THE BOERBOEL BIBLE

SECOND EDITION



Raising, Training and Living With the World's Most Misunderstood Guardian

RUI NAVARRO

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FREE SAMPLE

2 Free Chapters

from *The Boerboel Bible*, Second Edition, by Rui Navarro

Chapter 3: What a Boerboel Really Is

Chapter 5: Choosing Your Boerboel

These two chapters are taken word for word from the full book. The page numbers are the ones in the book.

Sent to you by Elite Boerboels. The full book has 20 chapters.

CHAPTER 3

What a Boerboel Really Is

Most people look at a Boerboel and see a big dog. I look at a Boerboel and see a guardian that thinks for himself. That difference is the reason so many owners get into trouble. They buy the size and the look. Then one day the instincts show up, and they realize they never understood the dog they brought home.

So here is the one idea of this chapter. A Boerboel is a guardian with strong defense and a slow switch. Your job is not to remove what he is. Your job is to control it.

Balance Is the Whole Point

A real Boerboel is not defined by how big he is, how heavy he looks or how good he looks in a photo. The heart of this breed is balance. Power and control. Confidence and stability. Protection and a normal, peaceful family life.

A good Boerboel is calm, stable and confident. He is not nervous, not reactive, not unpredictable. He can live with a family, be patient and tolerant in daily life, and still have a strong protective instinct when it's really needed.

That balance is what makes the breed special. It's also what makes it hard to breed well.

Too soft, and the dog has no presence.

Too aggressive, and the dog becomes a liability.

Too unstable, and the dog becomes dangerous.

And there's one more thing people forget. A real Boerboel makes decisions. He doesn't react blindly to everything that moves. He watches. He evaluates. Then he acts. That is what separates a real guardian from a dog that just reacts to noise.

> RUI'S RULE
> If you buy a mastiff, you are buying a guard dog. Guarding is not a disease. But it has to be under control.

What He Was Built to Do

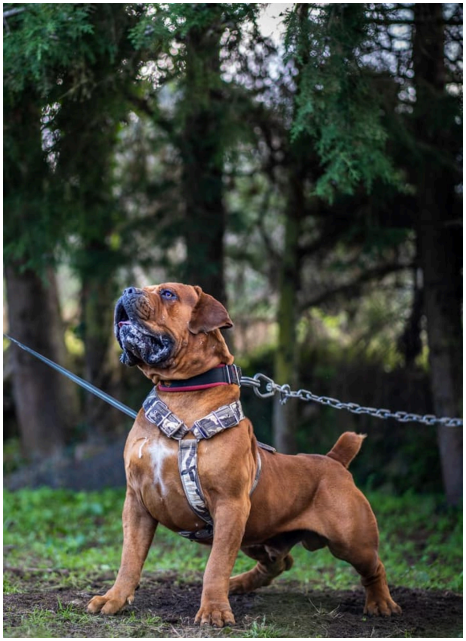
Remember the last chapter. The Boerboel was developed to protect farms, animals and families, where the threats were real. That job needed a dog that could look at a situation and make his own decision, often with nobody there to tell him what to do.

So in most Boerboels you will see:

- **Watchfulness.** He notices the car that stops outside, the person walking past the fence, the sound at night.
- **Territory.** His home, his yard, his people. That is what he cares about protecting.
- **Independence.** He was bred to decide, not to wait for instructions.
- **Calm when nothing is happening.** A good Boerboel doesn't waste energy. Many mastiffs don't even bark easily.

Not every Boerboel is the same. Some have more prey drive and some have almost none. Some are more defensive, some more territorial, some more social. Some are very hard, and some are surprisingly sensitive. You always have to look at the individual dog.

But you can't ignore what the breed was made to do. The genetics are there.



A Boerboel at work.

The Triangle Inside Your Dog

To understand a Boerboel, you need a simple picture of what goes on inside a dog's head.

In my training I use a simple model with three mental states. Real dogs are more complex, of course. But this triangle explains almost everything you'll see.

1. Prey. The desire to chase, catch and bite something moving. You see it when a dog goes crazy for a ball or a tug toy.

2. Aggression. I use this word in a wide sense. Not only "wanting to hurt." Barking at the ball, wanting something badly, dominance, and defense all go in this box.

3. Obedience. The state where the dog is listening to you and working with you.

There is also **food drive**: how much the dog wants food, and how hard he'll work for it. For most Boerboels, this is a big one.

