



# Anchor Therapy Clinic

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January 18, 2021

To: Vacaville Police Department

Subject: Canine (Gus) Cognitive and Workability Evaluation

## REPORT OF ASSESSMENT

**Canine Name:** Gus (canine)

**Utilization:** Dual Purpose: Patrol / Narcotic Detection

**Age:** 1 year, 3 months

**Gender:** Male, Intact

**Breed:** Czechoslovakian Shepherd

**Department:** Vacaville Police Department

**Administer:** Kevin Cameron, M.A, CPTT, AAT.

**Assessment Date(s):** January 15, 2021

January 16, 2021

January 17, 2021

### Sources of Data:

- a. Contact Observations & Assessment
- b. Environmental Assessment
- c. Socialization Assessment
- d. Workability Assessment
- e. Department Interviews
- f. Referral video review

### Tests Administered:

- a. Temperament Testing
- b. Obedience Evaluation
- c. Odor Recognition Testing
- d. POST Certification

**Record Review:** No training records, medical records, utilization, or certification records were provided.

**Background:**

**1. Identifying Information:** Gus (canine) is identified as one year, three-month-old male Czechoslovakian Shepherd belonging to the Vacaville Police Department. The department identifies the canine as being Certified and utilized as a dual-purpose patrol/narcotic detection Police K9. Certification of the canine was identified that it was conducted by Steve Brewer of Law Dogs Inc. using the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification test.

**2. Referral:** The referral for evaluation was in response to an altercation between a canine handler. The department is seeking an assessment to determine the cognitive wellbeing and workability of a Law Enforcement K9 for the Vacaville Police Department consisting of:

- a. Cognitive evaluation: the cognitive assessment would be conducted to determine the current temperament, potential impacts, and canine team working liabilities of recent training experiences, and possible resiliency of the canine to perform its duties as a dual-purpose working dog (patrol/narcotics detection).
- b. Determine necessary rehabilitation of the canine

**3. Department Interview:** Discussions with department SGT Frank Piro, K9 Handler Cole Spencer, and public marketing by Steve Brewer provided insight to current training expectations, canine training operations, and current operating expectation of Vacaville Police Department working dog teams.

*Key Points:*

- a. It is identified that working dog teams must conduct a minimum of 4 hours of training weekly.
- b. Working dog teams conduct handler training and POST certification with Steve Brewer, Law Dogs Inc.
- c. Working dog teams conduct 3-4 months of training before attending certification.
- d. Gus (canine) was procured from Europe in November 2020 and was certified in December 2020.
- e. Gus (canine) was reported to be certified in patrol tasks and narcotics: Cocaine, Heroin, Methamphetamine, and "All amphetamines."
- f. All working dog teams are only trained using aversive methods with little to no positive reinforcement.
- g. Working dog teams are required to medicate their working dogs with Cosequin.

- h. Working dog teams do not receive education or training in cognitive-behavioral canine training fundamentals, operant conditioning models, canine health and wellness, training equipment utilization,

**4. Working history:** The canine is reported to be a European import arriving in November 2020, where he began training with a new working dog handler. It was reported that the canine team completed training and POST certification with Law Dogs in December of 2020. The canine was removed from the handler after the referring incident, which took place on or about December 30, 2020.

## **Section I: Assessment**

### **1. Canine Health & Welfare**

Initial contact with the canine best describes his mannerisms as aloof observed in the back of a police canine vehicle. Upon the canine exiting the vehicle, the canine's body composition and gait were evaluated.

a. **Body Composition:** At rest, in a standing position, the canine appeared to be malnourished or underfed. 5-7 ribs were easily observable on either side of the canine. The duties and activities of a working dog constitute a need to maintain athletic body composition. A traditional rule of thumb is that a working dog should have an hourglass shape and only see 1-2 ribs at the most. The gait appeared to be impacted immediately upon exiting the vehicle returning to normative once the canine stretched. The canine was not observed running due to a lack of obedience and concerns over control of the animal. The canine had slowed dermal elasticity identifying concerns for dehydration. The capillary response could not verify this due to concerns over aggression.

b. **Medical Care:** The canine is reported to be undergoing routine Veterinary care. Veterinarian records were not available for review. It was identified that the canine is receiving continuous daily dosing of Cosiquin at the Department Trainer's direction without the oversight of a Veterinarian.

