

What does club membership mean?

1. A reasonable time commitment.

Many people join Schutzhund clubs, only to drop out of sight within their first year when they become discouraged over the amount of time required, or their perceived lack of progress. Schutzhund dog sport is very demanding, and because it involves three phases, it will take a substantial amount of time. Additionally, it is not a solitary endeavor and club members need to be willing to help one another by attending training regularly and staying for the duration of the sessions.

What separates Schutzhund from some other training venues is that it is an on-going process of improvement; there is no 6-week quickie course that sends one off with a certificate. A good foundation sets one up for success---miss a building block and the holes in a training program will become very apparent as one progresses. For people who are used to measuring progress in 6-10 week sessions, this can seem a tedious process, and this is where many folks can become discouraged.

But all trainers have personal lives and other commitments and in a club, members understand this. That is why it is important to help one another in training, and to step up and take turns. The more people willing to help, the less individuals are apt to become over-used or burn out.

2. Basic knowledge of the sport.

Are you expected to know all about Schutzhund when you join? Absolutely not! But before you do join a club, you should identify your personal goals and whether a Schutzhund club embraces your vision of accomplishment with your dog. In order to do that, you have to have a basic understanding of the sport. The following is a link to the United Schutzhund Clubs of America and information about the sport:

<http://germanshepherddog.com/schutzhund/index.htm>

As you have read, Schutzhund, literally translated, means "protection dog. Schutzhund clubs train in the sport and that means obtaining working Schutzhund titles is a goal. If your goal is to obtain tracking skills, as it is with several folks involved in SAR, a club can help, but it is important for members to understand the other phases of Schutzhund and support it as a club function. If you are wishing to join only to train your dog in protection, then a Schutzhund club is not the right organization for you: remember, there are three phases to Schutzhund, tracking, obedience and protection. The dog sport requires Members train in all three phases, not just one.

You are free to come out and watch training (without your dog) and you are encouraged to ask questions. In that way, you can determine whether the sport itself and also the training style are what you are searching for. There are many styles as there are individuals; take your time and find the right fit for you and your dog. This sport has its own language as well, and by observing you can take the time to inquire without the immediacy of having to act on those words.

3. A dog

If you have decided you have the time to commit and have an understanding of what the training involves, do you have a dog suitable for sport training? Much of what a dog needs for Schutzhund sport is in the genetic makeup of the animal.

As a prospective member you will attend a certain number of consecutive training sessions, during which your dog will be evaluated for working ability and temperament. A stable temperament is foremost. Your dog will be evaluated as to its reaction to this new place, people and other dogs. This can be quite overwhelming, so please don't write your dog off after one session---others won't! The training director will observe and evaluate your relationship with the dog and its drive. Does it enjoy playing tug-of-war? Does it love to chase a ball? What motivates it most? The Training Director (TD) will advise you of his/her opinion concerning the abilities of the dog.

Please understand that these evaluations aren't meant to hurt anyone's feelings; they are an honest appraisal of the potential of the dog in this sport. Sometimes that means that a young dog simply needs time to grow up. Sometimes a dog doesn't have the heart to participate. That doesn't mean it isn't a perfectly lovely companion, just that this particular sport is not the right choice. Forcing participation on an unwilling candidate is not the way to go...this should be FUN! At this juncture you may have to make a choice: to stay and work with your dog to the best of his/her abilities in those areas the dog enjoys, leave and find another arena that you both enjoy working in, or get another dog for the sport. This is a very personal decision.

The training director may also require that you achieve a "BH", which involves obedience and temperament testing, before you proceed to protection work. Some times this is a matter of first learning how to be a team with your dog. Membership does not guarantee that your dog will be trained in protection work if there are concerns about the dog or the team.

If you are interested in the sport and do not presently have a dog, the best advice we can offer is to take your time! Watch the dogs in the club and if there are qualities you like about them, inquire where they came from. Research other breeders and ask questions. Don't rush into a puppy without a great deal of thought. Familiarize yourself with the sport before leaping into a purchase.

4. Equipment

You will purchase toys and equipment during your training life.

Collar: you will want a flat collar with a sturdy buckle. We start our young dogs in flat collars and the older ones will wear a flat collar (of leather) for protection work. Please, no plastic fasteners! They break easily and put other dogs and people in danger.

Leash: a 4-foot leather leash, it doesn't allow for too much slack while heeling, and can be easily stowed away in a pocket.

Crate: to secure the dog when you are away from your vehicle at training that is safe to the dog and other participants.

Long line: A 15-foot line for tracking and protection. Make sure the snap is well made. It could be either leather, (leather is better on the hands), or nylon.

Treats and toys: Whatever motivates your dog AND is easily handled (carried in pocket or hand--- no giant fuzzy toys). The treats should be small pieces, about the size of half a dime, that don't have to be chewed up to swallow, such as hotdogs or the commercial foods. This is so that the dog doesn't have to stop to chew the treat.

Fur-saver choke collar. The fur-saver is different from traditional diamond link chokers, as the links are large and sturdy and therefore easier on the dog's neck (trachea) and his fur, and anywhere you fasten your leash is a "live" ring. In a hurry, you don't have to search for the single ring to affix the leash.

Correction collar. This collar goes by many different names; stock, prong collar, correction collar. Purchase a medium link collar that is sturdily made. Another choice is a collar made of small links. The logic is that the weight remains similar to the fur-saver. The small link collars do not withstand as much stress to the links and are used for specific attention exercises. Do not use any correction collar without proper instruction and supervision until you are familiar with its use.

10-meter tracking line. This will be required for trial, but is not often used in training, especially in the beginning stages.

Back-tie for the dog. A braided rope style won't tangle the dogs legs like a chain might. Do not leave a dog unattended on a back tie. This is solely for the purpose of securing them while you lay a track as they watch or do some tug play on your own, so that the dog doesn't chew up your fancy leather leash.

5. Inquiring Mind

Bring an inquiring mind to a club! Attend seminars, and learn from discussions of others and ask questions and to grow in your understanding of the sport and dogs. Some clubs though, do not allow their members to attend outside seminars, or to suggest any other training methods. Unless you are familiar with a trainer, it is often a good idea to simply observe first. Allowing someone to use your dog as a demonstration in a seminar, one who has no investment in your dog's future, can do much damage. It is important that you develop a training strategy and not confuse the dog by changing methods each time you hear a new theory. but do listen to new ideas and ask questions.

6. Training Rules

As a prospective club member, you will receive a copy of the club's Rules of Conduct, but here are a few very basic training rules:

- All dogs must be currently vaccinated.
- No dog is to run loose unless under training
- Ask permission before interacting with another dog, either by yourself or with your own dog
- Pick up your dog's waste.