



Interview with Josef Hedl (USA)

By Michael Stalter



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Joe Hedl (red shirt), Michael Stalter (blue shirt) with Polo von Hause Kigen



Joe Hedl (left) & Xaver Meixner (2nd from right)

Michael Stalter: Before jumping right in with a bunch of questions and answers, I would like to give a little background information on Josef (Joe) Hedl that was just published in the 2017 Landesgruppe Chicago Sieger Show's catalog. Josef Hedl is an AKC and International Judge of Rottweilers, having been in the breed for 47 years as of 2017. Joe has judged Rottweiler specialty shows all over the world, and more than once in some countries. Joe is the only Rottweiler breeder judge to judge Rottweilers at the Westminster Kennel Club, and he has judged there twice. He has also judged the American Rottweiler Club National Specialty twice as well as numerous regional specialties. As of this writing, Joe has been the only judge from the United States to be invited to judge at an ADRK (German Rottweiler Club) event. He has apprenticed under 19 different ADRK judges and Breed Wardens. Joe has also made a name for himself as a handler, and in my opinion, quite a big name for himself, since he has won 22 different Rottweiler specialties.



Joe Hedl & Xaver Meixner - 2013 ADRK KS

I met Joe back in 1989 at the Yorkville Kennel Club show held at Waubensee Community College. I was 29 and I had my very first Rottweiler who was like everyone's first Rottweiler—just perfect. Except she wasn't, because when I got her I had no clue what a Rottweiler was supposed to look like other than being black and tan. Stalter's Isis would eventually earn a CD, BH, and two herding titles from the American Herding Breed Association but she was no show Rottweiler. Like all the newbie Rottweiler people, I had bought every book and magazine on Rottweilers that I could find. I had seen pictures of what I thought was the best living Rottweiler in the world and he lived about two hours away from me. He was International and BISS AKC Champion, WS'86, BS'86 Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, Gekört.



Muriel Freeman & Joe Hedl

Now back then I didn't even know how to pronounce Santo's name but I was in love with this Rottweiler and all of his titles. So here I am at the Yorkville Kennel Club in the summer of 1989 showing my Isis in conformation. We were in the novice class and I was thrilled to get a blue ribbon at the show. After the Rottweilers were done showing I saw the guy I thought owned Santo and I walked up to him and asked if he was the guy who did indeed own Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen. Joe looked at me like a tired rock star with one more fan wanting an autograph and said yes, he did own Santo. I babbled on and on about what I had read about Santo in the magazines and asked if it was all true. With the patience of a saint, Joe talked to me about Santo and all of his titles and that while some ads said that he was the 1986 Bundessieger, the ADRK had withheld the title due to him being sold outside of Germany. Then, with the knowledge and experience of a whole year of owning a Rottweiler, I asked Joe what he thought of my girl and what he charged for a stud service to Santo. With the diplomacy of a skilled politician, Joe found the few positive things about Isis and then said that we should just wait until she was two and had her hips OFA'ed before we talked about breeding her to Santo. So with a "glad to have met you and talked to you," we shook hands and I walked away thinking how great it was to have met and talked to the guy who owned Santo. I had forgotten his name but he owned Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen. Over the next couple of shows I went to, I would remember that Santo was owned by Joe Hedl.



Joe Hedl judging in South America

Tell me about starting the United States Rottweiler Club (USRC). Who was with you and why did you start it?

We had this idea, Eckart Salquist and I, that we were going to put on German style shows. We put on our first show in California. We had Xaver Meixner and his family over to judge the show by where Eckart lived, near Riverside, California. Xaver judged the adults and Claudia at 16 years old judged the puppies and everyone loved this show. Since everyone loved this show, Eckart and I started talking about putting on German style shows in USA. Eckart said that he should do the shows on the west coast and that I should do the shows in the midwest. I told Eckart that I would like to make this a national club.