Glucosamine/chondroitin combination (Cosequin) is a nutritional supplement often prescribed to treat joint and muscle injuries, osteoarthritis in dogs and acts as a mild anti-inflammatory. Much of working dog health and fitness relies on the handler's subjective report to the veterinarian. Working dogs utilizing unregulated medications may experience injuries in training unrecognized by inexperienced handlers preventing proper treatment by veterinarians and creating a high risk of aggressive behaviors by a working dog experiencing pain. There are concerns that long-term use of Cosequin may result in liver or kidney issues with the canines.

## 2. **Temperament Testing**

A temperament test measures a canine's motivations (drives) and reaction or behavior to various stimuli and elements presented. Primary and secondary drives are based on DoD MWD operational definitions.

- *Primary*: Breathing, thirst, hunger (food), pain avoidance
- *Secondary*: Socialization, prey, play aggression (competition)

The canine is best described as an insecure (fearful), high drive, moderate titration, and dominant working dog. The canine's desires to be active, and his domineering behavioral traits can easily be mistaken for rapport or confidence in the canine. The canine presents as fearful and engages in avoidant behaviors when cornered, leashed, or when a handler attempts to pet him. The canine will present an indifferent mannerism with strangers outside of a 15-foot radius from the canine. It is observed that the canine is insecure and is expecting to be corrected at all times. The canine has no positive relationship with training collars, kennel crates, or traditional training stimuli. The only positive interaction the canine has is with his food bowl.

a. **Hunger:** The canine presents as hungry and food aggressive (fearful). When presented with his bowl, he will eat vigorously, and while the canine is being fed, he will guard his bowl, aggressing on anyone near. After the canine has completed eating, he will return to a positive demeanor allowing for anyone to retrieve his bowl.

b. **Pain Avoidance:** The canine is in a constant state of pain avoidance. A dog will avoid objects and actions it has learned to associate with pain or discomfort. The canine shows fear-based responses with men, women, and children. The kennel crate possesses a negative associating, causing the canine to seek to hide in the crate's rear, vocalizing toward individuals until he experiences a positive interaction with them. Working dog training tools such as collars, shock collars, prong collars, and other traditional tools elicit a fear response (insecurity) from the canine. The canine resource guards his food, fearing either not being fed or that he is going to lack sustenance.

c. **Prey drive:** The canine presents with a high prey drive

"Prey drive" is an expression that refers to the dog's natural tendency to chase, bite, and carry an item the dog perceives as prey. This applies to things that would, in the natural world, constitute prey items for a dog (e.g., a rabbit), as well as artificial objects (e.g., a thrown ball) that are also capable of triggering the dog's impulse to engage in predatory behavior. Prey behavior has enormous importance for a working dog's training because it reinforces nearly all substance detection training. It also contributes significantly to controlled aggression training.

d. **Play Drive:** The canine presents with a high play drive only when it has a positive rapport with a handler.

Play Socialization is behavior that lacks apparent external goals. It does not fulfill any immediate need like hunger or thirst. From watching dogs at play, we infer that they "enjoy" themselves while playing. Although play is difficult to define, and although scientists argue about its purpose, play is a distinct and identifiable behavior that occurs in a wide range of animals. We may presume it is one of the dog's needs, and there can be little doubt that carefree and happy play between dog and handler is a vital part of a healthy and productive training relationship.

### **3. Obedience Evaluation**

It was identified that the canine was trained in obedience for over 4 hours weekly utilizing commands in German. Commands are traditionally given verbally but can be paired with nonverbal commands to reinforce those commands. Obedience tasks including sit, lay down, come (recall), or outing an object.

On Leash Obedience Tasks: **NONE**  
Off-Leash Obedience Tasks: **NONE**

The canine does not understand leash pressures, inductive-induction of commands, and has no cognitive understating of obedience. The canine can be "cued" into a sit or down position based solely on the handler's body position but shown no understanding of the task. The canine will release a toy only if "cued" by collar pressure when calm.

### **4. Odor Recognition Testing**

The canine's odor recognition is best described as "imprinted." The canine does not search and will shown no odor recognition unless it is visually cued by a reward prior to the search. The canine understands there is an association between a reward and a target odor but does not have a clear understanding of the task being performed.

### **5. POST Certification**

POST Police K-9 standards recommends that an in-service K-9 team complete 16 hours of documented training monthly to maintain basic patrol and/or detection proficiency. A K-9 team with multiple/added specializations (e.g., SWAT K-9, bomb detection, search and rescue) may require additional training to maintain proficiency.

