

A SCENT WORK JOURNEY WITH AN APPENZELLER SENNENHUND

BY KEITH HERMIZ

photos credited to SpryDog Photography



We started our Scent Work journey in early 2020 after a brief foray into the world of Agility. “Vinca” had the Appenzeller Sennenhund’s athleticism and intelligence to be successful in the ring, but her very low arousal threshold made it too challenging for her to progress. We stumbled upon a local “nose work” class and thought we would give it a try as a diversion, not knowing anything about the sport nor thinking ahead to trialing. We went to a few COVID-style classes held in parking lots where she would have to search a jumbled variety of cardboard boxes for her favorite treat at the time (hot dogs). She struggled initially, easily distracted, and was unsure about sticking her head in some of the box arrangements. But she quickly came to understand the game and we saw that being successful in this activity would lean heavily on a dog-handler partnership. We were sold, and moved on to private lessons where we started to learn just how intricate and challenging this sport can be. I took on the role of the Vinca’s Scent Work handler while my wife continues to focus on Obedience.



“When we first started trailing,

there were many times when everyone heard the iconic Appenzeller bark...”

We currently compete in trials with the National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW) and AKC Scent Work performance events. In the core events, dog and handler teams compete in a diverse set of trial elements where essential oil odors, usually delivered on cotton swabs, are hidden. The elements common to NACSW and AKC are containers, interior and exterior searches. Each sanctioning organization has a fourth element: vehicles, in the case of NACSW, and buried, in AKC. The level of competition determines which scents are used, how large the search space might be, what and how many containers are used, how high the scents may be placed, how many scents will be placed, if any, and how long the team has for their search. The sanctioning organizations vary on how teams progress, with the NACSW requiring qualifying scores in all elements at the entry-level trials to be completed before titling, while AKC has adopted a cumulative element approach.

It's this last variable that has made trialing in NACSW the most challenging for us. While we have had good success across the elements, qualifying in all four at a single trial can be challenging for a breed that is always inquisitive and suspicious of her surroundings. I am proud to say that we titled at the NW2 level the weekend prior to my writing this article. We began with a container search that was held in a large room with a dozen plastic toolboxes, two with scented hides and one with a food distractor that she needed to ignore. The second search was an exterior space in a parking lot, where various tools and equipment were strewn; with three of them having hides of varying odors. The third element was finding a single hide somewhere on one of three vehicles; behind the bumper of a van as it turned out. The fourth search was for a single hide in a classroom, where it was hidden in a file drawer. A twist of the NW2 level is a fifth search repeating one of the elements. On this weekend it was another interior search in a small room filled with chairs, stools, and bins of electronic components where the hide was inaccessible in a drawer of a tool chest.

I admit to being amazed, still, after some of these searches because, even understanding how well-attuned dogs are to detecting and discriminating scents, it is remarkable to see them do what they do. That weekend, I had decided to lead Vinca along the driver's side of the middle vehicle. She got to the front of it, snapped around, and marched us back the way we came and then directly to the bumper of the van parked alongside. In the classroom, I led her down the front set of tables and chairs, figuring we would sweep through each of the five rows one at a time, but she dragged me, literally, to the back of the room and directly to the cabinet where the hide had been placed—easily 50 feet away. Every search doesn't go this way, but when they do it is awe-inspiring.



The trials themselves have been good for a dog that easily gets aroused. There's a lot of down time between runs and Vinca has had to learn to be patient as we “wait our turn.” We do a lot of calming as we prepare for each element so that she can start each one focused on the task. When we first started trialing, there were many times when everyone heard the iconic Appenzeller bark as Vinca tried to herd me along to the staging areas. But we've grown as a team and that hardly happens anymore.

Training now is much more targeted, as the challenges at each next level are known and are substantial on their own. We now use a virtual coach who, through video homework assignments, gets us working through more challenging topics. We face new things such as an unknown number of hides (including searching spaces with no hides), suspended hides, and increasingly difficult distractors in the search space.

According to the AKC, Vinca was the only Appenzeller titling in Scent Work in 2021, the last year for which they have statistics published. We are currently competing at the Advanced level for containers, Excellent level for buried and exterior, and Masters level for interior. In NACSW, Vinca is the only Appenzeller titling, having earned an ORT, NW1 and NW2 to date.

We love Scent Work, we love that we are breed pioneers, and we are proud that we are the first to achieve these titles. We also look forward to the challenges that lie ahead. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith Hermiz is mostly retired from his years as a data scientist, but he remains active as a volunteer advanced EMT with his wife, Rachel, serving their small community of Grafton, Vermont. “Vinca,” now four years old, has been with them since she was a pup.

