

Helper Feature

Dusan Majtas (Slovakia)

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Dusan Majtas judging at 2009 IFR World Schutzhund Championship

Please tell us about yourself.

I was born in 1959 in Bratislava, Slovakia, and I still live there today. I have been interested in cynology since 1972. Since 1983, I have worked on the training board of the Slovak Association, where I have been involved in the legislative preparation of trialing codes and rules. Since 1985, I have, at various times, also worked as a trainer for the Slovak team. Since 1991, I have been the chair and vice-chair of the Slovak Association of Sports Cynology. My judging career started in 1981,

becoming a national and international FCI judge in 1985, and a WUSV judge from 1996. At the same time, I became a bonitation judge and testing commissar for judging exams. I have been involved in the creation and modification of all trialing codes and rules since 1985.

My competitive experience with dogs goes back to 1974. I have competed at the Slovak Championship 30 times, and have won it with three dogs, reaching the World Championship with them seven times. I have headed the Slovak team in the World Championship many times. My greatest success was 9th place in individuals and 2nd place in teams at the 2nd WUSV World Championship in 1989 in Maribor. In total, I have judged about 70 trials - the National Trialing Code, IPO, SchH, rescue trials, protection and tracking, with seven dogs from levels I through to 3 (SVV, IPO 3 and SchH). I have competed at more than 200 competitions. My wife, Marta, is also active in trialing and has passed more than 100 trials and participated in about 400 competitions. Since 1992, I have run a Chabet breeding station (now Black Chabet), from which my wife's dog Emir Chabet has competed 12 times at the World Championship and the station has represented in the World Championships 27 times. As a trainer, I have been preparing Eva Panáková, the double world champion in IPO FH tracking (2009-2010), for five years now. I participated in the training of the 2009 World Champion for Dobermans, Mr. Pavol Tamši, and Marek Kršák who competed in the IFR SchH World Championship. I have judged the World Championship of German boxers, Dobermans, Rottweilers, the IPO FH tracks and this year also Bouviers, dozens of qualification competitions for World Championships, the Slovak championships, and competitions abroad in the Czech Republic, Austria, Poland, Netherlands, Japan, USA, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro, Italy, and Estonia. I have organized training seminars in many countries of the world, focusing on sports and service cynology. I work in a private security service as director and in a dog training school I founded as a trainer and helper, and which is currently run by my wife. I have trained about 700 dogs, most of which worked

in the armed forces (police, army and security).

Please tell us about the club you train with.

I have a training school and train every day. I also am a member of Chorvátsky Grob Cynology Club (approximately 30 members) where my friends and I get ready for the most important world competitions. More than half of our members have competed in World Championships (FCI, WUSV, Dobermans, Rottweilers, Belgium Shepherd Dogs). We always have the highest aims at the club. We meet two to three times a week, naturally not all of us every time. Saturday is a day when the big obedience and defence training takes place, from morning to evening, sometimes quite late into the evening. Otherwise, we train in smaller groups during the week, and also use different clubs and tracking fields for training, of which there are a sufficient number in our area. In Bratislava, it is possible to use six training fields, of which three are football stadiums. Over the course of the year, we also use other methods to train and prepare our dogs; mainly the training camps that are organized for one to two weeks, and where we can train every day in all three phases (tracking, obedience and protection) since these camps have helpers ready throughout the whole day.

How did you get introduced to the Rottweiler?

About 20 years ago, a friend from Germany had a Rottweiler puppy he had bought for his son, but the son did not show any interest in the puppy. So this way I got my most favourite dog of this breed, named Aro. Although he was not the largest in size, he was nevertheless greatest in his heart and spirit. He was of an athletic build with a very good muscle frame, with a talent for movement and a unique temperament, which gave him, even under very difficult climatic conditions, great endurance and vitality in work. So I did not have trouble in training him even in high temperatures, because his physical condition and natural desire to work and get enjoyment through training guaranteed the possibility of more precise and fruitful training sessions. By nature, he was friendly and totally sociable to people and animals, but in protection uncompromising in the attack phase, with full, hard and especially calm bites, problem-free in the releasing phase, guarding, control and barking, which always ensured him excellent assessment in protection. In tracking, he worked hard as a compressor, which was related also to his appetite. Toward me he was an absolutely devoted friend, able to do everything for a mutual nice feeling from our life together.