*POST Certification Evaluation Results*

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Obedience</b>   | <b>Result: Fail</b> |
| <b>Critical Task:</b> Obedience and Control of a K-9   |                     |
| <b>Note:</b><br>Canine does not sit, down, or have the ability to walk with the handler in a controlled manner |                     |

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Patrol Search</b>   | <b>Result: Fail</b> |
| <b>Critical Tasks:</b> Reasonable Control, Suspect Location, Signal Recognition  |                     |
| <b>Note:</b><br>Canine does not understand the task. Canine requires direct cue, believing he is going to engage a bite sleeve or toy. |                     |

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Apprehension</b>  | <b>Result: Fail</b> |
| <b>Critical Tasks:</b> Control, Pursuit, Call Off  |                     |
| <b>Note:</b><br>Bite work was not conducted due to safety concerns and lack of obedience |                     |

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| <b>Handler Protection</b>   | <b>Result: Fail</b> |
| <b>Critical Tasks:</b> The dog makes physical contact with the agitator/decoy, the dog "disengages" on verbal command, the dog remains under control. |                     |
| <b>Note:</b><br>Bite work was not conducted due to safety concerns and lack of obedience  |                     |

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Detection</b>   | <b>Result: Fail</b> |
| <b>Critical Tasks:</b> Reasonable control, find substances.  |                     |
| <b>Note:</b><br>Canine does not understand the task. Canine found 0/10 planted aids in a controlled environment. |                     |

A DoD Working Dog certification was scheduled to be conducted to be utilized as a comparison to the POST certification and assist in determining workability. The certification was canceled due to a lack of obedience and safety concerns with the canine.

## **Section II: Diagnostic Summary**

### **1. Cognitive-Behavioral**

The canine's cognitive-behavioral assessment indicates the canine is a insecure (fearful), high drive, moderate titration, and dominant untrained working dog. There is a significant concern for the canine engaging in aggressive behaviors due to fear. The canine appears to be underweight and unregulated medication poses concerns for the overall health, wellbeing, and

utilization of the canine. The canine does not present as having positive training experiences, which are correlated by reports of handlers only engaging in aversive training methodologies.

## **2. Workability**

Currently, the canine presents as untrained and does not meet the certification criteria for the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification. The canine does not possess any obedience or odor detection capabilities at the time of the assessment. At the canine's current state of training, fear response, and insecurity, this working dog would present as a liability for both the handler and the public if it were to be used in a law enforcement capacity.

## **3. Referral Response**

1. The canine has been significantly and negatively impacted by department working dog training methodologies.
2. Although the canine presents a fear response, it is believed that it not the result of a singular incident. Fear-based behaviors seen in the canine are generally a result of comorbidity of conditions in the canine's training environment and home life. The canine shows a strong resiliency due to its perceived mental stability and willingness to please, indicating that it has the fortitude to overcome traumatic events with the appropriate reinforcement.
3. The canine's current status presents the animal as a liability without proper training, reinforcement, and oversight.
4. The canine requires rehabilitative training to overcome insecurities, reduce liabilities, and develop a working rapport with a handler.
5. With proper training and reinforcement, based on the canine's drives and resiliency, it is believed that the canine has the potential to be a strong working dog and an asset to law enforcement.

## **Section III: Discussion**

The canine's assessments and observations conclude that the canine lacks positive rapport, training, and handler care. The canine's resiliency to overcome his fears and insecurities shows excellent potential for the canine to engage in law enforcement duties. Much of the canine's cognitive-behavioral issues may be rectified with a strong positive rapport, obedience, balanced training methodologies, and consistency in the canine development. It is believed that a lack of training in the handler, the canine, and deficiencies in the training program may be the underlying antecedent to the current condition of the canine.

## **Discussion of Evaluation Significance**

### **1. Certification**

- a. According to reports from the Vacaville Police Department, this canine was certified in patrol and narcotic detection by a POST Certification official. Based on POST standards, this canine cannot perform any of the critical tasks required to meet certification standards. Although a canine will perform differently for a stranger as opposed to its bonded handler, the canine does not present any of the fundamental skills in obedience or odor recognition necessary to be a Police K9 at the time of the evaluation.
- b. According to identified standards, the canine team was allotted approximately 30 days of the 3-4 months to complete the necessary training program to meet certification standards. With an experienced handler, a "green" canine may be ready for certification within 30 days, but it is exceptionally uncommon.
- c. The department identified that the canine was trained and certified by the same individual. POST standards identify to preserve the highest standards of professionalism and avoid any perceived conflict of interest between the Evaluator and the K-9 Team, and the Evaluator should not have a monetary interest in breeding/selling/training of the dog being evaluated.

