

An Interview with James Moses

By D.D. Ardoin

When and how did you get into dogs?
My father bought my first German Shepherd Dog for me when I was nine. I named him "Nageeb" which is my name in Arabic. My father was Lebanese and my mother was French Canadian. I finished my first German Shepherd Dog champion in 1958, when I was 13 years old. My mother bred Miniature Poodles and I won my first all-breed Best in Show with a black Mini Poodle when I was 15 years old. I won my first all-breed Best in Show with a GSD bitch when I was 16 years old.

When you became a handler, what dogs were popular & what was handling like?

When I became a handler, some of the better dogs were GV Troll von Richterbach, GV Bill von Kleiswig and GV Brix Grafencrone. I handled GV Lance of Fran-Jo early in my career and he was by far the most popular dog of that time. He crossed well with Ernest Loeb's Bernd daughters. When I started handling dogs they were judged at a much more moderate speed and they had to have been trained. A good dog could and often did win owner-handled. They weren't shown 20 feet in front of you racing like mad. I believe that early in my career we had a larger percentage of judges that knew the anatomical structure of the GSD and put more emphasis on smooth, coordinated, correct movement. Today the double handler has a more important part of showing our breed than the person actually handling the dog.

How were dogs and dog shows different early in your career?

When I started handling dogs it took well over 40 dogs in each sex to have a three-point major. At that time we had many imported dogs in our open classes and in specials. You could not tell the difference between good German imports and good American bred dogs.

At most of our specialty shows the dogs were judged at a fast walk and then a slow trot and placed in order before the individual examinations. I have always thought that this type of judging was much more helpful to new fanciers to help teach them correct side gait. If the best

side-gaiting dog was in the front of the line and then ended up farther back after his individual, you knew that the exhibit had a hidden fault such as a mouth fault or a problem coming and going that was severe enough to have cost them their position in line.

At that time dogs were not as angulated in hindquarter as they are today. Overall the breed was much more athletic than it is today. We were more concerned with smooth, coordinated movement, not how fast and high the dogs could go! Today many exhibitors get carried away with fast speed and exaggerated movement, with toe-dragging rears and hackney fronts, and they seem to think this is correct side gait.



Jim & his first GSD

Which handlers did you admire and why?

When I first started showing dogs I competed with Chum Porter and Jim Norris a lot. Chum Porter always had his dogs trained to perfection and could really rate the best speed for the dog he was showing. Once Chum was at the front of the class he was very hard to beat. Jim Norris was great with shy dogs but always moved them too fast in my opinion...but I guess that's why Von Stephanitz said fear lends wings!

Lamar Kuhns was by far the best groomer and poser of

all the handlers of that era. Bill Dooley and Jack McMahon also were very good handlers.

As to present day handlers I think Kent Boyles is in a class by himself. There are some handlers



Jim with 1967 Am/Can. Grand Victor Ch. Lance of Fran-Jo ROM; Judge: Chum Porter

that may be as good or even slightly better with certain types of dogs, but with the breed as a whole, from wild dogs to dogs that need encouragement to keep going, he is one of the best with whom I have ever been associated. I think a lot of his ability comes from his passion for the breed and his dedicated hard work.

Who were some of the great dogs you handled early on, and what made them special? Which was your favorite?

In 1965 I handled the top winning dog of all breeds in Canada, a German Shepherd Dog named Ch JoMar's Avenger of Arbor owned by Heather Logan. In 1966 I handled the Canadian Grand Victor and Canadian Grand Victrix both from the open class under the then-President of the SV in Germany, Dr. Christopher Rommel. The Grand Victor was Ch Ero vom Zellwald owned by Ernest Loeb. While showing the dog he would walk into some very excellent poses, so I was showing off thinking the dog was making me look good. I received my very first and most lasting criticism from Mr. Loeb on that day and one that I have never forgotten. Mr. Loeb motioned me over to the side of the ring and asked me if I could change Ero where would I change him. I answered that maybe I would want him to stand a little more cleverly with his front legs (Ero was a little too east-west with his front feet). Mr. Loeb then told me that instead of showing off for the crowd and sometimes letting the dog face the judge, that he thought I would be much smarter to keep the dog faced sideways or away from the judge. I never needed to be told that again in my handling career!



