



# The Rottweiler Today

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L-R: Oliver Neubrand with handler Ronny Gruber & Hoss vom Hause Neubrand IFR-IPO Weltmeister & Schuttdienstweltmeister 2010

Whenever you meet with Rottweiler enthusiasts, no matter where they are from the conversation is soon directed to the state of our breed today. Is the Rottweiler still a working dog? How has the breed changed in recent years and what does the future hold for the Rottweiler in today's world? I asked Oliver Neubrand of the prestigious German vom Hause Neubrand kennel to share with us his thoughts on today's Rottweiler. Oliver is a trainer, helper, competitor and a handler renowned worldwide. In the last few years he has held numerous training seminars around the globe and can therefore offer a sweeping perspective on the subject. But let us allow Oliver to tell the story...

It has been 30 years since my family began breeding Rottweilers under the prefix "vom Hause Neubrand" in 1976. Finding information on breeding of dogs was not as easy in the mid-70s as it is today. There was no Internet and not many books to learn from, so the learning was done by doing. That was also the case with my parents. Our first litter was born in a building that was actually used to raise pigs! Back then there were no animal protection laws or restrictions on how to handle and care for pets, nor was there much general knowledge on the subject. The mentality in breeding litters was pretty much based on natural selection of "eat or die," as brutal as it sounds today. Puppies were not socialized the way that we now know they need to be socialized and in fact, many breeders thought that the more aggressive the dog was, the better it was. Most of the people wanting to buy a Rottweiler wanted a guard dog, not a dog for show or working or even for a family pet. Breeders in those days did not need to be licensed and the selection of a stud dog was more often than not based on the driving distance rather than the dog's suitability for the breed bitch. Bitches of even HD+ hips were used for breeding as no HD ratings were required. Were not those the days... Things have really changed since then. Today, the ADRK sets the standard for breeding through various restrictions and requirements for breeder licenses, litter checks, breed tests, working results, etc. There are laws to protect dogs, to define kennel sizes and boarding conditions. There are limits as to the use of stud dogs and the number of litters a bitch can produce in a lifetime and so forth. To be successful today, a breeder really has to take care of his dogs! Puppy buyers of today know their pedigrees and what they want, placing demands on breeders to provide guarantees on health, HD/ED results, eyes, and teeth. Some even want guarantees that the puppy they are buying is going to be a top show dog or next to unbeatable in working. People do not want just any Rottweiler any more: they want a big dog, black mouth, dark eyes, strong bones, big head, a social

character, high drives, lots of energy, and drive consistency. In Germany, there are also problematic issues concerning the breeding of Rottweilers. With a limited number of approved stud dogs available, and the growing demand for German Rottweilers overseas, our gene pool continues to get smaller and smaller. For us, the use of a stud dog after it has been sold overseas is not an option. As the quality of a producer can only be viewed through his products, we are left with a lot of guesswork with most of the males being sold before we ever get to see the actual product!

In today's world of breeding dogs, the breed dogs are very valuable animals who breeders take very good care of to ensure their well-being. This includes the use of premium pet foods, the best veterinary services available and overall care of the dogs. In the old days, people would have put down a dog with, for example, a broken ligament. Now it is natural that it be fixed!

## Conformation and shows

As far as conformation goes, I think that shows have truly gone through an evolution from the very first Klubsieger show held in 1971 to the Klubsieger held in 2010! Whereas in 1971 we only had approximately 10 foreign exhibitors, in 2010 the German exhibitors were a minority at about 30% of total entries. The total number of entries has also grown to five times the number at the first show, with the Klubsieger becoming the most important and prestigious Rottweiler event of any given year. The requirements of the show Rottweiler have somewhat changed along the way also. Whereas eye color and pigmentation used to play an important role in the past, and it was unthinkable to present a dog with pink spots in the corners of the mouth in a show, judges today will consider it pure cosmetics. There was more weight on the correct structure (rather than freaky looks), a good topline, and movement. Interestingly enough, temperament used to not really be an issue and aggressiveness was not a reason to disqualify a dog as it is today.

Today, the emphasis is on stylish, powerful looks, big size, top condition, and excellent presentation. No dog can win in the ring unless it is presented well. The importance of a good head and good color and coat too often shadow other really important factors such as powerful free movement. As a breeder and trainer, I would extend a wish to any judge evaluating a Rottweiler in a show ring that there must be a difference made between a strong and powerful looking Rottweiler and a Rottweiler resembling a Mastiff or a Saint Bernard! We have a very precise breed standard. We should try not to stretch too far from it and certainly not to any extreme. A Rottweiler should not be too heavy and big, but also not too thin or without substance.