**2. Canine Health and Welfare:** There are significant concerns about the canine's health and welfare. The canine shows numerous signs of neglect, cognitively and physically, that has occurred, and only can occur, over a significant period. Based on the condition of the canine and data from the evaluation, there is reason to conclude that the canine condition may result from a lack of handler knowledge about the care and welfare of a working dog. Even with continuous medical care, as previously identified, the veterinarian staff relies on subjective reporting from the canine's handler. If a handler does not have the appropriate education on the biological needs of a working dog, a malnourished animal can easily be passed off as going through a "highly active" stage of development. When a veterinarian or educated handler is not regulating a working dog's medication, then there is no clear way of knowing what normative behavior for the canine is. Aggression from a canine can be expected from a hungry or injured working dog. A canine trainer who is engaged in the welfare and working proficiency of their assigned canine teams will have a vested interest in the health and welfare of their working dogs because the health of the canine directly impacts the performance of the canine. A complete list of health, nutrition, and necessary routine care skills for working dogs can be provided.



**3. Handler Training:** Although the necessary operational handler skills will vary based on the canine team's mission, there are numerous sustainment skills essential for every operation of working dog utilization that should be taught during a "Handler's Training" course. Annual training and education should be conducted to ensure operational competency and kept up to date on current industry standards. At a minimum, a canine handler should be educated in:

- Canine biology
- Canine health and medical care
- Sanitation
- Canine care and maintenance
- Working dog safety
- Working dog utilization concepts
- Canine training fundamentals
- Cognitive-behavioral conditioning
- Operant conditioning
- Rapport building fundamentals
- Search techniques
- Obedience fundamentals
- Odor training fundamentals
- Training scenario development
- Canine Team development
- Certification standards
- Handler duties and responsibilities
- Trainer duties and Responsibilities
- Emergency response procedures
- Law and ethics

The information provided for this assessment identified that the handler completed a Handlers Training course and POST certification with a "green" or untrained dog within 30 days. The organizational trainer identifies that a handler should have undergone a minimum of 3-4 months of training before attempting certification. The significant concern arises for the health and welfare of a canine due to a lack of handler education and the overall performance and safety of the canine team if a trainer did not afford the adequate handler training, proper supervision of the application of knowledge, checks on learning, or rushed a certification of an ill-prepared team.

**4. Canine Training:** Assessment of the canine identified the canine lacked basic fundamental training to meet POST certification criteria, calling into question the POST certification's validity. The canine did not have any construct of obedience, understanding of search-related tasks, or odor recognition. The canine could be "cued" into engaging in an activity; however, there is a significant difference between a trained dog and a canine who can be lured into a physical position with a reward or treat. There is no "one-way" to train a working dog; however, every technique utilizes classical and operant conditioning models, including both positive and negative reinforcement. Training never includes causing physical harm or physically striking a canine as a form of correction. Although often misunderstood, obedience is a significant part of all working dogs regardless of their skill sets. Obedience does not diminish "drive" or workability of a patrol or detection canine.

POST certification requirement for this canine identifies a minimum of 12 "critical" tasks that a working dog is required to perform. This canine could not perform any of the specified critical tasks at any level of proficiency. POST standards identify that a canine should undergo a minimum of 4 hours a week of training for a single purpose canine. Additional time should be allotted for additional skills (dual purpose) in a canine. The Department of Defense requires working dog handlers to conduct a minimum of 4 hours a week in detection, 4 hours a week in patrol, and obedience to maintain certification standards. Canine handlers should be trained in

working dog training fundamentals to assist in improving and developing their canine team. A Trainer should oversee all canine training to meet and maintain proficiency standards, improve the teams' workability and performance, and ensure the safety of the canine and handlers.

**5. Team Development:** Working rapport between a canine and a handler traditionally takes a minimum of 30 days and up to 6 months. Once working rapport is developed, the handler can begin to learn the canine's biological responses to recognize changes in behavior, indicating a positive odor response. Lack of team development causes potential concerns for safety and workability. Ultimately canine team development is the responsibility of the canine trainer. A canine trainer should be experienced in all elements surrounding the health, welfare, selection, training, utilization, and development of the canines, the handlers, and the canine teams. A department's working dog program is only as strong as the canine trainer employed to develop their teams.

