

# Navigating the Police K-9 Import Business

*By Steve Pearson*

I am writing this article because I have seen far too many agencies swindled when they purchase a new green dual-purpose police dog candidate. I thought that a little insight into the K-9 import business might help decrease the number of “victim” agencies who fall prey to deceitful police K-9 importers and exporters.

The importation of dogs for police work in the United States began picking up steam in the mid 90’s. Today we see some dogs coming from Mexico, Brazil, and a few other countries but a majority of them come from Europe. Why? The simplified reason is because that is where the working dog breeds were originally created and developed into the dogs we see today.

Prior to September 11, 2001 suitable quality imports were relatively easy to find and affordable. After 9/11 things changed in a dramatic way. Dogs are a world-wide commodity just like oil and oranges. The 9/11 attacks generated an enormous world-wide demand for police and military working dogs. The brisk demand created a short supply and a significantly higher price for quality working dogs. To compensate for the low supply of quality German Shepherd Dogs and Malinois, the European breeders began to increase their cross breeding of the German Shepherd and Malinois and Dutch Shepherds. The goal of this cross breeding is to take the stability of the GSD and mix it with the drive of the Malinois. The cross breeding helped with the short supply but the increase in demand did not slow. This supply and demand scenario created the situation we are in today. There are not enough quality green dogs from working lines to meet the demand. Consequently, more and more agencies are being conned, tricked, and defrauded by dishonest and corrupt importers and/or “vendors”

who are selling sub-standard dogs. It is not my intention to imply that most K-9 importers and/or “vendors” in the United States are crooked or corrupt. However, it is my experience that this industry has a very high level of fraud and corruption on both sides of the pond compared to other businesses.

In my opinion, too many agencies are accepting green dogs that should have been immediately rejected or returned. Just so we are clear on terminology, my definition of a green dog is a dog who has not been trained. They search because they have the inherent genetic disposition to do so. They have been “built” in a sense because they bite a sleeve and/or a suit, but green dogs do not have any formal training beyond that.

One of the most common areas of fraud is selling single purpose dogs as dual purpose quality. A dog who has the character of a single purpose detection dog must not be placed into the role of a dual-purpose dog. They simply are not built for that type of work and will likely get the handler hurt or killed. These dogs frequently fail to engage or run from danger. They are not likely to search into dark rooms or tight places and may not want to walk on slick floors. Single purpose dogs who are thrust into the dual- purpose role are more likely to become high in defense and become fear biters. Another potential area of fraud is the sale of dogs who have the character for the sport (IPO, Schutzhund, KNPV, ZVV and alike). These dogs may not be good candidates for police work. They test quite well on green grass where they are comfortable. Once you bring the sport dog into a building you might see a very different dog. Environmental issues are the most common problems you see in these dogs. They may not want to walk on slick floors, enter dark rooms,

or even climb some types of stairs. They are quite comfortable and strong outside but might be quite insecure indoors. Solid environmental testing indoors is a must with these dogs. Are all sport dogs poor dual-purpose police dog candidates? Absolutely not. Some sport dogs make fine dual-purpose dogs. But be careful and make sure these dogs are just as strong inside as they are outdoors.

So why do the “vendors” sell these dogs as dual purpose dogs and who is to blame? The answer to the first question is easy; money. Dual purpose green dogs bring more money than single purpose and sport dogs. It is that simple. The vendors do not care whether or not you or your partners are hurt or killed because your dog did not do his job. That is your problem. Who is to blame? Ultimately it is the person who selected the dog and often times that is you. There are only a handful of serious European companies/kennels who export dogs to the United States. Most of them are in one way, shape, or form dishonest. An American company who imports the dogs is then faced with a dilemma. Do they return the single purpose dogs who have been advertised as dual-purpose quality? Or, do they perpetuate the lie and try to make it work? This is the ethical issue that the importer is faced with. To me the answer is simple. But to some,

returning the dogs to Europe is a costly venture and not good for the bottom line. So, they keep these single purpose dogs and either perpetuate the lie or sell the dogs as single purpose and make significantly less money.

In 2003 I was selecting dogs at a kennel I used to do business with in Holland. We were driving back to the kennel from the testing area when the owner of the kennel told me, "you are a fu\*king idiot". I was a bit surprised and I asked him why he

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thought that. He said, "because all you ever do is come here and take my best dogs". He added, "there is no money in good dogs. The money is in the shit. You will be bankrupt in 2 years". I did not immediately understand what he was talking about but soon realized that he was correct. If you can get someone to purchase a low quality or otherwise substandard or defective green dog at the same price as a high- quality dual-purpose dog you will reap fantastic profits. The person who told me this is a tremendously successful exporter of working dogs. But there is one problem with this business model. It won't work if you have any integrity or ethical values.

