

2009 Bundesleistungshuten Germany's Premier Herding Event September 25-27, 2009

By Karen Priest



The annual Bundesleistungshuten showcases Herding German Shepherd Dogs & professional Shepherds competing to win Germany's highest Sheep Herding Honor, the Golden Shovel.

Here you will see the great masters among Shepherds, all gathered to compete at one event, as well as their German Shepherd Dogs performing in the job they were originally intended for. The weekend promises to be a festival for Herding enthusiasts, with vendors offering sheep products (blankets, vests, wool items), as well as Herding and dog sport equipment. There will be excellent food, featuring lamb cuisine, as well as music, beer, and, of course, German Shepherd Dogs. The Bundesleistungshuten (BLH) falls one weekend prior to the BSP, so spectators can easily plan to make both events part of their trip.

This year's event will be held in Schweinfurt, the area that is home to Karl Fuller's Zwinger vom Kirschtal, one of the world's most renowned Herding kennels. Herr Fuller has himself earned the Golden Shovel 10 times. (8 times with the SV and 2 times with the Schafzuchtverband.) Now an octogenarian retired from competition, Herr Fuller is still very much involved in the event. His club will host the event for the first time, and they are planning some very special details for spectators.

To qualify for the Bundesleistungshuten, a Shepherd and his German Shepherd Dog must first compete in a Landesgroup level HGH trial during the summer, and earn a minimum of 80 points. The BLH is comprised of the same components as the HGH, and the point scale is the same. There will be about 300 sheep in the flock. Each team will take the sheep from the pen,

move the flock to the graze, negotiate a bridge, a narrow graze, a wide graze, a road and traffic, and re-pen the sheep. Individual runs take about an hour.

Years ago, there were many competitors —often 20 to 24 Shepherds entered. In those days, there was a rule that each Shepherd was only allowed to start one time; otherwise, there were too many runs, taking far too much time. In recent years, as the number of competitors has dwindled, this rule has been changed. Now Shepherds with more than one dog qualifying are encouraged to do multiple runs. In 2007 there were 10 Shepherds and 14 runs. (Four Shepherds started two dogs.)

The event begins on Friday mid-day, with the drawing of lots by each Shepherd. This determines the order and time of each Team's run. Then, the judges will show all the Shepherds the area for Herding. A couple of competitors might start on Friday afternoon. Friday evening there is a big party. Marion Fuller told me, "In the evening we will have a big party, with all the Shepherds in a big tent. There will be a lot of food, Bavarian beer, music and some dancing."

Saturday is the main day for Herding. Each run takes about an hour, making for a full day! Saturday evening there is another party in the tent, and SV representatives make a speech for the crowd, followed by music and dancing.

Sunday morning the tradition calls for church services with a catholic priest, under the open sky, outside the tent. Herding commences after the service and usually continues until early afternoon. Once all the Shepherds have done their run, the judges will sit together to tally points and make decisions. While the judges convene, the hosting club will have some special entertainment planned for the spectators.

Throughout the event, there will be videos of the German Shepherd Dog showing in the tent for visitors to enjoy.

I encourage Herding enthusiasts and German Shepherd Dog devotees alike to attend this event and watch the dogs working. You are sure to be impressed and come away with a greater understanding of the breed's original purpose.

If you plan to attend, you would be wise to wear comfortable shoes. I also recommend umbrellas and rain gear, in case it rains for a short time during the event.

If you would like more information about the area and places to stay, or if you are looking to meet up with other Americans who are attending, please contact me, traumhofgsd@aol.com. ∞