

Dubai Police K9 hosts IRO for a veterinarian study from the Munich University.

The Saint Bernard dog is most famous rescue dog in the world, but since the monks of Switzerland rescued lost people in the mountains, a lot of time has passed and other breeds have proven to do the work much better. But certain breeds might be able to work better in the snow as being much lighter in weight, other breeds are more apt to rescue people in water, others are better climbers. One fact is that most important of all is that they should have super noses and a will to search and climb.

A lot of dogs work fantastically in open fields and mountains, depending on where they live and are used to the climatic conditions in their own area, be it cold or mountainous or flat and wet. But the International Rescue Dog Organization needs a lot of dogs that should be able to work in those areas where most earthquakes and disasters appear, and very often this is in countries where it is very hot. Usually in these countries and disaster areas people are poor and have no time to spend with dogs to train them as rescue dogs and sometimes there are religious restrictions towards dogs. It is not easy to see if dogs from the richer part of the world are able to perform as well as they do at home. The IRO is still a young organization and not all countries have teams, let alone have a club or national organization, and be a member of the IRO. Fortunately one member country fulfills all the criteria, a hot climate, an associated organization and the means to host foreign dogs and handlers to perform an extended test in depth, Dubai. The Veterinarian Department of the Munich University was lending its expertise and delegated a team with the purpose to find out how working dogs behave in very hot circumstances, how long they are able to work and how reliable the results of a search are.

20 Teams (dog and handler) from 7 different countries were invited to come over to the Emirates: 1 from Holland, one from Croatia, 4 from Slovenia, 4 from Austria, 5 from Germany, 1 from Slovakia and 4 from Hungary. 5 More teams from the Dubai Police K9 would also participate in the test, which would offer an extra opportunity to the University team to compare results of local dogs to the ones from Europe. The European teams were to arrive in Vienna where the dogs would be put on as cargo to Dubai with the very same flight as the teams. For several dogs it was their first flight and a lot of handlers were obviously a little worried about how their dogs would react to this experience. Of course, on the occasion of a disaster mission, it would be the very same situation. It was an experience that they should undergo anyway if it was for a real rescue mission. Of course the Emirates Cargo Company would do everything to bring this to a good end and the IRO was treated as a special guest, they were welcomed by the captain of the plane and the crew and the handlers had special seats reserved in the back of the plane.



Once arrived in Dubai the handlers were reassured that all dogs were well and safe and brought to the Dubai Police camp in air-conditioned vans. This was a little disappointing for the handlers as they had hoped to see their dogs immediately after landing. It took several hours more before they were brought to the kennels and could play with their dogs. It was a moving moment of joy when they were finally united. For a dog this must have been a very traumatic experience, being separated from their master, the flight, being taken to a kennel while most of them are used to share the house at home, etc., a lot of first-ever-experiences for both master and dog. But it proved again how flexible dogs can be as on the first working day most dogs were already used to their new situation and environment.



The K-9 kennels were of a very high standard, clean, provided with a box for food and personal stuff, a separate medical box, and an inside air-conditioned area. All kennels were connected from inside with a corridor and cleaned and disinfected every morning. A veterinarian was permanently available. The K-9 training camp has a lot of kennels and dogs but still enough space

available to host all the IRO dogs. There was no lack of space at all. The kennels were situated at the farthest end of the camp some 200m away from the conference hall and the offices. There was also a special parking place for the air-conditioned dog vans. Everything was connected with roads and the whole area was fenced as can be expected from a training camp. In between the buildings

were 4 terrains of which 3 were used as search areas with hiding places for victims. Although less impressive than in Ljubljana they looked very much like what can be expected in areas where in reality most victims occur due to catastrophes and where people build houses with a few old bricks, wood and fabric and materials collected from the streets, and in certain places used cars were turned upside down.

The veterinarian team had a small room available in one of the kennels to improvise their laboratory while the dogs were examined in the entrance hall. It was all comfortable enough to do all the tests that were planned.

The teams were divided in two groups. The first group was working the first 3 days while the handlers of group two were serving as victims and their dogs would rest. Friday was a break day (= Sunday for the Muslims). On Sunday activities were restarted with the dogs of group two and the handlers of group one serving as victims this time.

All working dogs needed to swallow a very small blue metal pill that migrated through the body and constantly emitted the body temperature that was captured by the instruments they wore in a small bag attached to a harness. The handlers were supposed to check this regularly.

Blood was taken from every dog before and after working as well as a saliva sample to measure stress. The members of the veterinarian team were also present at the working fields and every test was taken on film so that later everything could be combined and compared again later to the lab



results.

It was very hot, 38° in the shade and over 45° in the sun. The area was by definition sand and the temperature of the soil could rise over 60°. Probably for this reason most dogs tried to have their feet not on the soil for a long time and jumped more than they are used to doing. Breeds with fur between the toes had fewer problems. Every dog was supposed to search 3 different areas and go on for 20 minutes, even if they had found all victims. This was needed for the uniformity of the medical tests and for some fast working dogs this was sometimes a little bit confusing as they needed to re-examine the very same place twice until their time was over. All handlers were free to withdraw their dogs if they noticed signs of fatigue or exhaustion and this happened at least once. Except from a few burned soles, no dogs were injured.