How did you get involved in schutzhund?

I used to have dogs since my very young childhood, since when I was two, but these were only small social breeds. Later, when I was at school, I was always adopted by some sort of street dog searching for an owner, so I used to regularly bring them home and my father in return managed to quickly donate them to someone. This lasted until I was ten, until I managed to convince

him, with the help of my neighbour, who used to train his service dog in the club, that we needed a proper dog at home, with whom I would attend training. In the end, my parents turned into my supporters and spent their lives looking after my dogs when I was away at competitions or training events, something for which I am very grateful, because without the support from my family, I would not have been able to devote myself so fully to this hobby.



What skills do you possess that make you a good helper, handler, and effective trainer?

I can say that all I have seen in my life during dog training, I have tried to comprehend and reach conclusions from each single situation as to whether the given method may be applied in my opinion to training, and whether or not it will be of benefit. I have learned that everyone who trains

dogs makes mistakes. The difference lies in the fact that an experienced trainer identifies the mistake immediately and is able to change the training positively whereas a less attentive and inexperienced handler sticks with the incorrect training, believing that the imperfection is on the dog's side. Everyone, even a less-experienced dog owner, surely knows that a dog behaves in the way it has been taught, and in a way natural to it. As a trainer or helper I have improved and learned a lot mainly on dogs lacking sufficient talent, or, and this mostly, on disqualified dogs due in particular to incorrect previous training, which came to me as the last resort. These always concerned problems that needed to be addressed in the field of psychology, in the head. Success lays in the correct motivation and simple solution to these problems. From this arose my conviction that the simpler training, the faster the dog learns the required tasks and may be expected to master the exercises. In the field of helper work, I prefer a motivating relationship between the dog and helper, based on the prey drive and supported by the dog's trust in the helper's work, meaning that a dog never worries that the helper will hurt him somehow, or cause him pain. Therefore, dogs from our school love me as helper, they look forward to the work and at the same time are uncompromising in protection and able to put all their energy into this work. I build on their natural social aggression, which never causes problems in handling a dog during protection.

How does the Rottweiler differ from other breeds?

I long ago realized that each dog is unique - an individual, and thus different from another dog within their own breed, not mentioning different dog breeds. I prefer to try to understand the dog I am training at the moment, his individual abilities, skills, character and talent. Therefore, I do not ponder too much over comparing breeds. All in all, each dog has some faults, even the very best ones, but at the same time each dog has also certain talent. So, in the end result, it is the method in which the trainer can work on the weaknesses of the dog's

performance and how he can use the dog's natural talent that matter. However, I wish to mention one feature that can be observed in the case of this breed and that is very important for the trainer. It is the burning-out of the reflex, i.e. the ability of learned habits to weaken over time and over the quantity of work performed. In the case of the Rottweiler breed the weakening - the burning out of the reflex is very slow, which is positive mainly for those activities that have been correctly learned. The excellent exercises need not be trained that often, because they are constantly performed at an excellent level. In training the slow burn-out effect is not so good when coming from the aspect of trying to correct apparent, mostly methodological, mistakes in training, where incorrect habits have been acquired and exercises have been wrongly learned right from the very start of the dog's training. In such a case, the work is very demanding, because changing the already fixed performance of exercises takes a very long time and sometimes, in the case of major errors, the state is irreversible.

What is your training and teaching philosophy?

