

In 1976 a new limited breeding program was established at the Innisfail Police Dog Services training centre. The intent — similar to that of earlier breeding experiments — was to provide an assured supply of trainable dogs. The aim was also to raise a strain of working dogs most suitable for law-enforcement duties. (Insp. Fream points out that the term “working” dog is used to differentiate these animals from show or pet stock raised by most commercial breeders.)

This last breeding program met with limited success and has since been stayed. Explains Insp. Fream: “We have not realized the benefits we had hoped for in raising our own dogs. The project presented such limited results that it did not warrant the costs of maintaining it.” From the several litters raised, only a few dogs graduated to field service. Nor have dogs bred at the Innisfail kennels proven superior to those acquired by purchase or donation.

In attempting to overcome the supply problem and to reduce expenditures, the Police Dog Services administrators discarded certain measures and introduced others:

“To this end, every field dog handler is an agent for the program of dog acquisition. We have improved our dog selection criteria and this appears to be working well. Another factor is that we no longer take young puppies to be raised by a potential dog handler; rather, we now accept dogs at seven or eight months of age. This permits at least a minor assessment of the dog’s potential and relieves the expense of raising puppies, whose potential is virtually unknown throughout the first six months.”

The age range in which dogs begin training varies with each law-

enforcement agency. In the Force’s program, says Insp. Fream, dogs between twelve and twenty-four months old are considered suitable, provided they meet the selection criteria. The commencement of training depends on an individual dog’s maturity and background.

Those dogs obtained by purchase that are eventually screened out of the training program are returned to their previous owners by virtue of the sales contract. Unsuitable animals obtained through donations are placed in private homes, and the new owners must sign a waiver of claim. The German shepherd is a very popular breed with the general public, consequently, many people are interested in obtaining these dogs from the Force’s kennels.

Gender

Although the great majority of police service dogs used in the RCMP are male, female dogs are not excluded from the program. The females tend to mature at a later age than males and, as a rule, do not display the tenacity necessary in the criminal apprehension profile. Although female dogs are generally smaller than males, this is in itself not an exclusion factor.

Insp. Fream recalls the loss of one particularly talented female dog:

“Police Service Dog Gypsy, a female German shepherd trained for explosives searches, was an excellent working dog. She was brought to the training centre to be used in the breeding program... just at the time the decision was made to stay this phase of the operation. Gypsy was subsequently sold to Parks Canada where she is continuing to work in explosives detection. Her capability has since been extended by training in avalanche search and rescue.”