When considering the entire Rottweiler world, I think that German breeders have a hard time keeping ahead of many of their international counterparts on the conformation front as the rules imposed on them by the ADRK are possibly the strictest in the world. Those rules are made not only to ensure the breeding of a nice looking Rottweiler, but to secure the preservation of the complete Rottweiler - one that has the looks for show AND capability for work. Therefore, the German bred Rottweilers will, in my opinion, continue to carry the torch for the complete Rottweiler. In some countries, there are no requirements even for hip dysplasia X-rays, let alone working results. It is my opinion that the German Rottweilers will dominate the show rings in the future as they are being presented as complete working dogs with breeders aiming for the balance of temperament and looks.



*Ives vom Hause Neubrand*

Achieving this balance should be the cornerstone of Rottweiler breeding anywhere.

Prohibition of tail docking has also changed the look of our Rottweiler quite a bit as the tail naturally affects the topline. In fact, it is the croup of the dogs that are a bit different from what they used to be. The reason being that if the dogs still would have a very straight croup the tail would be setting incorrectly and the carriage of tail would not be the way we want it to be. The trend in backline is leaning towards a slightly falling croup that allows the tail to set correctly without rolling over the back of the

dog. I personally prefer a dog with a tail. In fact, I love a Rottweiler with a tail and would not like to have it changed back to the docking days. I also think that there are so many positive things that come with the tail; people are able to read their dogs better, even those that are not dog people, and the dog gets a more friendly look overall. Beside all that, the dogs move much better in balance with a tail. They are more flexible, faster in corners, and hence better for the work. The competition in shows is a lot harder now than it was maybe 30 years ago. It is a challenge for the judges to be able to pass judgment on dogs without letting their own personal feelings play a part in judging. It is essential, however, that any such feelings and sentiments be put aside when passing judgment for a dog in the ring.

#### **Health and character**

Perhaps the most talked-about health issue with the Rottweiler as with any other large breed is the HD/ED issue. I find it unbelievable that there still are countries that do not require HD/ED X-raying of their breeding material! Problems with hip dysplasia can quite often be traced back to improper care, insufficient nutrition, and incorrect (either too little or too much) level of exercise of puppies. While I cannot speak for the results of any country other than Germany, I can say that our statistics on HD are quite good. This is largely due to the work that ADRK has done in promoting this matter over the years.

A few years ago, we also started X-raying the elbows of our dogs. This is still a learning process as we try to specify potential risks as to certain lines. I think, however, that the elbows do not present such a big problem within our breed as long as there is no actual dysplasia occurring. In my opinion the dogs should be X-rayed prior to the start of serious training, as the strain of training e.g., protection work, playing with the ball, jumping and such does take its toll on the physique of the dog. For health requirements on breeding material I find it sufficient that both dogs have acceptable HD/ED results. One of the other main health problems of the Rottweiler that has raised its ugly head in recent years is the ligament problem. However, there is no real solution to fix this problem with breeding selections alone. The only way we can correct and hopefully eliminate this problem is to be honest and open about it when making selections for breeding.

Sometimes, you hear old Rottweiler owners claiming the Rottweiler is not what it used to be. I think that this claim actually has not much substance as what has changed instead is the way that we care for and train our dogs. Puppies are being socialized and familiarized with handling at a very early age and training methods have developed a great deal. Along with training methods and the information that we now

have available, handlers, trainers and helpers have improved in their work. We have come to realize that the old "kick-ass" method simply does not work and does not bring about the desired results. Public focus on certain "dangerous" breeds and the problem dogs that have led to headlines has emphasized the need for socialization and proper training. Personally I find that the Rottweiler today has an improved temperament; when you think about it, it can't be too bad when our dogs can work in high levels of IPO and at the same time be social and friendly.