Defense Is Not the Same as Courage

This is where people get confused, so let me be very clear.

Defense comes from the feeling that something may hurt the dog or his owner. A dog in defense doesn't want a fight. He wants the threat to go away. Defense often comes from a bit of insecurity.

That's why you have to be careful with labels. Many people see a big mastiff barking and growling with his hair up and say, "He's dominant. I have a super dog." Sometimes he is just insecure.

From the outside, a confident guardian and an insecure dog can look the same: a big dog making a lot of noise. Don't confuse defense with dominance. Don't confuse noise with courage.

> QUICK CHECK
> When your Boerboel reacts, ask yourself:
> - Is this about his space, like the gate, the fence or the car, while he's relaxed on neutral ground? That's territory.
> - Is he checking every car and every person, alert and serious? That's guarding.
> - Is he less patient with pushy dogs as he gets older? That's lower social tolerance, very common in mature mastiffs.
> - Is the barking getting stronger every week because the person or dog always walks away? That's learned reactivity. The behavior is being rewarded.

The Boerboel Profile

Here is what I see, in general, in the Boerboels I breed and train. This is my experience, not a law of nature. Every dog is an individual.

High defense. Boerboels, and molossers in general, have much higher defense instincts than the shepherd breeds. This is what makes them such good guard dogs.

Low prey, high food drive. Most Boerboels have much less prey drive and much more food drive. My dogs have a bit more prey drive than the average, because I select for it. But food is still usually the best way to start training a Boerboel. And if you don't stimulate the prey drive when they're young, many times it is simply not there later.

Slow to switch. This is the big one. Boerboels take much longer to switch from one instinct to another. Especially from aggression back to obedience. When many mastiffs go into that state at the gate, it's like the brain

switches off, and they don't come back easily. In a 90 kg (200 lb) dog, that is a very big deal.

Think of it like an engine and brakes. A Boerboel has a big engine. The brakes are not built in. You have to build them.

And here's a detail most people don't expect. A Boerboel with high prey drive can go out of control faster than a German Shepherd. All that power, wound up, with a brain that doesn't come back down easily.

Calmer, but not easier. A Boerboel is usually calmer and more thoughtful than a shepherd. He watches. He takes things in. He doesn't come to you every five minutes with a ball asking what's next.

People hear "calmer" and translate it to "easier." No. A quiet dog can be just as demanding as an active one, sometimes more. He may also be dominant, he may be harder to motivate, and he may have his own opinion about doing ten more repetitions.

Other dogs. In my experience, Boerboels can be more difficult with other dogs, especially with dogs of the same sex. You buy a puppy, but you live with the adult. The puppy that plays with every dog at one year old may not want that at three.

Boerboel, Malinois and German Shepherd

People ask me all the time how the Boerboel compares to the shepherd breeds. I work with Boerboels, working-line German Shepherds and Malinois, so here is how I see them. Again, this is my experience with the dogs and lines I know.

	Boerboel and other molossers	**Malinois**	**Working-line German Shepherd**
Defense	Very high	Less developed	Balanced
Prey drive	Usually low, food drive higher	Exaggerated	High, usable
Sensitivity	Usually on the hard side	More sensitive	Balanced
Switching between instincts	Much slower, especially aggression to obedience	Usually struggles more going from	Fast

		aggression to obedience	
What I see them as	A top guard dog for home and territory	A lot of prey, harder to bring back from aggression	My first choice for personal protection dogs

The **Boerboel** is the guardian of the territory. High defense, very aware of what's happening around the home, a fantastic high-level guard dog. But he needs much more work to come out of one state and into another.

The **Malinois** has exaggerated prey drive. The defense is less developed, he is more sensitive, and in my experience he usually struggles more to go from aggression back to obedience.

The **working-line German Shepherd** is, for me, the most balanced dog. Good defense, good prey drive, and he can switch between defense, prey and obedience very fast. That is why, when I build personal protection dogs, I choose the working-line German Shepherd.

Does that mean a Boerboel can't do protection work? Of course not. If you know my channel, you know I do bite work with Boerboels and I select for it. But I have to look at what each dog brings: confidence, motivation, stability, willingness to engage. Size tells me very little about those things.

> **FROM MY KENNEL**
> I breed and train both Boerboels and working-line German Shepherds. In my experience, the German Shepherd lines are more predictable, because organized German Shepherd breeding goes back more than a century, with generations of performance, temperament and health records. With Boerboels, even after more than ten years of selecting, I still see big differences inside one litter. One puppy more confident, another with more prey drive, another with very little interest in that kind of work.