BÄRLI VON DEROCHE

Makes Appenzeller Sennenhund History

BY BEN PARKER AND ELIZABETH GRAY-PARKER

Bärlü von Deroche is the first North American Appenzeller Sennenhunde to be titled in IGP (formerly known as Schutzhund). Why does this matter? Because IGP is a sport generally pursued with German Shepherd Dogs and Belgian Malinois, which are currently bred for traits that allow them to excel specifically in this sport. It is less common to see an “off-breed” performing well in this sport.

IGP tests a dog’s abilities to perform tracking, protection, and obedience through progressively more challenging titles: the IGPI, IGP2, and IGP3. However, before one can compete for these titles, the dog must pass the Begleithund, or BH, meaning Traffic Companion Dog. The BH tests a dog’s overall temperament, obedience, and capacity to operate in a high-traffic setting. The dog is judged on its ability to maintain focus, perform sharp obedience, and reliably execute the required commands. The dog must also hold an approximately seven-minute long-distance honor dog down-stay, with the handler’s back turned, while another dog performs the routine. Further, there is a traffic portion in which the dog must operate calmly within a group of dogs, bike-riders, cars driving past, and people stopping to talk to the handler. As many Appenzeller owners know, this setting can be a unique challenge for our very boisterous and vocal dogs.



BÄRLI VON DEROCHE MAKES APPENZELLER SENNENHUND HISTORY

/// BÄRLI IS ONE OF THE MOST PHENOMENAL DOGS WE HAVE EVER OWNED. HE LOVES TO WORK, AND WE LOVE HIS HIGH-SPIRITED, SILLY, AND AFFECTIONATE PERSONALITY. ///

Bärli's BH was a particularly proud moment for us because Bärli has a tendency towards over-excitability in the presence of other dogs, and we worked extremely hard to prepare him for this trial. Bärli and his handler/co-owner, Ben, excelled at the trial under exceptional circumstances. Not only were there the standard distractions as intended for the trial, but also heavy winds with 30 mph Montana wind gusts, causing a borderline dust storm. (We rubbed a lot of dirt out of our eyes that day.) There were horses at one end of the trial field that were irritable and bickering with one another. There were also multiple trains passing nearby at full speed, blowing their horns. (Did I mention the sheets of metal blowing and knocking into metal fences, scaring all the horses and causing some chaos in the background?) At one point, when Bärli was on deck, the spectator tents nearly sailed away in the wind, and we had to put a hold on the trial to tame them.

Through all of this, Bärli worked at his best and made a name for Appenzellers that day! He gave an exceptional performance in all elements of the trial and brought his best "fuß" (German for "focused heel"), his skill that we are most proud of and looks the happiest doing. He made North American Appenzeller history by becoming the first titled in BH, a worthy accomplishment.

Bärli is one of the most phenomenal dogs we have ever owned. He loves to work, and we love his high-spirited, silly, and affectionate personality. He is a very well-rounded dog, and beyond the BH he has also earned titles in IABCA Conformation, a UKC Total Dog, and a UKC Top Ten in Breed for 2022. Bärli's pursuits for 2023 are currently focused on Drafting, with plans to trial in the fall. ■



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ben Parker and Lizzy Gray-Parker have both been lifelong dog lovers, and years before knowing each other they separately pursued their own dog training adventures and canine hobbies. Since acquiring their first dog together (Bärli), they have evolved their lifelong love of canines into full-time work and now operate their own dog training business with the goal of helping clients discover the joys of training and developing a meaningful bond with their dogs. They live in Idaho with their Appenzeller, "Bärli," and Belgian Malinois, "Dojo," and are actively training for various working-dog pursuits, including Drafting, Obedience, Tracking, and IGP. As a pack, they also love spending time exploring the beautiful Idaho outdoors via land, snow or water.

MISCELLANEOUS & FOUNDATION STOCK SERVICES GROUP BREEDERS

DEBBIE DALES

1. Where do you live? How many years in dogs? How many years as a breeder?

I live in a small unincorporated town called Deroche located in the Fraser Valley of B.C. Canada. I am primarily a Pug dog breeder and have only been exhibiting and breeding for the past 12 years. When I was planning to move to this rural community, I wanted a bigger, but not large, dog to help ward off predatorial animals and raptors. After doing some research I came across the Appenzeller Sennenhunde breed. Appenzellers were bred partly as a guard dog and partly as a herding dog and are known for their high pitch bark; they are very intelligent and are quick learners...all traits that I was looking for in a breed to help guard over my Pugs. Appenzellers are a short-haired medium sized multi-color cattle dog of Spitz type. Appenzellers require very little grooming and as a Pug breeder, how could I not love how the Appenzeller's tail curls up over its back? Appenzellers also have very few health concerns and live an average lifespan of 12 to 14 years. Nothing comes before health in my breeding program and even though it was not my intent to start breeding Appenzellers when I brought my first one home, it was a bonus to find a breed with so few health concerns. On February 22, 2015, my first Appenzeller came to live with us.