In the past, there were many dogs that bit immediately if a person got close to them or they came too close to someone no matter whether it was an adult, a child, or another dog. Our own product Brando was like that. Owners used to be proud of their strong and dangerous dogs, an attitude that is not at all acceptable or even possible in today's world. There is a story of one of the first breed tests where a handler got so badly bitten by his own dog that he had to be taken to the hospital. No reason to disqualify the dog, however, as a friend came to the rescue and handled the dog (now wearing a muzzle) for the measurements. A dumbbell was placed in his mouth so that someone could check his teeth and bite. The protection in those days was perhaps harder than it is now due to the use of the stick and untrained helpers, but as it was, no "out" was required. I like to tell a story of my own SchH 3 trial dog that has travelled with me several times to seminars and competitions to different corners of the world. He has walked through airports with me and stayed at hotels. There was an incident last year when I had just finished doing protection with him at the IFR WC in Florida and a young family walked by asking whether they could pet the dog. I said it was okay and these little kids came to this big Rottweiler and petted him - and this was right after he had earned the highest protection points of that particular trial! Another good example is IFR IPO WC 2010 Hoss vom Hause Neubrand who, regardless of his Schutzhund training, leads the life of a regular pet dog at home. Hoss happily shares the couch with his family when they gather together to watch television at night. If anything, it's Hoss's loud snore that may sometimes lead to him being told to get down on the floor and find another place to sleep.

The Rottweiler is changing in character with the times as we the people do. Modern society sets its standards and requirements as it brings along new challenges and opportunities. It is an evolution that the Rottweiler lives through along with us. And that's how it should be.

#### **The Working Rottweiler**

The demands on today's working Rottweiler are many. It should be faster, it should be more correct and it should appear more upbeat when working, it could also have a better sense of courage. In too many cases, judging works against our breed as the qualities that Rottweiler has to offer in dog sports go unappreciated. So then, what are the qualities that a Rottweiler can compete in dog sports against his lighter and faster counterparts with? I'd say first and foremost it is his nerves. The Rottweiler by nature is a very steady and self-confident dog with a strong mind, calm appearance, and generally a good food drive. Once a handler finds the key to turning those qualities into his advantage the Rottweiler will rock! He will have exact exercises in obedience and strong guarding, full hard grips and dominating work in protection, and intense calm tracking. Our problem on the other hand is the obvious: speed and not least, his plain old physical size. When you think about it, a 50 kg Rottweiler has to be in excellent physical condition to withstand the heat and physical strain of trialing in midsummer heat in black fur. No matter how good a Rottweiler is, it will never be as fast as the Malinois or the GSD. In today's trials where speed seems to be just about the most desired quality, the Rottweiler does not stand a chance even when he gives all that he's got. For the sake of the Schutzhund sport and, of course, the Rottweiler, judging should take into consideration differences in breeds. In many all-breed trials helper work has been changing from what it should be (in accordance with the rules) to a style more suitable for the modern working breeds such as the Malinois. With

differences in breeds as opposite to each other as the Rottweiler and Malinois, it is obvious that the Rottweiler will suffer in the hands of this new way of helper work. The Rottweiler is a serious dog that needs serious, clear helper work in order to function at full capacity; the threat and the pressure needs to be "real" for the Rottweiler to respond. If the helper moves to the side instead of directly toward and over the dog in re-attack, the Rottweiler may not take him seriously and as a result he will lose points in trial. Or in driving the dog, the way the Rottweiler uses his whole body to fight against pressure does not earn him the points the way that another breed may earn just for holding on to the sleeve with a full bite while running alongside the helper. Many other examples can be seen taking place at all-breed trials. We will either have to start training our Rotties in a new way to keep up with these changes or as in too many cases switch to another breed to gain success in dog sports. We have already lost many talented handlers to other breeds and that is a shame, as I am convinced that the working qualities of the Rottweiler still do exist!

Meanwhile, there have been a couple of great working Rottweilers that deserve to be mentioned here: Ken vom Sternbogen and Torro vom Zimmerplatz were both very impressive at work and have passed on super temperaments to their offspring. This temperament is still being seen in this stable line of working dogs that now have Ken or Torro in the 4th or 5th generation. It is actually funny that these dogs should be considered the foundation for some "working lines" as they're both also famous for their conformation. Nevertheless these dogs were great because of their special quality mixed with good handlers, helpers and successful training. This is the required package for a success in dog sports. A good dog alone will not win trophies, neither will a good handler. Schutzhund has always been and still is very much a team sport where all the pieces must fall into place.