Jim with Ch. Jo-Mar's Avenger of Arbor Judge: Elsie Murray

In 1967 I handled GV Ch. Lance of Fran-Jo to the Grand Victor title. Lance was a very dominant sire and crossed well with Bernd daughters. In 1971 I handled GV Ch. Mannix of Fran-Jo to his

title...He was a result of Lance to a Bernd daughter. Mannix was quite a side-mover for his time and was considered extreme in angulation. I was criticized by many breeders at that time for promoting extreme dogs. But believe me, they were not even close to some of the overdone hindquarters you see so much of today.

A Mannix son that I handled was GV Ch. Scorpio of Shiloh Gardens. I think that Scorpio was probably the best overall male that I ever showed. He had it all, plus excellent temperament and character. I have shown many other Grand Victors and Grand Victrices, I have been very fortunate to have shown so many quality animals, many of whom were also very good producers.



1990 Am/Can. GV Ch. Proven Hill's Banker of Altana ROM TC

When I was handling at mostly specialty shows I was offered many of the better dogs in the country. A dog that I handled to Grand Victor in both countries was Ch. Proven Hill's Banker of Altana for Bob and MaryEllen Kish. You will find Banker in many of the popular pedigrees of today. What dogs stand out in your mind as greats that you did not show?

One of the better dogs that I did not show who also had a good influence on the breed as a sire was Sel. Ch. Stuttgart's Sundance Kid.

What dogs early on influenced our breed? How did they influence our breed?

GV Ch Lance of Fran Jo ROM produced a very stylish dog with great toplines and good working hindquarters; when crossed with Mike and Judd bloodlines he produced some very excellent movers.

Who were your mentors early in your career? Early in my career I learned quite a lot about structure from a dachshund breeder from Western New York named Victor Munch. He kept a skeleton of one of his dogs and taught me which bones played what part in motion. I was fortunate to have worked with Ernest Loeb, Joseph Bihari, and Lang Skarda to name a few of my early mentors.

German Shepherds have been my whole life since before I was a teenager and I'm still learning more about them all the time. LaMar Kuhns and I taught each other a lot as we could criticize each other and both took it the way that it was meant. To help each of us improve ourselves years ago most of us we were more open about the good and the bad points of the dogs being shown.

What is your viewpoint on the sport of dog showing now?

Our level of competition is at an all-time low. Granted, our Select classes at our Nationals get better each year, but the number of exhibitors is shrinking at an alarming rate. Our National Specialty is like an old age convention. Member clubs need to have activities that will bring in new and younger members. Years ago all of our specialty clubs had obedience classes and we got most of our new members in this way. I think that our Parent Club should be doing much more for our regional clubs, helping them set up programs and activities to promote new membership.

Tell us about some of the dogs you have handled in the past 20 plus years.

In the last twenty years I have been handling mostly at all breed shows. I was inducted into the Dog Show Hall of Fame in 1999 in New York City.

I am proud to say that the top winning dog of all breeds in AKC history is the GSD that I handled named Ch. Altana's Mystique, who won 275 all breed Best in Shows and is featured in the 1999 Guinness Book of World Records. I also handled the top winning male dog of any breed, Ch. Covy Tucker Hill's Manhattan, who also was Best in Show at Westminster and at the AKC Centennial Show, which had the largest entry ever for a dog show held in the United States with almost 9,000 entries.



Sel. Ch. Altana's Mystique

I have shown two more GSDs to placements in the "100 club," which puts them in the top twenty show dogs of all time; Ch. Kismet's Sight for

Sore Eyes, "Dallas," and his daughter Ch. Kaleef's Genuine Risk. I have handled GSDs to more than 1,000 all breed Best in Shows and I have won the Quaker Oats Award for the top Herding dog with a German Shepherd 16 times.