A common question is, why would an importer keep going back to an exporter who had been deceitful in the past by slipping in a few clinkers from time to time? Simple. Either the importer has acquiesced to what I call the Dutch business model; "the money is in the shit", or there is nowhere else to go. This is a difficult part of the import business that forces many into bankruptcy. They are swindled and taken advantage of by the exporter. Then they locate a new kennel in Europe and purchase some nice dogs from the new kennel. Once the level of "trust" has been built, Bam! The new kennel tosses in a few inferior dogs and the cycle starts all over again. Even if the exporter would take the dogs back, (and most will) the importer is still out big money. He paid for the dogs to go from Europe to the U.S. and back again. Then he had to pay for the replacement dogs to ship to the U.S. hoping and praying that these dogs will work. The importer has spent thousands on shipping and hasn't even sold a dog yet. The exporter is out nothing. This is why so many importers in the U.S. concede to the fraud. It is either that or go out of business.

It is common to banter about the age of some green imports. Someone would say, "how old is the dog?" The answer would be, "how old do you want him to be?" The sad part is, that in many cases this banter is actually true. Have you ever seen a new green dog who is grey in the muzzle and has an abundance of scaly plaque on his molars? The handler is told that the dog

is 14 months old and he has the dog's passport to prove it. Yet another con. It is not at all uncommon for 3 to 4-year old dogs to be sold as 14-18-month-old dogs. I recently saw an imported dog who had just been purchased by an agency and the dog's passport indicated he was 18 months. The dog was grey in the muzzle, had an ample amount of plaque on his teeth, and arthritis in his hips. The vet estimated the dog's age at between 4.5 and 6 years. Granted this is an extreme example but it does happen and will continue to happen into the future.

Prior to 9/11 it was not uncommon to purchase new green dogs between the age of 18-24 months. The dogs were more mature and you rarely saw any puppy biting from these dogs. So, if the world-wide supply of quality green dogs is exceptionally low, does it make any sense that an importer would have an abundance of dogs between 18 and 24 months or even older? No chance. The fact of the matter is that importers are now forced to purchase their dogs at a much younger age. The general rule is that if the importer does not buy the dog now, someone else will. When you see a dog that is 24 to 36 months old being sold as a 14 to 18-month old dog you can rest assured that the dog was most likely returned to the seller by one or more agencies. The reasons the dog had been returned may not be clear to you until you take the dog to the vet and/ or start training the dog. Be very afraid of the internet as it is full of misleading falsehoods and lies. Beware of the web site with claims such as, "we have 20-25 of the finest world class green and trained patrol and detection dogs on hand at all times". There is no chance that this claim is true.

What about titled dogs? What are they and are they worth the money? A titled dog is one that is at least 15 months old on the lower end and minimum 20 months old on the upper end of titles in the sport. The most common titles are IPO-BH, IPO-1, IPO-2, and IPO-3. (IPO has replaced the Schutzhund 1, 2, and 3 titles.) Another common title is the KNPV PH-1 title. KNPV is a Dutch organization founded in 1907. In English KNPV translates to Royal Dutch Police Dog Association. There are other titles in KNPV but PH-1 is most

common. There are three levels of the PH-1 title. The most common breeds used in the KNPV sport are the Malinois and Dutch Shepherds. The number of dogs with this title on an annual basis has decreased significantly from about 695 PH-1 titled dogs in 1993 to fewer than 200 today. The reason for the lower number is simple. There are substantially fewer quality dogs available who can pass the test. The PH-1 test is a strong one. KNPV titled dogs are typically very strong and are generally not a good choice for a new handler particularly if the new handler does not have help from trainers who have experience with Mals. A PH-1 dog may cost between 6,000 and 10,000 Euro. After that you have to teach the dog the skills needed for police work. Plus, there is no guarantee the dog will be environmentally solid. All of the testing for

KNPV and IPO titled dogs is done outside. These dogs are not required to perform any tasks indoors to earn their titles. Worth the risk and money? Not for me.

This is not an article about what tests to use and how to use them. That subject has been covered quite thoroughly over the years. If you are not experienced at selecting a dog then you must either hire someone who is, or trust and ensure that your trainer is well suited to select a quality dog for you. Most law enforcement agencies in the United States do not have staff with the expertise required to select and train police dogs. As a result, it is customary for agencies to rely upon their trainers to do the job for them.

