

# **TRAINING** *the* *Police Service Dog* *to apprehend* **the LEG**



*by Rodney Spicer*

*Keeping the PSD back tied to the stakeout pole allows the agitator to pull and keep tension on the line thus reinforcing the grip while the PSD is in the tunnel. The handler can also roll and move the tunnel, creating stress for the PSD to overcome.*



*In the initial leg bite training, the handler will direct the PSD onto the leg by grabbing the collar on each side of the PSD's head. While the agitator presents an overhead object, the handler immediately puts tension on the leash to reinforce the grip.*

During a real world K9 deployment, it can be critical that the police service dog not pick and choose where they are going to bite the suspect. Rather, when the PSD engages the suspect, the PSD must apprehend what is accessible. This training can make all the difference in the outcome of a successful K9 deployment as well as officer safety issues that can arise by the PSD not biting what is accessible.

At the beginning of K9 school it is important to know each PSD candidate's foundational training background. What sport or style of training was the PSD candidate started in? KNPV, Belgian Ring, French Ring and Mondio Ring all use bite suits for training and competitions where they are conditioned and have repetitive associations to bite the leg of the decoy. Schutzhund, IPO and ZVV are very similar to each other and each of

these three sports only use an arm sleeve where associations and presentations have been formed to only bite the arm sleeve when presented. The higher the degree of working dog sport titles means the more repetitive exercises and associations.

For this article I will refer to the person taking the bites from the dog as the "agitator." I start the leg training by having the agitator behind a door or at the corner of a building. I then have the agitator peek out of hiding and begin a verbal confrontation to arouse the PSD then go back to hiding. I then have the K9 handler in a ready position with knees bent and one foot in front of the other for proper balance. The handler will have the PSD along side of the wall about 6" to 12" from the corner where the agitator is hiding. The PSD may have a

flat collar or harness on attached to the lead. I have the handler hold the lead very short in a downward stiff arm motion. This will prevent the PSD from focusing toward the arm area and jumping in that direction. Note: I do not want the agitator presenting or showing his upper body. Dogs that have foundational training or working dog titles where bite sleeves are required are highly likely to only focus on the arms due to the training associations. I then have the agitator apply a kicking motion, knee first toward the direction of the PSD, while the upper body remains behind the wall if possible. Knee first so that the agitator does not get bit on the foot. I will do this a few times with not allowing the PSD the opportunity to bite, misses only. I am attempting to keep the PSD highly aroused and frustrated. My goal is so that the PSD will be frustrated and strike the quick prey movements of the agitators leg. Once the PSD begins to strike at the leg I will then instruct the agitator to present the leg for the PSD to bite. For the agitators safety the handler must remain in one spot and not move forward. At this point in training the agitator will come to the PSD.

If the PSD bites the presented leg, the agitator will continue in a kicking back and forth motion thus keeping the prey alive. The handler will also keep the leash short, tight and give calm praise. After a brief time on the leg I will then instruct the handler to physically grab the PSD by the collar and remove the dog by lifting him off the bite, at which time the agitator will freeze his movement. This will prevent the PSD from releasing the bite and jumping high toward the arm area where all past associations have been formed. The agitator will attempt to keep his arms behind the wall or behind his back while the PSD is on the leg.

This exercise can take one to several sessions. If the PSD will not bite the leg, I will then continue with

other training exercises and not give any bites during that training session. The PSD will learn that satisfaction can also come from the leg presentation which may take several sessions.

Once the PSD is consistently biting the presented leg, I then have the agitator begin to walk backwards by applying a kicking motion with the leg that the PSD is biting. Again the handler will hold the leash short, tight, arm downward and give calm verbal praise while trailing the agitator. If the PSD begins to pull the agitator backwards, I then have the agitator go with

*Once the handler has placed the PSD on the agitator through the ladder. The handler then can let go of the ladder and add tension to the leash reinforcing the grip. The goal is for the PSD to ignore the object and remain on the grip while his head is between the ladder rungs as he is engaged with the agitator.*



# K9 bitework

and in the direction of the PSD for a few feet and then back away in a reverse direction away from the PSD. This also reinforces the counter movement by the agitator.

The next phase I will then give the apprehension command to the PSD while on a long line attached to the harness. The agitator will be in an open area with his hands behind his back while moving his leg. The handler will slowly let the PSD pull the long line from him until he is at the end just in front

of the agitator where the agitator will begin again in a kicking motion while the line is tight.

Now that the PSD is confidently biting the leg, I then begin scenario training with a low degree of difficulty in the beginning. For example, I will have the handler conduct a building search. Once the PSD alerts by barking to the inaccessible agitator who is hiding behind a door, I then have the handler go to the PSD and place him on lead while giving verbal praise. I then have the agitator crack open the door just enough for the PSD to get his head through the opening where the agitator is only presenting his leg while his arms are behind his back or behind the door. Once the PSD bites the leg and maintains his grip, the agitator will then begin walking while the handler is maintaining a tight lead. The handler will then physically remove the PSD from his grip as the agitator freezes his movement. Once the PSD is confidently biting the leg and not releasing to re-bite the arm, I then will start verbal recalls.