Pam Brown-Crump (pink jacket) & Joe Hedl with Yumbo vd Alten Festung

Eckart and I were talking about people not knowing a lot about Rottweilers. I said what better way to teach people about the Rottweiler than to have shows like this (German style shows), and they can learn. Looking back, I should have listened to him because he was right and I was wrong. So as the months went by, I thought about this idea of a national club and we had a meeting in Las Vegas at Kathy Lockenger's house. At the meeting, there was Eckart, myself, Karen Thompson (who was a State Trooper), Jacko Rousseau, Wayne Simanovich, and Manson Johnson.

I told everyone at the meeting that I did not want to be anything in the club but a member of the Board of Directors to help guide the club. Eckart Salquist was the first President and Wayne Simanovich was Vice President. Karen Thompson was the first Secretary and Jacko Rousseau was the first Treasurer. At the time, the AKC people didn't want to be involved with the USRC because they thought it was a whim and it would go away.

Tell me about starting the American Rottweiler Verein (ARV). Who was with you and why did you start it?

Two years after we started the USRC, Wayne Simanovich and Jacko Rousseau wanted to take the USRC in a different direction, which revolved around bite work, bite work, and bite work. So I talked to Eckart when we were having one of the early Landesgruppe Chicago shows and said that we made a mistake when forming the club by having people who wanted to not focus on the shows and the education aspect that we wanted to when we started the USRC. So we should form a new club. Eckart asked what we should call it and I said American Verein. We ended up calling it the American Rottweiler Verein and we wanted it to be more like the ADRK with shows and ZtPs.



Tell me about your involvement with the Medallion Rottweiler Club (MRC).

I joined back in the early days of the Medallion Rottweiler Club before the Rottweiler got popular. I wanted to get involved in a Rottweiler club with my wife Donna and she became Membership Chairman when I was the Vice President. We worked on having some great specialties and enlarging the membership of the MRC and we were very active in the club. At the time, the MRC was also working on a Code of Ethics. We were debating about having mandatory OFA ratings and I led the opposition to this rule. I felt that if the dog had a passing hip rating from the ADRK then that should be good for the



dog. I thought that having a mandatory re-xray policy would hurt the club and some people wouldn't become members. We lost the vote by 10 votes. I quit the MRC and I became a bad guy for many years to them.

How did you become friends with Xaver Meixner? Did you know him from when you lived in Germany?

No, I did not. I came to USA when I was 9½ and I didn't meet Xaver until I went to Germany with Bernard Clay and Tom Salen to buy some Rottweilers. We stopped at several breeders and one of them was Xaver Meixner. He showed me all of his dogs but the one that he had behind his butcher shop and he wouldn't show me that one dog. I said to him, I want to see the dog you are hiding behind the butcher shop. Xaver said that he is not for sale and I told him that I understand that and I respect that. Xaver brought him out and we saw him. On the way back to USA, Bernard was talking about the dog that was hidden behind the butcher shop and that we should try to buy that dog. I told him that I did not have that kind of money to buy it. But I thought about it and thought what if I syndicated the dog.

I was able to put together a syndication with a Minnesota Viking football player, Chris Foote, Tom Salen, and myself. I spent the next six months driving Xaver crazy trying to buy the dog and I think I wore him out because he ended up selling the dog to me. The dog was WS'86, BS'86, BISS Int/Am CH Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, IPO 3, Gek.bis, HD+/- . Over this time, I became friends with Xaver and it turned into a family friendship with me knowing every member of his family and Xaver knowing every member of my family. We have been friends ever since and he helps me and I help him.

Tell us about Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen.

Santo was a World Seiger and a Bundessieger, but one of those titles was withheld because he was sold outside of Germany. The judge at the show did not like Americans and he found out after Santo won the Bundessieger that he had been sold to America. The judge said, "You can win but we are withholding the title." So Mrs. Meixner took all the trophies and stuff and handed them back to the judge and we left.

What are the two or three most important things that you have learned from Xaver Meixner?

