

The Green Number Mystery

Today I had the unique opportunity to observe a mysterious event rarely seen by folks other than breeders of versatile hunting dogs and the people who provide the mysterious service I am about to describe.

Most of us that belong to the hunting dog world are well aware of the green, often faded identification found on the underside of the ears of some dogs.

If your dog is registered with the North American Deutsch Kurzhaar Club (NADKC), a German style versatile hunting dog breed club, you are very aware of the green identification numbers on your dog's ears because those numbers appear on virtually every document regarding that particular pup.

Members of the NADKC organization enter the dog's numbers on test entry forms, provide them to the vet so he can get them directly on the x-ray films, provide them to the breed warden if need be and so on.

So how do the numbers actually get there? The short answer is, "someone tattoos the pup's ear". Heck even I knew that!

The real skinny regarding the art remains a mystery to most of us since not many of us have actually seen it done. Recently I had the opportunity to observe the process so I'm going to make an effort to clear up the mystery by telling you what I observed.

Before I begin divulging information about the tattooing process, let's make several things clear:

- The pups are not taken to the local tattoo parlor;
- The work is not done by the vet;
- The person doing the tattooing does not have to be an extremely talented tattoo artist;
- I've only watched it being done once, so if I leave something out the missing part will just help to perpetuate the green number mystery.

As far as how old the pup needs to be before tattooing, I don't know and I didn't ask. The pups I observed were approximately eight weeks old.

The tools needed for tattooing, as I observed them to be, are as follows:

- A puppy with a right ear;
- A puppy holder (usually the breeder)
- A tattoo person (Tattooer)
- Alcohol wipes (that's rubbing alcohol not Jack Daniels)
- A tube of green ink (the tube of ink I saw was a brand called "Kechum")
- A tattooing tool (See photo)

- A tooth brush
- A cleaning towel
- Latex gloves

The process:

- The person doing the tattooing examines the puppy's right ear to see if there's any hairs that may get in the way of tattooing. In some breeds for this may mean plucking a few hairs out by hand if necessary.
- The tattoo person prepares what I will call the "Ink Stamp" by placing the correct numbers in the stamp and double checking to make sure the numbers are correct then confirming the numbers with the breeder. The ink stamp is really nothing more than a miniature, hand held printing press. It looks very similar to the stamp a notary might use. The only difference is that the numbers are formed by numerous small needles about the diameter of a thumb tack and approximately 3/8" long instead of flat metal or rubber. Numbers can be inserted or removed from the ink stamp as needed. It's important that the needles of each letter used be clean and predominantly free of old ink. Besides being an obvious health risk dirty needles may impede a smooth penetration making the job more difficult if not more painful than necessary.
- After preparing the ink stamp the tattooer (is tattooer a word?) applies a very small dab of the green ink (about the size of a pea) to his pinky finger. I suppose it doesn't matter what finger you put it on – I'm only passing on what I observed. The Ink appeared to be about the consistency of tooth paste and the tube looks a lot like a small tube of tooth paste.
- While sitting in a chair, the puppy holder holds the pup's head with his left hand and clamps the rest of the pup's body under his right arm grasping the pups chest and legs with the right hand. His grip is gentle at first but is firmed up when the tattooer gives the word.
- After donning the latex gloves, the tattooer smears the small dab of green ink paste evenly on the underside and center of the pups right ear covering an area that will accommodate the length of the numbers to be stamped there.
- The tattooer then slides the pup's ear, skin side up, between the top and bottom plates of the ink stamp, gives the holder notice to firm his grip on the pup, and squeezes the ink stamp firmly until he feels the needles of the stamp penetrate the skin of the pup ear. When the stamping is complete, (approximately 5 seconds), the stamp is very carefully removed from the pup's ear making sure that all needles are completely withdrawn before pulling the stamp away. That part is important since the small pup's ear can be easily injured if the stamp is jerked way before the stamp is completely disengaged.

- The tattooer then takes a tooth brush and firmly brushes the ink over the perforation formed by the ink stamp needles in order to be sure the ink penetrates the skin. The smeared ink is not wiped off of the pup but eventually wears away, leaving a hopefully legible impression of the correct numbers.
- Then everyone present sits down and eats ice cream on blue berry cobbler and drinks coffee “Hey – that’s what we did.” – “Just telling it the way it was man!”

During the tattooing process the pup yelps a little when the stamp penetrates its skin and a little during the tooth brush application of the ink, but that’s it. Probably about ten seconds total. When it’s done it’s done and the pup seems relatively oblivious to what just occurred.

Reportedly, the ink is water soluble so the stamp and letters can be cleaned easily.

Well that’s really it. No mystery, no magic, secret rituals or tattoo wizards. Just about all that’s required is an experienced tattoo person, someone to hold the pup, some ink and a funny stamp.

It was a simple, yet interesting, process to watch if you have never seen it done. I’ve provided a few pictures that may help clear up any thing that I’ve left out. However, I neglected to take a picture of the ice cream and blueberry cobbler, so the particulars regarding that will have to remain a mystery.

Forrest Moore of vom Moorehaus Kennel , “Tattoo Artist Extraordinaire”, for taking the time to let me observe the procedure and explain the finer points of the art.

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