Personally speaking, and based on my experience as a trainer and helper, I must stress the fact that the material for good working Rottweilers is still there. From Finland to the USA, from France to South America, there's plenty of good working material there. The thing is, how to get it all out in the open? In many locations the problem lies with the helpers, trainers and handlers who either have no experience in working the Rottweiler or by choice prefer to work other breeds. A Rottweiler is a dog that matures slowly and hence must be trained with patience, with consistency and by taking him forward step-by-step. He needs to be trained with a strong yet fair hand and understanding of how to keep up his drive and motivation while demanding him to be exact, correct and precise. In obedience the dilemma seems to be that either the dog is trained only to play where it will never develop the endurance for serious trialing, or he is trained with such a harsh hand that he stops working altogether! In training the motivation should be kept up to a certain degree with an element of surprise as the Rottweiler in his big mind will soon figure out the routine and yawn at the thought of doing the same thing over and over again. In competitions and trials it is sad to see a Rottweiler often misrepresented as a lazy, weak dog with no drive as that is definitely not the case!

It is important for our working breed that his working qualities are cherished and maintained in breeding. We should not try to breed Rottweilers with a Malinois temperament nor should they be allowed to turn into black and tan Labrador Retrievers. The qualities that we need to look for to ensure that the Rottweiler remains a working breed are high prey drive together with stable nerves, self-confidence sans too much dominance, hardness without being impossible to handle, balanced drive areas (between prey and defense), health and strength, and a will to work! Having emphasized the need for maintaining the working qualities, we must naturally also ensure that the Rottweiler will look like a Rottweiler also in the future. When you see a dog on the street that you have to

wonder whether it is a Rottweiler or Dobermann, you'll know something has gone wrong. A Rottweiler can and should look like a Rottweiler even when used for work. Owning a big dog comes with a responsibility - we must remember that a Rottweiler is still not a dog for everyone and can cause trouble when placed in wrong hands. One negative headline is one headline too many for our breed that is already in the list of potentially dangerous breeds in some countries. Socialization and training of dogs and education of puppy buyers and owners is a key to dispersing prejudices held towards the Rottweiler and to preventing the negative image laid on him in some places. Local and national organizations should try to work hard to cut down wild uncontrolled breeding as well as the use of dogs not meeting the standards of breeding requirements. It could be concluded that the Rottweiler should be bred, handled and trained with the demands of the modern society in mind. That is the only way for us to be able to continue enjoying this wonderful breed. The Rottweiler can have a great future as the breed is popular all over the world but what we the owners, trainers, helpers, handlers and breeders must ensure is that the popularity is of the right kind.

It would be in everyone's interest if we could have more cooperation in the world of Rottweilers - cooperation between different national clubs and organizations as well as the trainers, helpers and handlers that work their Rottweilers on the training fields every day. International seminars and training camps are a great way to promote this kind of cooperation. I would also gladly see the IFR (International Friends of the Rottweiler) play a bigger and more important role in the enhancing of the breed in all aspects including shows, working trials, breeding and education. The more people we have pulling together for our breed, the stronger we will be and the bigger the benefit for our breed.

As I look into the future of the Rottweiler, I see ever-growing interest in conformation as the breeding in many countries is concentrated solely in show material. At the same time there are upcoming breeders in countries that one could not just a while ago have imagined to have many Rottweilers, let alone have them being bred there. The market for the top quality dogs is growing and people are willing to invest in a dog that has the capability for work and the looks for show. With some big shows being held annually around the globe, the competition keeps getting tighter. In almost every country one can find a Rottweiler that could win at any show any day with very little nuances making the difference. That's what we have achieved with globalization.

It is a shame, however, that the working Rottweiler people still remain very much a minority in the Rottweiler world and within their respective countries. I am very much aware that there is a lot of interest in some countries for working the Rottweiler for Schutzhund sport. It is unfortunate that this interest is too often dampened by the sheer impossibility as there may not be enough qualified helpers and trainers around that understand and appreciate the qualities of our breed. Nevertheless, those handlers that take the training seriously are willing to drive long distances to train, learn and educate themselves. Organizing of both national and international seminars held by accomplished trainers is also a great way to spread the awareness and to exchange thoughts on the state of the Rottweiler and getting some good training done on the side! There are only a few countries in the world in which the national breed associations have set rules to help achieve and maintain the complete Rottweiler. To preserve the complete Rottweiler should be the common goal for all Rottie people worldwide.



*Seline vom Hause Neubrand*