for the express purpose of selling them back to brokers who then sell them directly to US vendors or to larger brokers in Holland. These pups are raised with their end purpose in mind, yet their training is influenced by the sports in which their handlers participate.

In my book **Controlled Aggression**, in one of the appendices, I go into some detail about the differences among the various protection sports of Europe and how that affects the behaviors of dogs coming from those backgrounds. In this article, I want to primarily focus on the impact the background of these dogs has on their early training for police dogs in their patrol work,

specifically in their gripping and pushing behavior.

PUSHING VS PULLING

Dogs coming from Holland primarily are coming from KNPV clubs and trainers familiar with that program. KNPV dogs bite in a certain style. They are taught to bite full mouth and push into the grip, bringing the fight to the man. The grips can often “pulse” when the dog gets full mouth and they continue to push in with their entire bodies, occasionally thrashing after a strong push. The rules of KNPV do not penalize the dog for pulsing a full grip. In fact, it is seen as a good thing that the dog pushes his whole body into the decoy and crushes the bicep with a full powerful grip. The dogs will often bear-hug the decoy with their front legs,

rather than push off the decoy.

As police dog trainers, many of us see this as an ideal grip, as the dog is always hunting for the grip to be full and if not, to take the earliest opportunity to push into the grip. When the dog bites a suspect and only gets a shallow grip, maybe even on clothing, the pusher has been trained to be unsatisfied with this frontal grip and will, with his whole body, seek to fill his mouth and improve his grip position to the molars. These biting mechanics are taught from puppyhood. We often teach puppies to bite leather straps with their molars to set the foundation for gripping all the way back. When you watch a pushing powerful dog bite, his whole body moves into the decoy; his back legs are driving into the decoy like a defensive tackle bull rushing a guard. Good decoys encourage this behavior by moving backwards when the dog presses in.

Dogs coming primarily from an IPO background bite in a completely different style and tend to be pullers rather than pushers. The dog bites and often immediately drops his weight and steadily provides resistance, pulling on the sleeve. In the sport of IPO, over the last 5 years this behavior has been encouraged even more

by the rule changes and judging directives. Dogs are expected to pull and pull steadily and hard. By this method, the dog's grip is set by the dog's own back pressure and the grip stays in place and doesn't move. This is simply a stylized preference of biting mechanics the rules of the sport of IPO support. The decoy in a trial has to fight against this resistance. The dogs are seen as "fighting" to stop the decoy from moving when escaping or making it difficult to drive the dog as he resists the press of the drive.

The problem with pulling when we go to make the dog a police dog is that we, by nature, have to place the dog in uncomfortable situations by dragging the dog on slippery floors, through tight spaces, over couches and other obstacles, thresholds to doorways, etc., and when the dog is faced with this environmental pressure, his "fighting style" of pulling is actually taking him away from the fight. So if the dog gets pulled into an uncomfortable situation and maybe has a less than full grip on initial entry and stress builds, he has learned to resolve conflict by fighting with pulling and can often slide off of the grip from his own pulling or actually pop off of the grip. This style of fighting in my opinion must be changed to make the dog ideal for po-



lice work. The pulling dog needs to be taught to push.

Pullers that get a lousy grip on a human being in police work may just get a grip on clothing or a frontal grip on a body part. Their training creates an impulse to drop weight and pull and if there is no human in the grip, just clothing, this will result in gaining *no pain compliance*. The dog can get conditioned to ripping at clothing and this severe situation becomes an officer safety issue. The dog that pushes and counters at every opportunity resolves stress and conflict by coming into the fight. As the dog loses a grip and gets clothing, they are unsatisfied and want to push in hard and find the man underneath the clothing. This then is a more ideal fighting style for the police dog because it brings with it the pain compliance we require.

The younger the dog is, the easier it is to teach the dog to counter and eventually push. When dogs arrive from Eastern Europe, in our initial evaluation of the dogs, we note if the dog is a pusher or a puller and if the dog has a tendency to pull, we must teach the dog to push before we start doing much else. Some dogs are sold to brokers in Europe because they refuse to pull and for us, that is a bonus, as they already bite in the style we prefer and were sold because for their



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sport of choice, they would have lost points. But if they do as they are being taught in IPO circles in Europe and pull against the decoy, we have to change that style.