I learned about Rottweilers from all the great breeders in Germany. I told my wife that I wanted to become a judge but I wanted to learn as much as I could from the very best. One year I went to Germany eight times to talk to all the great breeders. What I learned from Xaver Meixner was something that involved two Rottweiler bitches. One was Vicky vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, AD, ZtP, HD- and the other one was ESg'89, '90 Ö-BSg '89 Int'l CH Zecke vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH I, AD, ZtP, HD- who was your old dog Nico's mom. Zecke was to die for—she was so beautiful. I used to tell Xaver all the time to walk Vicky at night after midnight because she was so ugly that you don't want anyone to see how ugly she is. She looked like one of the Hunchbacks of Notre Dame. She was a Karo vom Schwaiger Wappen daughter, and she was not even ugly—she was really ugly. Xaver said to me "don't be so hasty". It ended up that Zecke only produced one litter that was worth feeding, which was the one your dog was out of. (My dog Joe is referring to was BJS'92 Nico vom Schwaiger Wappen, BH, HD-, OFA excellent. Out of the N litter was another NL, BJS'92 Naldo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH I, BH, HD-, OFA excellent and a couple of very nice females Nicole and Nina. Vicky had two litters from two different stud dogs who were ADRK Klubsiegers. KS'89, BJS'88 Danjo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, IPO 3, FH, AD, ZtP, HD- was one and the other was WS'94, ES'94, BS'94, KS'93, WJS'91 Ken vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, AD, IPO 3, Gek., HD-. I learned not to judge a dog on looks alone. Vicky also produced an excellent brood bitch for Xaver Meixner, Rena vom Schwaiger Wappen SchH 3, FH, AD, BH, IPO 3, Gek.bis EzA, HD-, who had several litters and in one of those litters was Int./DT.VDH-CH, Ö-KS'00 King vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH I, AD, BH, IPO 3, ZtP).

You have had a lot of success as a handler. How many dogs have you titled to AKC Championship titles and who were some of the dogs you handled?

I have titled to AKC Championship about 40 dogs. The most famous dog who I titled was CH Arri Von Der Hembachbrucke, SchH 3, FH, Gekört. He was the full younger brother of Int'l CH, ES'82, BS'80-'81, KS'80 Dingo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, Gekört bis EzA, HD- and a very successful stud dog in both Germany and the United States.





Arri was owned by Pam Crump-Brown of Radio Ranch Rottweilers. I titled to AKC Championship WS'86, BS'86, BISS Int/Am CH Santo vom Schwaiger Wappen, SchH 3, FH, IPO 3, Gek.bis, HD+/- in 6 or 7 shows.

How many litters have you bred and how many titled dogs would you say you have bred?

I bred about 10 litters and I had some success breeding champions, obedience champions, and a couple of schutzhund (IPO) champions.

Did you ever work any of your dogs in schutzhund? You have had several SchH and IPO 3's.

I did in the mid to late '60s with my German Shepherd Dog and my first Rottweiler. I then got out of schutzhund and became more active in the conformation part of dogs. I had many schutzhund dogs but I never worked them in schutzhund.

Santo was probably your most famous Rottweiler. What was he like and how was it to own such a famous dog?

Santo's personality was that he loved the whole world. He was a pleasure to have in the house; he was a very good friend to the family and everyone. It was kind of weird owning such a famous dog. It was an honor to own him because of who Santo was. My children got to meet all the top football players since he was co-owned by a football player, Chris Foote of the Minnesota Vikings. My family and I got to go to a lot of the games and it was something special. Chris and his wife went to a lot of dog shows that we were showing at and that was also special.

What other well-known dogs did you own?

I owned BISS Am CH Centurion's Che von der Barr. He was the number one AKC Rottweiler for three years in a row in USA. He was shown 168 times and we only lost 13 or 14 times. He was bred in USA. He was a big dog and he had a wonderful temperament; he was a true showman. He loved being in the show ring. He lived to be about 10 years old and he was a grandson of Am/Can CH Rodsden's Kluge v d Harque, Am CD, who was a son of BS'60-'61-'62, Int'l/Am CH Harras vom Sofienbusch, SchH I.