Prey Drive Is Not Aggression

Here's a misunderstanding I see every day in the comments on my videos. Someone sees a dog biting a sleeve in training and says, "That dog is aggressive. That's dangerous."

Not necessarily. A dog biting a sleeve may be in prey drive. It's a game for him. A very intense game, but a game. That is very different from real aggression.

And a dog that has done proper bite work, with real control, is usually more reliable than a dog that has never been prepared for anything.

Think of a martial artist. He knows how to fight, so he can stay calm in a conflict. An untrained person in the same situation may panic, run, or hit anything. An unprepared dog in a real threat may run away or bite whatever is closest.

That's why on my channel you see my Boerboels bite and then release on command. That is the point. Not the bite. The control.

What Control Really Means

Here is the most important idea in this chapter.

A calm dog is not the same as a trained dog. Some dogs are calm only because they have no drive. That's not training. The real question is: can your dog come back to you when he's excited, when he's in defense, when something really matters?

Calm obedience is easy. Control under arousal is the real skill.

And the goal is not a slow, gradual return to listening. When I put a dog in aggression and tell him "down," I want him to go down immediately, like a reflex. Not after a few seconds of thinking about it. Three seconds is already a long time. The faster the dog comes back to communication, the more control you have.

With a shepherd, that switch is easier to build. With a Boerboel, it takes more work, because of high defense and a slow switch. That's exactly why a Boerboel owner has to take training seriously.

If your Boerboel doesn't come back to you at the gate, that's not the breed being difficult. That's a switch nobody built yet. You can build it. Part III of this book shows you how.

> **RUI'S RULE**
> Don't remove the drive. Control it. I want a confident, powerful dog that can go up and come back down in an instant.

Guard Dog or Social Butterfly?

Before you train, decide what you want your Boerboel to be.

A big friendly dog that greets everyone at your weekend barbecue? That's fine. But understand the trade-off. The more you push a Boerboel to love every stranger, the more you may weaken his natural suspicion of strangers. And that suspicion is part of what makes him a guardian.

A real guard dog? He still needs a lot of socialization: different places, people, cars, noises. Experience teaches him the difference between normal life and a real threat. But socialization doesn't mean letting every stranger pet him and fuss over him. And when you have guests he doesn't know, sometimes the smart thing is to keep him separate.

Neither choice is wrong. But you have to make the choice. The dog can't make it for you. And whatever you choose, the dog must be under control.

Protection work, real personal protection, is another level again. It needs even more socialization, because the dog has to be completely at ease everywhere, and it needs a professional from an early age. We'll talk about that in Chapter 17.

He Is Not Finished Yet

One last thing. The Boerboel you have at one year old is not the dog you'll have at three or four. Many mastiffs change a lot as they mature, often between two and three years old, sometimes later. The guarding instinct becomes much more visible.

The puppy who loved everybody was not lying to you. He just wasn't finished. Chapter 11 is all about that change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A real Boerboel is about balance: powerful but controlled, protective but stable, calm at home and serious when it matters.
- Boerboels usually have high defense, low prey drive and high food drive. They take much longer to switch between instincts, especially from aggression to obedience.
- The Malinois has exaggerated prey and less developed defense and is more sensitive. The working-line German Shepherd is the most balanced, which is why I use it for personal protection.
- Don't confuse noise with courage, or defense with dominance. A lot of barking can come from insecurity.
- The goal of training is control under drive. The switch back to obedience should be instant, like a reflex.

Anyone can control a calm Boerboel. The one that counts is the Boerboel at the gate.

CHAPTER 5

Choosing Your Boerboel

Most people choose their puppy in about five minutes.

They look at the color. They look at the size. Then one puppy runs over, jumps on their legs, and they say, "That's the one. He chose me."

I understand. It's a beautiful moment. But it tells you almost nothing about the dog you're going to live with. And you will live with that five-minute decision for ten or twelve years.

Here is the one idea of this chapter. You are not choosing a puppy. You are choosing the adult dog, the breeder behind him, and a life you can actually handle. So let's choose well: the breeder first, then the type of dog that fits your life, then the test I do on puppies that most buyers never do.

Start With the Breeder

You are not just choosing where to buy a dog. You are choosing the person who decided which two dogs to put together, how the puppies were raised in their first weeks, and who should be there to help you after.