I always try to prefer an approach based on the motivation principle. To teach a dog to be fanatic for work, to do training with joy and willingness, to see training as an endless game and fun for himself and for his handler. In the framework of this thinking the motivation factor is thus always above the pressure factor (I mean pressure admissible within the conventional training methods) and so work during training is not refused. In the end, it is always at the last training where you are preparing your grounds - the motivation position, on which you can draw at the next training. In practice, this is seen in the simple situation where in the case of a certain mechanical stimulus for correcting the performance of an exercise, the dog does not react in passive protection but on the contrary he behaves actively. This is reflected in increased commitment in performance and successful performance of the exercise. I take a negative view of forcing a dog into activities it does not want to perform. I believe that a man is a sufficiently intelligent creature to manage in a thought-through manner to teach a dog almost anything without using unnatural violence, or torturing a dog with various products of technical progress. I am saying this also in connection with the relatively unusual training of dogs for their use in films, since I have for more than 30 years now almost every year prepared some dog for a film role. You would be surprised at what all screenwriters and directors think up and want from dogs. Sometimes it is almost sci-fi. But miracles are possible and with training properly thought through, it really is possible to teach a dog even performances that later in the film people think are actually film tricks, whereas it is always mere hard and clever work.

What do you think are the keys to a dog/handler's success in schutzhund?

For a dog to be successful, there are many internal and external factors, but we do not have room to go into detail here. I will simplify it to the internal relationship between a man and his dog. This is to be based on mutual trust, literally a love for one another. When you constitute the greatest possible good for the dog, it will always know that in a difficult moment you will stand by it and it will be able to overcome difficulties, sometimes even beyond its abilities. Of course, there are no results without work. So your dog will be as hard working as much as you are able to invest in the relationship. I would add here that the quantity of the work itself invested is rather a secondary factor; the primary factor remains the quality of training, a good trainer and helpers.

What are the biggest mistakes novice handlers make?

The mistakes of novice handlers almost all flow mainly from insufficient understanding of their dog. A novice handler with regard to their knowledge in the training methodology, dog's behaviour, its instinctive and characteristic qualities and systematics of the training, is still not able to put himself into the dog's thinking, into its action on the basis of stimuli and other factors affecting the dog during training. At the practical level, I will mention at least some most frequent basic mistakes. For example, already in the most basic training of calling a dog, novices breach the mutual trust relationship by various forms pressuring behaviour toward a puppy, which from the point of view of their ability to perceive and respect the wishes of their owner is

not as yet able to detach itself from activities that are more inviting for the puppy. Here we have a situation of will asserting from the side of the puppy on the one hand and of the handler on the other, who even at the cost of violence is forcing a puppy to come to him/her. Something which a small playful creature is simply not able to understand. It is almost from this in essence that the problem arises where a puppy not only does not respond to the calling command, but will intentionally avoid this activity. All that was needed is to show the puppy that the thing he likes best comes from the hands of its owner, that it will always get a little snack for its tummy after coming back to the owner, that the game with a prey is always with its beloved handler.

And as for the prey, i.e. a ball, tug toy or other motivation object, a similar effect happens here when the handler takes such an object away from the puppy without an adequate exchange. Naturally, then the small dog has no reason to bring its prey back any more. Why, going out of fear to someone who keeps taking what's his is rather incomprehensible also for a small puppy. We want him to grow up to be a fanatic retriever who will in future do anything for his favourite toy.

In tracking I see most frequently the basic mistakes as being to force a dog when the novice handler does not yet understand the basic role of the motivation factor and the dog will reward him with a panic distaste for tracking. I believe that as far as tracking is concerned, it is a phase requiring, in the case of correct training, the least number of interventions into the dog's work, since each activity of a dog on the track (correct start, searching intensity, pace, precision of articles and turns, endurance), today we can train practically without any pressure by use of motivation technique, which I have been working on for 35 years.