TEACHING THE DOG TO PUSH

The fundamental behavior that leads to pushing behavior is the *counter* (where the dog adjusts his grip at a moment of opportunity from a less full to a fuller grip). Ideally, the dog bites the man with a **full** (back of the mouth), **firm** (does not munch or "typewrite") and **hard** (pressure wise) grip. When the dog counters continually, actually driving in with his body and thus filling his mouth obsessively fuller and fuller, we have pushing grips. There are many techniques to teaching the dog to counter and then stringing these counters together to create pushing behavior. Having the decoy fight the dog then go still, pull against a back line on a harness or flat collar, then drop slack into the line (where the dog feels as if he might lose the grip from the tension) can create one counter to a fuller grip position. Often we get the dog on the sleeve, preferably a bite bar sleeve at first, and place the dog with all 4 feet on the ground and have the decoy walk backwards. The walking speed must be experimented with. If you walk too slowly, the



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dog doesn't feel any sense of losing the prey and so doesn't need to improve his grip fullness. If you walk too fast backwards, the dog feels like he is always on the verge of losing the prey and may just hang on for dear life and not counter for fear of the sleeve popping out of his mouth and drop his weight to keep from losing the grip. Every dog's speed will be different. You are looking to see if the dog's back legs are hunching from pulling or if the dog is walking with the decoy. Once the dog's back legs relax and loosen up and the dog comes along with the decoy, you should start to see the dog drive in with some counters. It is imperative that the decoy slip the sleeve the first few times the dog is moving into the fight and he adjusts his grip fuller (even if the dog is full to begin with

and pulses in). We will address equipment orientation later; now we are focusing on building grip in the young dog and winning the sleeve from a counter is likely to encourage this behavior further.

We continue to do this work; the dog's handler posts out on a 15-foot line on harness or flat collar, the decoy works the dog (prey – defense – prey or defense –prey drive channels) and delivers a grip and immediately starts walking backwards. The handler keeps slight tension on the line but not enough to resist the motion of the decoy. As the decoy walks backwards, we watch the dog's body language and as he starts to relax and go with the decoy, we should start to see these counters. Start by rewarding single counters then ask the dog to do two or three in a

row before rewarding the dog with a slip of the sleeve. Occasionally, put strong tension on the line, pull tight against one another (decoy and handler) and then drop the dog back on all four feet and put slack in the line from the handler and if the dog counters, immediately start moving backwards to initiate more counters.

Once the dog gets the game of working in prey on the decoy moving backwards, we can intersperse defensive fights with the dog from the decoy (driving the dog with stick pressure, giving distractions like bottle curtains, rock jugs, etc.) and then channel back into prey by walking backwards when the pressure ends. The pressure will then become the antecedent to the counter. What you will start to observe is that as soon as the pres-

sure ends and the decoy moves backwards, the dog will counter in and the decoy yields by going further backwards and slip the sleeve. Once the dog starts to get this game of how to win a fight, deal with pressure, by aggressively coming forward into the decoy, the dog will likely revert to pulling only in situations where the dog feels dominant and superior to the decoy (when the decoy is on the ground for example). In long line deployments, where we fish the dog under an RV or truck to a hidden subject for example, the dog will pull at the dead weight, which works to our advantage. If the dog is fighting against an active subject or decoy, the pushing in remains the best way to get the fighting/pressure to cease (which we have taught the dog through our training).

Techniques like purposefully delivering very shallow unsatisfying grips to the dog initially with some tension in the back line will create a sense of need in the dog to get fuller immediately. Getting the dog to counter in a continual rhythm will create the tendency to push. The decoy must be skilled in reading the dog to know when to challenge the dog and when to allow the dog to win.

CONCLUSION

If the dog is not shown defense work in this initial training (in defense work while biting the dog is shown varying levels of pressure in both intensity and duration) or if the dog is not worked on a long line with alternating pushing with back tension, obsessive pushing only in prey can create a grip that is too loose, where the dog doesn't take time to clamp down and exert bite pressure on the subject or decoy. This is not a failure of the pushing fighting style but rather of the training technique.

Once the dog learns that pushing leads to winning fights with the decoy, you can ramp up pressure by putting the dog in a corner and when he pushes into the decoy, he gets out of the corner. Bites in bathtubs and small dark spaces, pinning the dog against a wall where pushing forward leads to pushing out of the predicament or through thresholds, leads the dog to the conclusion that bringing the fight to the man resolves all his conflicts. By biting with the back of his mouth the jaw becomes a pain compliance tool that always readjusts to maximum pressure position. Decoys will often grab a little fur in the hand and teach the dog that pushing in fiercely makes that discomfort go away. Eventually, the dog will start countering and pushing in during the pressure phase of fight sequences with the decoys, leading to shortening the fights in real life. "Fight me and I fight back ever harder!"

Before you take those green dogs into their skills

training in your next class, take some time to evaluate and work on the quality of their grip and the basics of pushing into the grip as you expose the dog to drive channeling fundamentals. For more on grip building, teaching pushing behavior and the importance of teaching police dogs how to properly channel their drives, read my book **Controlled Aggression** which can be found on Lulu.com by scanning the following QR code. A good understanding of these fundamentals will make teaching skills like out on command, redirects, out and return and especially recalls a breeze. 🌿



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