When the agitator is behind a door hiding, he can have his back to the door with his hands up toward

*Once the handler has placed the PSD on the agitators leg the agitator can then either push the bike into the PSD or pull him through the bike frame creating stress. When the PSD is conditioned and confident the handler will not need to apply leash tension to reinforce the grip.*



his chest with elbows down, and when facing the door hands should be behind the back and in a fist. The vast majority of accidental training bites are to the hands while wearing a bite suit and can be prevented with a proper safety brief and bite suit.

In the last phase of leg bite training, I add stress to the PSD while he is engaging the agitator and biting his leg. By inoculating the PSD to stressful training scenarios he is much more likely to overcome a greater challenge while encountering a real world scenario where the suspect is hitting and kicking the PSD.

I use a 3' tunnel where the agitator is at one end and the handler is at the other, giving the PSD just enough line to reach the agitator where only his legs are accessible. As the PSD bites and maintains his grip, the agitator can then begin kicking his legs while hitting the tunnel with an object, adding stress to the scenario. The stress should be brief and the handler should calmly praise the PSD.

I will also give the PSD the command to apprehend the agitator who is laying passively on the ground. The agitator is laying flat on his back with a specifically

designed wooden box that goes over the feet and another box that goes over the agitator from his head to mid thigh area, only allowing the PSD to bite the thigh and calf area.

I also use plywood boards that are 3' wide and 2' high with two handles on them, as well as trashcans with handles. The agitator will hold the plywood or trashcan just below his waist. The handler will give the PSD the apprehend command as the PSD is released. The agitator will not move the object up or down

until the PSD has bitten and remained on the leg. The agitator can then use the object by pushing down on the PSD creating stress creating stress on the K-9 by making him feel closed in. If the PSD attempts to go around the object, then the agitator will turn with him and always keep the PSD in the center of the object until the PSD bites the leg. There is no other option.

When the criteria has been met to deploy the PSD, there are generally three things that the suspect is doing

*The agitator can increase stress while using a board by pushing down on the PSD. This can create stress and a closed in feeling. In the initial training the handler should keep tension on the line connected to the harness. This will reinforce the grip and confidence.*

*A video of "Training the Police Service Dog to Apprehend the Leg" can be found on my website at [www.goldcoastk9.com](http://www.goldcoastk9.com) or on my YouTube page, [youtube.com/1goldcoastk9](http://youtube.com/1goldcoastk9).*





*During passive apprehension leg training it is natural for the agitator to move prior to contact to absorb the impact. By having the agitator in a box specifically made where the feet and upper body cannot be contacted by the PSD the agitator can then remain passive by not moving due to not being able to see the PSD while only having the legs safely exposed.*

when confronted by the PSD. These three areas should be included in scenario training and can be tweaked by adding objects and changing environments.

1. Fleeing (attempting to get away by any means possible, including jumping fences)
2. Hiding (laying passive and not moving)
3. Fighting (real fighting, not play, close quarters)

The goal for this training is to teach the PSD that when they are confronted and engaged by the suspect/agitator who is attempting to fend off the PSD by use of environmental objects that the PSD has been conditioned with re-enforced associations to apprehend what is accessible, not a predetermined area.

A handler of mine was once in a foot pursuit of an armed robbery suspect who was attempting to jump over a fence. When the suspect got to the top of the fence he was apprehended and brought to the ground. The suspect had a concealed shot gun in his jacket. If the

suspect were to get over the fence the handler would have been at a tactical disadvantage with serious officer safety issues.

Always choreograph new training scenarios by walking through them with the trainer, handler and agitator prior to going full speed with the PSD. Everyone needs to know their role to have a successful scenario.

Have all proper equipment ready prior to scenario.

Anticipate probable mistakes the PSD may have and be ready to correct or reinforce.

Always brief the agitator prior to the exercise and look out for their safety. It's everyone's responsibility.

Use objects that are common in your working environment such as chairs, trashcans, ladders, curtains, couch cushions and bikes. Use your imagination as though you were the one attempting to fend off the PSD.

Debrief training and ways to improve scenarios by adding stress and arrest teams, as well as less than lethal options to your training. ■

---

**Rodney Spicer** is the owner and K9 training coordinator of Gold Coast K9 located in Southern California. He has been training working dogs since 1985 and specializes in patrol and detection. He is also a California K9 POST evaluator. Contact him at [goldk9@adelphia.net](mailto:goldk9@adelphia.net) or [www.goldcoastk9.com](http://www.goldcoastk9.com)