In protection, novices mostly dream their dogs as uncompromising, hard protectors able to intervene at any moment. And this dream then guides their steps at the beginning of the defence training. They think that their dog is equipped with this from their excellent predecessors. And then I meet at clubs various manners of stimulating puppies, or young dogs to aggression. But what sort of aggression (forced by fear?), when a small dog stands opposite a Goliathan helper? Therefore I prefer to train protection through the natural ability of the dog to be aggressive, which we can arrive at in a comfortable way, without any pressure, via the prey drive. I have had many little dogs in my school who, upon setting eyes on me (and I am no giant), panicked so much that, had they not well-secured on their lead, their owners would never have found them again. But in the end, these small frightened puppies grew up into real guard dogs able, also in real life, often to protect the property, family or health of their owner.

What are the biggest mistakes experienced handlers make?

In the case of more experienced handlers it is different, since they have experience, have already trained several dogs. At least they think so. And here we come to the core of the problem with this group. When an experienced handler gets a puppy after a long time spent with his/her trained dog. They start to compare, look for mistakes and differences from their previous perfect dog, but they have forgotten that the previous one too was a puppy at the beginning. From this thinking, the method of the puppy's training develops, in the same spirit of the training for the previous dog. But each dog is born unique, with its specific qualities and so the overall method of teaching and training cannot be generalized and each individual dog requires an individual approach. It is necessary to once again become a patient and understanding big leader, who shows his small pupil what life is, what to do in it, how to behave and in this way to build a new relationship of trust and friendship. So the mistakes in practice, in training are shown in a stereotype of training: little variety in the training approaches used, little adaptation to the dog's temperament and consequently the potential for overestimating the dog's momentary abilities and further adverse features, which in their final form lead toward

the owner's dissatisfaction with his dog and often end in the sale of this dog as without a future and unsuitable for training. In the end, it is necessary to realize that no one knows everything and that life will again bring new knowledge and new situations during training which you have not faced before and so there is always something to think about.

What do you believe is the greatest threat to schutzhund today?

The greatest threat for a dog are people themselves... irresponsible dog owners creating bad a view of us from the point of view of society, breeders degenerating the natural qualities of breeds - mainly the dogs' character and state of health, breeders focusing only on financial profit without regard of the purity of the breed. As for schutzhund, I see the threat in diversion from the motivation training approaches and a great growth in a general use of modern electronic means, especially by people who know nothing about the dog's soul, and so devastate a great number of dogs.

Do you see any difference in the Rottweiler of today compared to the Rottweiler of 10 years ago? If so, what are the biggest differences you see?

I must admit that I am not that great an expert to fully and responsibly assess this issue. What I have noticed over the recent years is that I can see more significant progress in the field of training when we can talk about performances that please the eye, that become an experience for the viewers present and we can no longer talk only of rare performances and individual dogs, because we are seeing breeding at a higher, massive, level, which is very encouraging.

What do you like to see in a Rottweiler on the field?

What pleases me most is their enthusiasm to work, the speed at which they can perform exercises, the movement talent when they run, jump and bite. Their nice and devoted eyes, when they look into your eyes in their further expectation of new adventures and games.

Who are/were your mentors?

Over the years that I have worked with dogs I have met many excellent people from throughout the world, from numerous world champions through to ordinary cynologists, who remain my friends to this day, and about whom I can say that each of them in their own positive way touched my life in connection with my work with dogs, so if I wanted to even briefly list and describe how they influenced me I would have to devote to this topic a separate article, because I would not like to omit anyone.

What are your most important accomplishments?

My sports accomplishments have in essence been mentioned in the answers above, so I would like to simply add that as a breeder I am always pleased when the dogs from our breeding station get into good hands, when the owners are happy with them and one of the oldest friendships in history is again fulfilled, that between a man and a dog.

What do you want to be remembered for?

Cynology is for me a sport, hobby, a love of animals and nature, old friends and new friendships, and I am glad that some time ago in my childhood I got on to this path. I greatly appreciate the possibility of being a member of the cynology family on this planet, to have friends in various countries all over the world with whom I am always glad to meet, have a chat, train and exchange opinions regarding dog training and breeding. In conclusion, I simply wish to add that we appreciate our dogs for their friendship to us, for what they do for us and for how they enrich us.