In the 1980's former President Ronald Reagan used an English version of a Russian proverb when describing the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The proverb was, "trust but verify". That is the stance I suggest everyone takes when selecting their new green dog. Most dogs test very well and look super strong on green grass. Conducting further "tests" outdoors on your own are pointless. There are a few things that you can do to add to your peace of mind that your dog has the potential of being an effective dual- purpose patrol dog:

- Make sure that you have thoroughly vetted your supplier and/or trainer and

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know what the guarantee(s) are:

- If the trainer and importer are the same person or company then the guarantee should not be a problem
- If the trainer and importer/supplier are not the same person or company, you need to clarify how the guarantee is exercised if necessary and ensure that the trainer will advocate on your behalf
- At first glance does the dog look about how old the is alleged to be? If not, bring up your concerns when you visit the vet.
- Bring the dog inside fire stations, public works garages, slick floors of any kind, Home Depot, Lowes, and similar places. Jump him over objects, counters, and benches. How does he behave? The objective is to ensure that the dog is environmentally stable. If there are any concerns you must discuss these concerns with the trainer and/or importer right away. If the dog is not environmentally sound, there is no point in proceeding. Return him.
- Is your dog social around people and other dogs? It is not common for a quality, well socialized 12-14 month-old dog to act like a prick around people. If you see some anti-social behaviors in your dog shortly after you acquire him please seek some advice from a professional. A 12-14-month old dog who shows aggressive or other anti- social behaviors before basic training will likely become an out of control lunatic after training. That is, if he makes it that long. Do not accept dogs like this.
- If your new dog hesitates a bit when entering a new area or room don't panic. You want to know whether or not the dog recovers from his initial fear of a new area. If he recovers quickly and enters new areas a day or two later without hesitation you are good to go. However, if you bring the dog to this "new" area repeatedly and he still shows fear and/or hesitation you most likely have a problem.
- In my opinion a dog who will not walk on slick floors can never be rehabilitated 100%. Others may disagree with me but this is a serious environmental issue and may be indicative of other problems with the dog. Do not accept a dog who will not walk on slick floors. Do not accept the notion that

the dog can be fixed over time.

- The European Union has a registration law whereby all dogs that are for sale must be registered with their government. Unfortunately, most EU countries do not strictly follow this rule. If your dog came from Slovakia you can go to a web site ([www.crsz.sk](http://www.crsz.sk)) and enter the dog's passport number or transponder number to view the dog's history. If the Slovak dog is not in the system, you most likely have a fraudulent passport. Dog's coming from other countries who do not have the registration system are more prone to passport fraud. The most common passport fraud is the birth date.
- Touch your dog on his flank. If he flinches or otherwise shows you a reaction that he really does not like being touched there, you may have a problem. Some dogs are "flanked" by twisting the skin (their flank) to cause them pain and make them bite. If your new dog has been flanked it should cause you to examine the dog in greater detail. What other behavioral issues might he have? Is he likely to be less social than you desire?
- If the dog is neutered, ask the importer why that is so. It is not normal for the Europeans to neuter the dogs. I am not opposed to neutering a dual-purpose dog. But If he is neutered it is likely that he was purchased by a different agency who neutered him and then returned him to the importer. You are most likely being asked to buy a dog that someone else returned. Big red flag.

- Bring your new dog to the vet sooner than later. It is best that your vet has some experience with working dogs but I understand that is not always possible. Each import from Europe comes with a pet passport. Vaccinations, the dog's name, DOB, previous owner's name, passport number, and transponder number (microchip) are all documented in the passport. It is not necessary to revaccinate for diseases already covered in the passport. You will want the vet to give the dog

a “once over”. If not previously done by the importer, have the dog’s blood tested for Lymes, heartworm, anaplasmosis, and

ehrlichiosis. (This is all done with one blood draw) Vaccinations for Lymes, Leptospirosis, and Bordetella can also be given at this time. Such vaccinations are rarely given in Europe. If the dog does not have an EU passport send him back. That is a sure sign of fraud.

- X-rays should be available from the importer. If you are going to have your vet read the x-rays please remember that the dog is a working dog. Mild hip dysplasia is not uncommon in new dogs. The key word is mild. Your new working dog is not expected to pass an OFA standard. In all likelihood your dog is too young to be rated by OFA. These ratings are only given to dogs age 2 and older. Your new dog’s hip and elbow x-rays may have been taken around 11-13 months of age. A lot can change in the hips over the next 12 months as the dog matures.
- Upon delivery your trainer will likely have a list of do’s and don’ts for you to follow. I recommend that you follow them. If any of my recommendations are in conflict with what your trainer told you to do, I suggest you discuss that potential conflict with the trainer. You put your trust in your trainer. You must follow his/her advice.

I hope that this information has or will become helpful when you purchase your next working dog. Please remember, if there are too many red flags and you are not totally sold on the new dog either reject him or send him back immediately. Don’t wait until you start seeing problems during basic training. If you wait, you only increase the possibility of running into roadblocks when you try to return the dog for a new one.

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