BIS Ch. Covy-Tucker Hill's Manhattan ROM

What stud dog has been the most influential during the past 20 years? Why?

Dallas, without question! Sel. Ch. Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes HSCs was the right dog at the right time. He produced moderate rear angulation with excellent follow-through behind as well as great breed type and excellent temperament at a time when our breed had too much length of upper and lower thigh and complete lack of follow-through behind. Dogs that dragged their toes when moving became so abundant that many people didn't even see this as a problem!

Anyone who doubts the value of Dallas as a sire just needs to check the pedigrees of our Select dogs and bitches for the last several years.



AOE Select Ex. Ch. Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes ROM, TC, HSCs



Dallas & kids - Sire Sel. Ch. Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes, BOB; and 2 progeny Ch. Kaleef's Genuine Risk, BOS & Ch. Rowland's Cure For Love AOM.

Give us a snapshot of your Kaleef breeding/showing program.

At Kaleef we strive for healthy, happy dogs that will make good family companions first and then try to have them adhere to the standard as closely as possible. We want dogs that are healthy, have good character, can be competitive at both our Nationals and at all breed shows, and can then go do the work that they are bred for, whether that is herding, agility, obedience, or watching the kids. Unfortunately, we keep and show too many dogs, that's why I'm still working today!

Where do you think the sport is headed?

I have lived through many fads in this breed but we always seem to come back to the correct structure -- balanced movers that are suitable for people in all walks of life. Very few people buy a show dog as their first dog. Most purchase a beautiful pet and then get encouraged to show it.

If we don't do something to encourage new people we will end up with National Specialty entries of fifty dogs! I have some ideas but no positive answers. Many of our regional clubs are comprised of an older age class of members, as they get older and the club work becomes too hard for them, the club folds.

I think that two factors have detracted significantly from an influx of new members: AKC stopped making sanctioned matches mandatory, and most clubs no longer have obedience classes. This is where many new members became involved initially. As I said before, very few people go out to buy their first dog and say "I want a show dog." Usually they have an attractive pet, are encouraged to go to a sanctioned match, get a ribbon and become interested in showing. Many would go on to get another dog more suitable for the show ring. I think this is a MAJOR problem for the GSDC of America and this needs to be addressed by our Board. We donate plenty of money to different causes and I think we need to develop and help finance programs that will help regional clubs get new members.

How are all breed and specialty judging different?

At all breed shows soundness coming and going and general eye appeal are much more important; most all breed judges are not experts on sidegait, but neither are many of our specialty judges. At specialties most of our judges evaluate mainly on their perception of sidegait. There is nothing wrong with placing more emphasis on sidegait, IF you know what correct sidegait is. A 20-foot lead and 100 miles an hour seems to be the fad in recent years. For many years our fastest gait would be the slowest speed you see dogs judged at today.

It's obvious to me that many of our judges have never seen German Shepherd Dogs tending a flock of sheep. Their speed is a slow to medium trot or a gallop. By judging dogs at such ridiculous speeds, we end up putting too much emphasis on how smart the double handlers are, and on the

dogs' performance rather than their structure. It is many times harder to get and keep a sound dog motivated than a nervous one with a mommy dependency.

The parent club is very lacking in breed education. Years ago we had many seminars for both newcomers and long-time members alike. We also had judges' seminars where both judges and wanna-be judges were encouraged to evaluate at the proper speed and with proper procedure. The 20-foot loose lead is a mystery to me. A lead is to guide and communicate with your dog. The object of a loose lead is to see if the dog's withers and structure changes without the help of tension on the lead. If you can't see that in a short period of time you shouldn't be in the center of the ring judging! The overly-long lead and 100 per cent loose lead favors experienced handlers and double handlers and makes newer, inexperienced owners non-competitive (which is one of the reasons I believe new people are in such short supply).