A good breeder:

- **Knows the breed deeply.** The history, the temperament, the common health problems, how to raise a giant puppy. And he keeps learning.
- **Puts the dogs first.** Clean conditions, good care, early socialization. Quality, not quantity.
- **Chooses pairings carefully.** For temperament, health and structure, not for convenience.
- **Tests and is open about it.** He screens his breeding dogs and tells you what was tested, without you having to fight for the information.

One thing people don't expect. A good breeder doesn't have to be a big name in the show ring. Some of the best breeders, me included, rarely go to shows. Ribbons don't tell you much about the dogs.

Ask About the Vision

There is one question I love, because most breeders can't answer it: **"What is your goal? What dog are you trying to produce?"**

Ask it. Most breeders don't really know how to reply. In the Boerboel world, many people start breeding and their only goal is the biggest dog with the biggest head. That's not a vision. A good breeder can tell you exactly what he is selecting for and why.

Look Beyond the Parents

"The parents are healthy" is a start. It's not the finish. Ask what was actually tested, and what is documented further back: grandparents, great-grandparents. As I said in Chapter 4, with Boerboels that history is often missing. The breeders who record it are giving you something valuable.

Working Lines or Show Lines?

If you want a big, friendly teddy bear for the family, there are solid breeders in many parts of the world, from show lines and working lines. But if you want a real working family Boerboel, calm at home and a true guardian when it matters, your options are smaller. Find a breeder whose priorities match yours. Trust your gut. Take your time.

Ask the breeder what happens in the first two weeks of the puppies' life. A serious breeder does Early Neurological Stimulation (ENS) and can explain it to you. I explain exactly how we do it in Chapter 18.

QUICK CHECK

Before you choose a breeder:

- Ask what he is breeding for, and listen to whether he has a real answer.
- Ask what health tests were done on the parents, and what is known about the dogs behind them.
- Read reviews from real owners on Google, Facebook and other places.
- Look at his videos. Watch how the adult dogs behave, not just how they look.
- Visit the kennel if you can.
- Talk to experienced Boerboel owners and ask who they recommend.
- Ask a lot of questions. A good breeder is happy to answer.

Choose for Your Life, Not for the Photo

Every Boerboel is a big, powerful dog. They are not all the same. Some are calm and easygoing. Some are full of energy. Before you choose a dog, be honest about your own life.

Your activity. Do you love long walks and training? Or do you want a calmer life at home? Calmer doesn't mean easier. Every Boerboel needs exercise, training and rules.

Your home. A house with a yard, or something smaller? Where will the dog sleep? Where does he stay when you have visitors?

Your experience. If this is your first big, powerful dog, look for a more easygoing temperament. If you have handled strong-willed dogs before, you may be ready for a more intense one.

Your family. With small children, you want a patient, gentle dog. A wilder dog may fit better in a home with older kids or adults who can handle him.

The practical stuff. This is what people forget. Where will a 200 lb dog fit in your car? Who will walk him? Can your children walk him outside, or is that unsafe? Will you be able to take him where you need to go? These details become very real when the cute puppy becomes a giant.

Other dogs. If you already have dogs or want more later, tell your breeder. In my experience, Boerboels can be more difficult with other dogs, especially of the same sex. That has to be part of the decision.

You can learn a lot before you ever visit. Many good breeders, including those who send dogs overseas, show their dogs on YouTube, their websites and social media. Watch how the adults behave. That's your future.

> **RUI'S RULE**
> You're choosing a puppy, but you're going to live with the adult. Choose for that.



An Elite Boerboel puppy.

The Puppy Test Most Buyers Never Do

Two puppies from the same litter. Same mother, same father. They can be completely different dogs. One can be perfect for you. The other can be a big problem.

For me, genetics is one of the most important things. When I look at a puppy from my own breeding, I already know a lot, because I know the mother, the father and the lines. But the breed and the parents give you clues. They don't give you the dog. You still have to look at the puppy in front of you.

Here is what I look at.

1. How Much Does He Want Food?

I put some food in my hand, move my hand on the floor, and watch. Does he follow it? Chase it? Push for it? Try to get into my hand?

This matters because food is how I teach. In the beginning, everything I teach a puppy, I teach with food. For most Boerboels, food is the strongest motivation they have.

But be careful. Many times people think, "This puppy has no food drive." The truth is the puppy just didn't understand yet that there's food in your hand. A puppy that never did this before is often all over the place, sniffing, looking around, walking away.