2. What is your kennel name? How many dogs do you currently keep?

We currently have three (3) Appenzellers at Deroche Appenzellers, Ulric, a 5-year- old male, Buca, a 2-year- old female and Dani, a 10-1/2-month-old female. All three (3) have black tri-color coats. We also have a grumble of 8 pugs under our Cuddle Pug kennel name.

3. Which show dogs from the past have been your noteworthy winners?

Highleigh Ulric has his UKC championship title and his International Honors Bronze Championship title. I started showing Ulric in AKC Open shows in 2019 where he was awarded Best in Breed and Group One. Due to Covid-19, Ulric was not entered in AKC events in 2020 and 2021 and is yet to obtain his AKC Award of Merit. Bucanevue of Alpine Appenzellers has her International National Championship title. These dogs are noteworthy winners as there are only a handful of Appenzellers in North America that currently have any of these titles. Appenzellers were not recognized by the CKC (Canadian Kennel Club), so we have been unable to exhibit them at dog shows in Canada.

MISCELLANEOUS & FOUNDATION STOCK SERVICES GROUP BREEDERS



I have CKC championships on all but one of my adult female pugs and CKC GCH titles on both of my adult male pugs. In addition to having a CKC GCH title, Yellow Frame's The Hustler, one of my male Pugs, also has his AKC championship title.

4. Which have been your most influential sires and dams?

Coining the phrase quality over quantity, Desta from Townview, our first brood Appenzeller female, only produced a total of 13 live pups in 4 litters before we retired her from our breeding program. She produced very nice puppies, two of which have gone on to be show and performance dogs. I believe a good breeding program starts with good healthy and sound brood bitches which I am hopeful Buca and Dani will be.

5. Can you talk a bit about your facilities? Where are your puppies whelped? How are they raised?

We have a small room set up in our basement for whelping puppies. Our puppies spend most of their time in this room until they are weaned. After that, weather permitting, they are introduced to a contained outside kennel with more space for them to play and run around in the fresh air. On nice days they spend most of their time in this kennel and return to the whelping room to sleep for the night. During the day, we take our puppies out for excursions in our front field for exercise and to explore. Sometimes mom gets to join in too.



6. Are you working with your breed's parent club to gain full AKC recognition for your breed?

Since 2015, I have been active in the roll as President of AMDCA. As such, I have been very involved in the effort to gain full AKC, and more recently, CKC recognition for the Appenzeller Sennenhunde breed. As Appenzellers are still a very rare breed and their population is still very small in North America, we anticipate full recognition will continue to be a work in progress for some time yet. Paula Webber, Vice-President, AMDCA and I have provided education

MISCELLANEOUS & FOUNDATION STOCK SERVICES GROUP BREEDERS

presentations to dog Judges in both US and Canada, and I am very happy to announce that in January this year, CKC has approved the addition of the Appenzeller Sennenhunde breed to their Miscellaneous list. Effective July 1st, 2023, exhibitors will be permitted to enter Appenzellers in CKC conformation events.

7. What is your "process" for selecting Show Puppies? Performance Puppies?

To select show and performance prospect puppies, I start by confirming sire and dam are both health certified. Then I research the sire and dam's pedigrees to learn as much as possible about their lines in effort to identify any health, conformation and/or temperament issues. At seven (7) weeks of age, I evaluate puppies' temperaments using the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test. Even though the Volhard test also looks at the structure of each puppy, I have created a conformation evaluation based on the Appenzell breed standard that I complete for each puppy at 8 weeks of age. This additional evaluation helps me to rate some of the desirable breed specific show qualities, such as color markings, symmetry, tail, eyes, ears, etc.

8. Do you compete in Companion Events? Performance Events?

I have done some companion and performance training with my Appenzellers but have not competed in companion or performance events with them personally. However, I have bred some dogs that do compete and do very well in a variety of these events. My focus is mainly on health, conformation and breeding.

9. How would you define "conditioning" as it relates to your breed?

Socialization, mental stimulation, and exercise are key components to a well conditioned Appenzeller. Appenzellers do go through multiple fearful stages as puppies and adolescents which stands to reason why it is so important to start socializing Appenzellers as young puppies and to continue socializing them well into their maturity. Appenzellers are very smart and can get bored and destructive very quickly so mental stimulation is also important. Teaching them new tricks, providing mentally stimulating problem-solving games, and introducing different toys are some things you can do to keep their minds stimulated. Appenzellers require regular exercise...they love to go for walks, love to run, love to swim, love playing in snow, love playing fetch, and love playing with other dogs. Play with other dogs does need to be supervised as Appenzeller's play is usually very exuberant and can get rough. When they are doing an activity or exercise, they really like, they may bark in excitement...keep in mind they are known for their high pitch bark.