Tell me about your last Rottweiler, Bobby vom Wachberg. He was a very beautiful male who was the ADRK Bundesjugendsieger of 2006.

I got Bobby for Manson and Evie Johnson, but they had bought CH Djuke vom Viistaler Land, SchH 3, ZtP so I ended up keeping Bobby for myself. He lived his whole life with me and I never showed him, but just kept him as my buddy.

I wish I would have been able to meet Bobby. The daughter of his that I have is just a great house dog. She loves me and my kids and she thinks she is a person who has a say in everything that goes on here at my house. If I ignore her for too long, she will paw me and her personality is just wonderful. I am guessing that her personality came from Bobby?

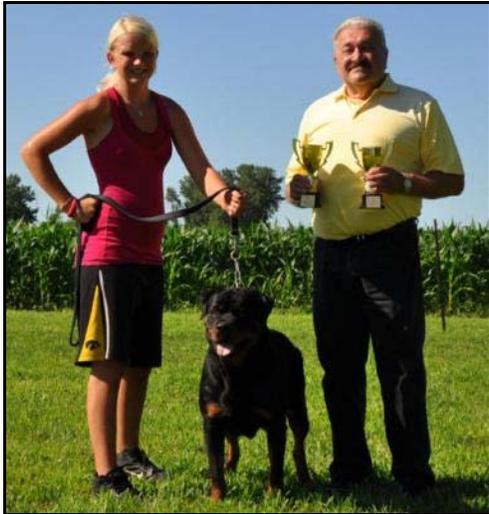
It did, it did. He was a character—he was one hell of a character.

What have been your most memorable experiences as a Rottweiler judge?

I have judged dogs all over the world, I have judged every specialty that you can think of and I judged the American Rottweiler Club national specialty twice as well as numerous regional specialties and am the only breeder judge to judge Westminster twice. They were all very memorable but the most memorable was that I was the only American invited to judge an ADRK show. It was such an honor to be asked to judge for the ADRK and none of the other very well-known American judges have.

Joe, you have always been someone I have looked up to in the Rottweiler world and I remember the first time I met you in 1989 at a show in Yorkville, Illinois. To me, you always seemed like one of the Rottweiler world's rock stars. How has your Rottweiler fame helped and hurt you?

It did both. It turned people against me because they were jealous. Some people turned against me and I became the bad guy because there is a lot of jealousy in the dog world. Yet, with the dogs, my kids got to meet a lot of football players and I got to meet a lot of famous people. Whenever I would go to New York, I would stay with a good friend of mine, Muriel Freeman, at her house. Do you know who Muriel Freeman was? She was a very great and knowledgeable Rottweiler judge who wrote one of the best books on Rottweilers—The Complete Rottweiler. Anyway, it was good and bad being me.



Tell me a little about yourself. Where were you born? What did your parents do? When and why did you come to the United States?

I was born in a farm village outside of Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany where they make the Audi cars. Eckart Salquist was born there, too. My father was in the German Army and he was caught on the Russian Front. He spent 4½ years in a Russian concentration camp and he weighed 85 pounds when he got out. My mother lived on a small farm and during the war, she took in two teenage kids who lived in the basement of the house because they were Jewish. A neighbor turned her into the Gestapo and they came and burned the house down. They killed all of the farm animals and assured my mother that she would be dead, too, but my father being in the army is what saved her life. So she ended up living the last two years of the war in a burned out railroad boxcar with my three sisters. So after the war we came to USA and settled in Chicago. My father was a shoemaker, which wasn't such a big success here in the USA.

Your wife Donna helped you with your Rottweilers. What were her areas of expertise with Rottweilers?

Donna was a genius. She did all the work with the Rottweilers and she would do everything when we had puppies. She had a gift for talking and she was always the center of attention at dog shows. She was my world.