So sit down. Play with him a little. Open your hand and let him find the food. Then you start to see the real puppy. If he still doesn't care much, try better food, like sausage or liver. Don't decide too fast.

2. Does He Chase and Hold?

Then I look at prey drive: the chase and the bite. I use something simple. A rag, a toy, sometimes a horse whip with a small piece of plastic bag on the end. I move it on the floor like something running away.

Does he chase it? Does he bite it? When he bites, does he hold on, or let go as soon as there's a little tension?

With Boerboels, this is often a small part of the picture. In my experience, most Boerboels have a lot less prey drive and a lot more food drive. I tested a seven-month-old Boerboel with the same kind of toy, and the prey drive was very, very small. With Boerboels, like Cane Corsos and similar dogs, if you don't stimulate the prey drive when they're young, many times it's just not there later.

That doesn't make him a bad dog. Not at all. A dog with a lot of food drive can be trained perfectly well. And I don't use prey drive to teach obedience at the beginning anyway. Never. That comes much later. This is just a test, so I know what I have in my hands.

> **FROM MY KENNEL**
> We once had a Swiss Shepherd here with no real drive for food and no real drive for toys. But he loved to be petted. So we worked with that, and he was happy. The point is not to find the puppy with the most drive. It's to know which dog you have before you take him home.

3. Hard or Soft?
Some dogs are soft. A hard voice or a small correction, and they feel it a lot. Other dogs are hard. You correct them and they look at you like nothing happened.

Neither one is wrong. But they are very different to live with and to train. In my experience, Boerboels are usually on the hard side. With a Boerboel puppy, a small touch is enough and he recovers fast. An adult Boerboel can have a very high pain threshold. That is a different conversation.

4. What Happens After a Surprise?
A noise. Something falls. A floor he has never walked on.

Every puppy gets surprised. That's normal. What I watch is what comes after. Does he run away and stay away? Or does he stop, look, and go back to check it out? And how long does that take?

5. How Is He With New People?
Someone new walks into the room. Does the puppy go to say hello? Stay back and watch? Hide behind his littermates?

Be careful with noise. A young dog may bark a lot because he's not sure what's happening. That's not courage. That's a dog who's not sure.

For a Boerboel especially, I want a dog that's confident, stable and secure. If one day that dog protects your family, I want it to come from confidence. Not from fear.

6. The Part Almost Nobody Checks: You
The question is not "Which is the best puppy in the litter?" The question is "Which is the best puppy for me?"

Think about horses. An experienced rider can get on a hot, strong horse and have the best day of his life. Put a beginner on the same horse and somebody gets hurt. The horse isn't bad. He's the wrong horse for that person.

Puppies are the same. The most intense puppy in the litter, the one that never stops and bites everything, looks like "the best one" to a lot of people. For an experienced handler who wants to work that dog every day, maybe he is. For a family with two small kids and a busy week, maybe not.

And it's not only about energy. If you're a calm, slightly soft person and you choose the hardest, most dominant puppy because he looks impressive, that's your choice. Own it. You're setting yourself up for a challenge you may not want.

That's why, when people get a puppy from me, I don't like choosing only by color or size. I look at the puppy's temperament, energy, confidence and drive. And I look at the family: their experience, their home, what they want the dog for. Two puppies from the same litter can be right for two completely different families.

> **QUICK CHECK**
> The puppy test in one minute:
> - Food: does he follow and push for the food in your hand?
> - Prey: does he chase, bite and hold a moving rag or toy?
> - Sensitivity: does he shrug off a little pressure, or feel it a lot?
> - Recovery: after a surprise, does he come back to check it out?
> - People: does he approach a new person with confidence?
> - You: can you honestly handle this puppy, in your real life?

Puppy or Adult Dog?

Most people buy a puppy, and that's what this chapter has focused on. With an adult dog you can see more of what you're getting. But Boerboels mature late. Many change a lot between two and three years old, and some later, between three and four. A one-year-old is still not the finished dog. Chapter 11 explains this change in detail.

Buying an Adult or a Trained Dog

Sometimes an adult dog is the right choice. You skip the puppy months, and you can see the size, the structure and much more of the temperament. But you also get everything that happened to that dog before you. So test him before you say yes.