MISCELLANEOUS & FOUNDATION STOCK SERVICES GROUP BREEDERS

10. Are there any health-related concerns in your breed? Any special nutritional needs?

Hips, elbows, patellar, and eyes are important health-related concerns for Appenzellers. Obtaining a normal rating for hips, elbows and patellar prior to breeding has been a standard breeding practice for AMDCA breeder members for many years. Because entropion and ectropion are disqualifying faults for our breed, eye testing was recently added to our list of required health testing. In support of best breeding practices for Appenzellers, the AMDCA partnered with the OFA Canine Health Information Center (CHIC) program in July 2021.

In addition to the above noted health concerns, skin sensitivity is not uncommon with the Appenzeller breed, so making sure that fish oil and glucosamine are included in an Appenzeller's daily diet is important.

11. Do you think your breed is supported by a sufficient number of preservation breeders?

I am very passionate about breed preservation and am happy to be able to say that currently all the Appenzeller breeders I know, members and non-members of the AMDCA, are purebred dog breeders. There are not very many Appenzeller breeders in North America, so I hope by continuing to mentor and educate new breeders and the public, the AMDCA is able to increase the number of ethical and responsible purebred Appenzeller breeders in North America.

12. Is your breed well suited to be a family dog? Who are the best candidates to own your breed?

Appenzellers are great family dogs, but they are not for everyone. They need a lot of activities, exercise, space, and they need a job to do. Appenzellers are caring and loyal and will certainly let you know when there is the slightest bit of unusual activity going on around your home. They are great with children in the family and will form a strong bond to them if they are raised with them. Appenzellers treat everyone they know like their best friend. However, they do like to jump up unless otherwise trained, so they do need to be supervised around small children and people with physical disabilities, especially those who have had little exposure to dogs.

The best candidates to own an Appenzeller are active themselves and have the time and desire to actively engage in activities with their dog, whether it is hiking, performance, search and rescue, etc. Appenzellers are very diverse and are happy to do a variety of different activities with their human companions.

13. What is the biggest misconception about your breed? What is your breed's best-kept secret? Most people do not know about Appenzellers, so Appenzeller owners are often asked "Is that a Bernese Mountain Dog?" or "Is that A Bernese cross?" This gives Appenzeller owners a great opportunity to educate the public on our breed.

The tri-coloring of Swiss Mountain Dog breeds is the same for all 4 Swiss Mountain Dog breeds with only one exception and that is that Appenzellers not only have black tri-color coats, but some Appenzellers have havana brown tri-color coats.

Did you know that Appenzeller puppies can yodel?



MISCELLANEOUS & FOUNDATION STOCK SERVICES GROUP BREEDERS

14. If you could share a comment or two with judges of your breed, what would you like to say to them?

Some Appenzellers may seem aloof when judges approach them in the show ring. This behaviour usually derives from a lack of confidence caused by the lack of exposure to people, dogs, or the environment. It is not because they are unfriendly or that they do not want to be a show dog. Some Appenzellers, especially younger ones, may require a lot more exposure than others which is why we emphasize the importance of socialization so much with this breed. If you happen to come across this when you are judging Appenzellers, do not approach from the front, approach from the side and do not stare into its eyes. If you do this, you should be able to complete your evaluation without further hesitation and the Appenzeller you are evaluating will likely believe it has just found a new friend.

15. Do you have any words of wisdom to pass along to newer breeders?

As purebred dog breeders, we have a responsibility to preserve our breed so please do your part to breed ethically.

- Join a breed club and network with other Appenzeller breeders.
- Do all required health testing for the breed and any additional testing for other health issues you may find in your dogs' lineage. You can't fix something you don't know about...the more you know, the better breeding decisions you will be able to make.
- Find a mentor that can teach you about conformation and how it impacts structure. Have your dog(s) conformation judged.
- Know your dog's pedigree and study pedigrees of dogs that you may be planning to use in your breeding program.

16. For a bit of fun, what's the most amusing thing you've ever experienced with one of your dogs?

I would have to say that the most amusing thing I have experienced with any of my Appenzellers is playing in the snow. Our first Appenzeller Hilja came outside with me the first winter I had her. I started shovelling the snow and throwing it over our fence into our front field. Hilja became excited and ran into the field where the snow was at least as high as her withers. She started jumping up to catch the snow I was throwing and continued to do this for well over a half hour as I was shovelling. She jumped up to at least 6 feet high at times to grab the snow. What I found most amusing was that she was so extremely elated the whole time. It is so heartwarming to see an Appenzeller that happy. We took full advantage of every opportunity we had to do this again.