Mike Stalter: I would like to share one of the things that I will always remember about Donna Hedl. In the summer of 2001, I had a litter out of an ADRK import, Mara vom Allnatal, SchH I, who had been bred to King vom Schwaiger Wappen in Germany and shipped over to me in whelp. She had a litter of 10 pups and she raised seven of them. When the pups were about 6 or 7 weeks old, Joe and Donna came to my house to see the pups out of King. At the time, my wife Mary had been battling breast cancer for about 11 years and things weren't going well for her. In another couple of months, the doctors would tell us that Mary was terminal. Donna, who had fought two rounds of breast cancer at the time, was very kind and encouraging to Mary. Donna and Mary had a very heartfelt chat about breast cancer and how hard it was. I was always very grateful for Donna's kindness. I remember hearing of Donna's death from breast cancer a couple of years after Mary passed and I just sat down and cried. Donna Hedl was a very kind and caring woman who will always have a special place in my heart.

You have had so much experience helping people find Rottweilers for themselves. I have to ask, what are some of the most memorable Rottweilers you helped people find?

I have helped a lot of people, AKC people and those who weren't involved in the AKC. I also helped a lot of famous people, too, who wanted to find good Rottweilers. A long time ago, I also helped some movie and TV stars get some dogs. I helped David Dellasega get a couple of Rottweilers—he is a famous Hollywood dog trainer. What I am most proud of is that of the dogs I bred, not one ever ended up in a dog pound or animal shelter or in an animal rescue. That is what I am most proud of.

What would you like for people to know and to remember about you?

That I helped people. When new people got into dogs, many were not talked to by the experienced people, but I would always talk to the new people and help them. I like helping people; I never took any money from helping people.

What advice would you give to Rottweiler owners, both new and experienced Rottweiler people?

To the new people, learn as much as you can, pay attention, and ask a lot of questions. To the experienced ones, don't let it go to your head. Remember you were once new to this yourself and help people when you think they need help. What I would like to see is what I have seen in South America. They have the best sportsmanship that I have seen. They help their competitors and that is so refreshing. You have no idea how nice that is. I would like to see this in USA. At the last Landesgruppe Chicago show, I saw everyone helping everyone and it showed great sportsmanship. That is why I brought the German Style shows to USA—for education and sportsmanship, and every time that happens, I win.

Mike Stalter: I have to say that getting to interview Josef Hedl, AKA Santo's owner, has to be ranked as one of the coolest things that I have ever done in the 29 years that I have been involved with Rottweilers. Joe's knowledge, not only of how to judge a Rottweiler but also of the history of the different kennels and bloodlines, is almost encyclopedic. Here is just one example of the knowledge Joe has. Back in January of 2016, Joe and some others came to my house to see a litter I had out of my male Polo von Hause Kigen and my female Olivia Störtebeker. Joe, his two friends, and my son Tom and I were there in my living room talking after looking at the pups and their parents when Joe asks me if I know the history of the Störtebeker Kennel. I said that I knew it was a two generation kennel started by ADRK judge Jürgen Wulff and that his son Christian Wulff, who is also an ADRK judge, is running it now. Joe smiles and says, "Yes, but did you know that Jürgen Wulff's first male Rottweiler is the father of the dog who was the foundation stud of Xaver Meixner's Vom Schwaiger Wappen kennel?" Joe went on to explain that Int. CH, ES'77, Ives Eulenspiegel, SchH 3, Gek.b.EzA, HD+/- was sired by Jürgen Wulff's Rottweiler, Astor vom Landgraben, SchH 3, Gekört b.EzA. Joe looked at the young pups running around my living room and said, "Think about this. Your Polo is a descendent of Jürgen Wulff's male and you bred him to a female bred by his kennel, Störtebeker. There is a little irony in that, I think." I have to say that every time I have talked to Joe or listened to him talk at shows, I have learned something. Even 29 years after I got my first Rottweiler, I am still learning about this wonderful breed and I am grateful that there are people like Josef Hedl who got involved in Rottweilers long before I ever did.



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