When I test a new adult dog, this is what I look at, in this order:

1. **How he walks into a strange place, with strange people.** Carefully? Pulling on the leash? Wagging his tail? Tense? In the first minutes you already see a lot: his nerves in a new environment, how much defense he has, and whether he is confident or not.
2. **Food.** These are three different things: eating from a bowl, eating from your hand, and chasing food in a moving hand. If he eats well from the bowl but not from the hand, it's usually a confidence problem, some conflict with people. That can be fixed, but you need to know it's there.
3. **Prey, if you want to test more.** Use a rag, never a bite sleeve first. Does he like to chase it? Does he like to bite it? How does he bite: full mouth or just the front teeth? Can you easily take it from him?

Then the paperwork. Ask for the hip, elbow and spine results, ask about his history, and ask why he is being sold. And remember the age. A Boerboel of 18 months can still change a lot before three.

What about a trained protection dog? A Boerboel is a natural guard dog, and an excellent one. But a guard dog and a trained protection dog are not the same thing. Molossers like the Boerboel are more defensive dogs, and switching from aggression back to obedience is much harder for them. That's why the dogs I train for full personal protection are working-line German Shepherds. They have the engine, and they can learn brakes that work at full speed. My company for that is TYR Protection Dogs (tyrprotectiondogs.com). If what you really need is a fully trained protection dog for your family, start there. If what you want is a great guardian and family dog, a well-bred Boerboel with good control is the answer. Know which one you're buying.

Picture an Ordinary Tuesday

Before you choose, imagine an ordinary Tuesday. You're tired. Work is done but you still have things to do.

What kind of dog do you actually want living beside you that evening? Choose for that life. You'll spend much more time living with your dog than taking pictures of him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Choose the breeder first: knowledge, care, honest health testing, and a clear answer when you ask what he is breeding for.
- Be honest about your life: activity, home, experience, family, other dogs, and the practical side of a 200 lb dog.
- In a puppy, test food drive, prey drive, sensitivity, recovery after a surprise and confidence with people.
- Most Boerboels have more food drive than prey drive, and that's fine: food is how training starts.
- The most important part of the test is you: choose the puppy you can actually handle, not the one that looks the most impressive.
- Buying an adult? Test how he enters a new place, how he takes food from your hand and how he handles a rag, and check his health results and history.

The puppy that runs to you first is not choosing you. You are the one who has to choose.

NEXT STEP

If you are looking for a Boerboel bred for health, temperament and structure, see our available puppies and upcoming litters at eliteboerboels.com. Every Elite litter is raised with ENS from day 3.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Read the Whole Book

You have just read 2 of the 20 chapters of *The Boerboel Bible*. The full ebook also covers health and nutrition, your Boerboel and your family, the big shift between age two and three, a complete training section, socialization, real-life control, responsible breeding and the golden years.

Get the full book: ruinavarro.com/books

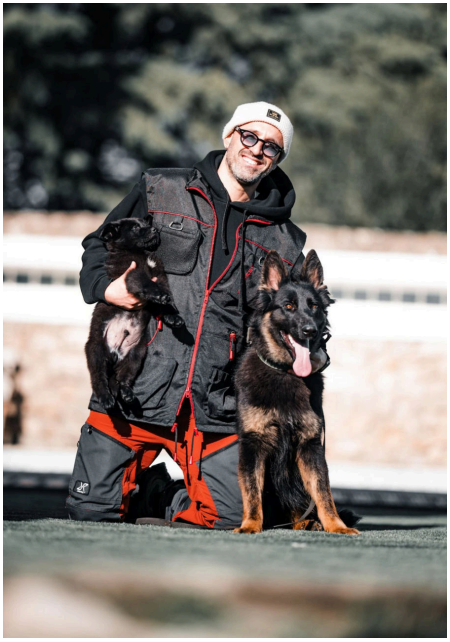
LOOKING FOR A BOERBOEL?

If you are ready to choose your puppy, see the Boerboels available now at Elite Boerboels and tell us what you are looking for.

See available Boerboels: eliteboerboels.com

Questions? Email info@eliteboerboels.com

About the Author



Rui Navarro

Rui Navarro is a protection dog trainer and breeder based just outside Lisbon, Portugal. He has been around dogs since he was a kid and has worked with working and guardian breeds for more than 30 years: German Shepherds, Malinois, Rottweilers, Dobermanns, Bandogs and Boerboels.

He is the founder of Elite Boerboels, TYR Protection Dogs and Von TyrWald, and the President of the Boerboel Breeders Association. Together with his wife Sandra, he places dogs with families in more than 30 countries, mostly in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and Canada.