**6. Oversight:** The issues concerning the canine could be easily preventable with effective oversight of the department working dog program consisting of standard operating procedures, standardized training programs, independent canine team certifications, annual compliance reviews, effective canine team supervision, and appropriate training oversight. Assessment data indicate the training involved within the elements of the canine team is unstructured and non-standardized at best. The canine and handler lacked proper supervision at the trainer's level, which negatively impacted this canine.

**7. Canine's Future Workability:** Based on the drives, resilience, and effective rehabilitation, there is no identified reason the canine cannot be expected to fully recover and perform effectively as a dual-purpose working dog serving in a Law Enforcement capacity. The canine's future performance will significantly depend on the working dog training program, the handler's education, and appropriate oversight. Data suggests that the department intervened in the animal's welfare before severe and irreparable harm to the canine or its future potential performance.

## **Section IV: Recommendations:**

### **1. Canine Rehabilitation**

- a. The canine undergoes rehabilitation to illuminate insecurities, alleviate uncontrolled aggression, and develop an ability to trust in human partners.
- b. A licensed veterinarian gives the canine a complete physical to determine nutrient needs and the potential medical impact of the current psychological condition.
- c. Canine is only provided medication based on the recommendation of a veterinarian.

## **2. Canine Team**

- a. With proper training and supervision, replacing the canine with the previous handler would not impede the team's recovery or future workability. Pairing a canine with a different handler would not hinder the recovery or future workability of the team.

## **3. Handler Training**

- a. It is recommended that the assigned handler complete a handler's training program comprising of the aforementioned identified handler fundamentals.
- b. Based on the data provided, it is recommended that a review of the department's standards for required handler knowledge be evaluated and any additional training be conducted to prevent future incidents and improve the quality of life for the working dogs and improve the workability of the canine teams.

## **4. Canine Training**

- a. It is recommended that a canine undergoes appropriate training to meet the utilization requirements of its assigned duties. Canine training is recommended to be a minimum of 4 hours weekly with additional allotted time for additional skills and obedience.
- b. Canine training should include cognitively developed skills that a canine can perform on command to ensure the canine can be safely controlled and effectively utilized. Skills generally include heeling skills, sitting, laying down, recall, detection based skills, controlled aggression (patrol canines). Skilled tasks are typically performed on command with no more than 2-3 minor corrections per task (on/off leash). Detection skills generally require canines to maintain a 90%-95% proficiency rate on trained odors. Patrol based skills are based on the needs of the department.

## **5. Supervision**

- a. It is recommended that canine teams maintain training and probable cause records to ensure compliance with training programs and improve canine teams' workability. Records should be annually inspected and reviewed before any certification.
- b. Implement training standards and governing standard operating procedures. These standards should be supported by governing departments to allow for appropriate training and team development.
- c. It is recommended that an annual administrative review of the canine training program be conducted to ensure compliance standards are maintained.

## 6. Certification


- a. It is recommended that the canine be decertified at this time and attempt recertification upon the completion of canine training.
- b. POST certification is a standardized and industry-accepted standard for law enforcement canine teams. It is recommended that certification officials be disinterested parties not directly associated with the certifying canine team's training or utilization per POST certification recommended standards.

## 7. Contractual recommendations of a Trainer

- a. It is recommended that the contracted trainer's contractual obligations be reviewed for compliance and omissions preventing the supervision of the training of canines, handlers, and canine team development.
- b. It is recommended that canine training is within the skillset of the contracted trainers. Marketed training capabilities of the trainer should be in line with the contractual obligations of the canine trainer.
- c. Contract oversight should be implemented to ensure the working dog teams are trained to the highest level possible based on the trainer's skills.
- d. A regularly scheduled briefing, no less than annually, by the trainer to the department, should be conducted to ensure training compliance and the highest level of performance by the working dog teams

Additional consultation and resources are available upon request. This report is confidential and solicited by and is for the Vacaville Police Department's explicit use. Distribution of this report without express written permission from the department or the author is prohibited. Point of contact is the undersigned at (916) 701-5197 or [kevin@anchorthrapyclinic.com](mailto:kevin@anchorthrapyclinic.com).

This report was completed on January 18, 2021

  
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