What do you think AKC and the GSDCA can do to bring positive changes?

There is nothing the AKC can do to help our breed. It is up to our parent club and Board of Directors to guide us. As of late I see nothing that the Board is doing to correct our problems. Our breed has moved to second in overall registrations, yet the number of dogs needed for majors is at an all-time low. Participation in our conformation shows is at the lowest level in many, many years.

While I don't have the answers, I do have many ideas. Our GSD Board of Directors need to take these matters up and work on them. I intend to stay in this breed as long as I live but fear I'll end up competing with only a couple of my old friends in an entry of 10 or 12 dogs.

Who are your mentors?

Sheree Moses, Kent Boyles, Bob and MaryEllen Kish, as well as some of my other friends, are my mentors today. You need to stay involved with people who are dedicated to the breed and not just what the current fad is. I hope to keep learning about this breed until the day I die. I learn something new every week and hope I never think that I know everything. My ideas change as the breed changes. I usually place more emphasis on where I think our breed is lacking at the present time, and try to adapt accordingly.

How has the breed improved and what are our current problems?

I believe that temperament has improved quite a bit. I think most of our judges try to do a decent job of evaluating temperament in the time and manner allowed. We do have some that think our breed should act like Golden Retrievers and others that don't know that staring into a dog's eyes for any length of time is an act of aggression that no bold dog will tolerate. Also staring at a young dog that has perhaps not had much exposure will cause that dog to respond in a submissive fashion.

Common sense should apply in all instances. We have improved in some areas and have gone too far in others. Many of our dogs have become anatomically non-functional for what this breed was developed to do!

It seems that many of our exhibitors have an incorrect conception of side gait for the German Shepherd Dog. The last thing our breed was developed for was to look FANCY gaiting against the white wall at our national specialties. Can you imagine what these overdone animals would be able to do on top of the 9/11 rubble? For every inch a dog's front feet go up in the air, they should be penalized one inch of front reach. At the end of the push from behind the stifle should straighten out and the hock should follow through. Just because a dog's rear toes turn up (while his hock is still leaning forward and his stifle still has a large bend in it) That in NOT correct follow through behind. When and how often have you seen dogs judged at a fast walk at our nationals? This is a tending breed, not a running breed. Usually the handler at the front of the line dictates the speed in which the class will be judged, shame on all of us!

What do you want to accomplish in the breed that you have not?

We will continue our breeding program for as long as we're physically and financially able, and hopefully continue to improve the overall quality of the dogs that we breed.

What are your plans for the future in the sport?

I intend to retire this year and will judge on a limited basis. I also intend to try and give back to the breed some of the wonderful things it has given me.

What advice would you give to someone new to our sport?

Purchase the best German Shepherd Dog that you can and devote the time and effort necessary to keep it in good condition and to have it perform well in the show ring. Learn how to do nails and groom properly. Ask advice from people in the breed that have enjoyed some success. The vast majority will be very happy and willing to share their knowledge and success with you. You will learn from the people that you associate with, so pick them wisely. I have always been amazed that when an exhibitor finally got a really good dog, how quickly they stopped thinking everything was so political! We have quite a few judges just looking to find the next really good one. Evaluate your dog and its performance in the ring, then you and your handler need to be truly objective in picking the right shows and judges for your dog for it to do as well as it should. I know it's hard to be as objective as you need to be when he or she is waking you up every morning with famous German Shepherd kisses.

How can we create more interest in the sport of dog showing?

I think that we all have to help regional clubs attract and keep new members and then go out of our way to make them feel wanted. Many of the people who purchased dogs from us have been encouraged to join local clubs depending on where they live, only to tell us that no one was friendly and that they felt out of place. I think this is an area to which the parent club should devote much time and effort. Most regional clubs no longer have training classes and no longer have to have sanction matches, two places many of our new members have come from in the past.

What makes a handler great?

First and most important is that they must truly love dogs. The very best handlers that I've known have a very good understanding of the breed standard for the breeds they were showing. Natural ability is a good plus, but doesn't do much good if he or she doesn't know what they have on the end of the lead.

Many of our handlers today can be replaced by any high school track runner. They show their charges scooting around the ring at 100 miles per hour while holding the end of a 20-foot lead. If the dog is not perfectly ring trained with a mommy dependency, those handlers spend half the time untangling the lead and dragging the dog back into the ring. They do the down and back with so much lead hanging that it looks like a figure eight. Many exhibitors complain that we don't have enough handlers in the breed. You don't need eight jockeys when there are only three horses in the race!

What responsibility does a handler have? A judge? Which one is responsible for the current state of our breed?

The judges, of course, without question. Most exhibitors will not try to breed what they don't think the judges will put up. Why do you think the Germans can change things so quickly? If the judges don't pay attention to what the breed club wants changed, they won't be judging, end of story. I know it's not easy for the judge to not put up the crowd favorite, but many times the dog that appeals to the crowd is not the most correct gaiting German Shepherd Dog.

A handler should have many responsibilities. They help decide on which one of possible stud dogs to breed to, help pick which puppies to keep and what to sell. A popular handler sees many of a stud dog's progeny and gets to see what puppies sired by these dogs look like at different ages, much more than the client that breeds maybe one litter every year or two. He also has to help plan the dog's show career, and give advice as to the proper conditioning of the dog.

He should also be truthful as to the outcome of dog shows. Believe it or not you will sometimes get defeated by a better dog. If I were an owner (and sometimes I am) I would get pretty sick of a handler who kept telling me we were beaten because the judge was a crook. I would ask him why he was entering my dog under so many crooked judges. All dogs have their day and are judged on



how they looked that day, not how they looked in the back yard last month.

What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you in your dog show career?

Several years ago I received second in the Herding group in Western, NY with Geneva. A friend of mine won both the Hound group and Working group and asked me to help in Best in Show. While I was handling her Newfoundland and all the dogs were gaiting in for Best, into the ring came Geneva and my Mini Poodle Cinderella and they just started gaiting around the ring next to the Newfoundland much to the delight of the crowd ringside!

You went GV this year with a dog you own, rather than handled. How did the experience differ from handling a dog to this win?

I can now sympathize much more with owners. It is MUCH more stressful outside of the ring than inside of it!

What would you like to say to the GSDCA membership?

Our conformation shows are at an all time low. As a group we all have to tackle this problem together. We are number two in AKC registrations, yet our conformation entries are dismal. There are many more majors at all-breed shows than there are at our specialties. If you take out the filler dogs most clubs put in just so that they can say they had a major show, I would guess we would have many one point specialties.

Some people think that the cause is financial,

yet Rally and Agility entries are going through the roof. The German show entries (and your average German dog is more expensive to purchase than an American bred dog) in this country are much, much larger than our American shows. Labradors rank just ahead of us in total registrations, but their Potomac specialty just had an entry of 1,400 dogs. I believe there are several reasons for this, but I think one of the main reasons is the manner in which our breed is shown and judged. Also, we need to be more active about promoting our breed to the public.

Many people think we should cut our futurities down to six regions, and maybe at this time it is needed. But in several more years do we cut it down to four and then two? That would be a stop gap measure at best. We need to fix the problems that are causing the lack of interest, not just keep shrinking the participation. In the early '70s I judged a futurity in Western New York with Grant Mann and we had an entry of close to 300. Several years later I judged in California with an entry of 77 in the junior puppy dog class alone.

I think it is up to our Board to try to pull together and try to implement some of these changes to help our breed and our sport move forward. I was a board member in the '70s and we had quite a few heated disagreements. We still went to dinner together afterwards. Just because we disagreed did not mean we didn't have respect for each other and our right to have a different opinion. At this low time in our breed we all need to be pulling in the same direction. Can we change our course? I think so but it will not be easy. ■