

Planning A Tracking Test

By Sara Pruyn

Like so many performance events, putting on a tracking test is no small feat. An active tracking committee, with a good leader or two, are the starting point. Because our National Specialty is rotating, only occasionally returning to a previous location, the first step is securing two days of the time schedule. Tracking tests are traditionally held on Sunday, with plotting day being on

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Saturday. You might ask, why? Most judges and tracklayers work, and giving up two days of pay for a very small reimbursement is not practical. Tracklayers work for free, receiving only a lunch or two, and the feeling of accomplishment for laying a passing track.

Here are some of the many factors that play into what sites can and cannot be used: if putting on a TD or TDX test, fields could be used by farmers during the week. Tracking Test Urban (TDU) and Variable Surface Tracking (VST) tests take place in urban settings. Business parks are not available during the week; businesses are open and don't want extra people taking their parking areas. College campuses are not available during the week while school is in session, during major school events, and sport events. Town parks frequently have their mowing and maintenance done during the week.

The AKC has very strict guidelines on sites and their use. TD tests must have many yards per leg, turns per test, and minimum clearance between the track and roads and ends of fields. TDX tests must have all that, plus at least two obstacles, such as woods, roads, streams, etc. TDU tests must have a percentage of grass to pavement, with similar criteria for leg lengths, turns, and barriers. VST test sites can be very hard to come by, not only in length, but "non-vegetative" surfaces, including at least one turn in a large, non-grassy area.

Once a location for the test has been confirmed, the hunt for judges begins. There is a limited pool of tracking judges. The amount of money available to pay the

judges, provide a hotel room for two nights, transportation costs, etc., can all add to the trouble of finding judges. Many judges are booked two years ahead of schedule. If the test day is confirmed less than a year in advance, many judges have previous commitments. The Trial Chair cannot enter the test, which limits who wants the job. All the DCA Tracking Committee members track with our own dogs, so volunteering for the many positions required to run a test means we cannot enter; always a disappointment.

The first day of a tracking test involves the Trial Chair, the judges, the Chief Tracklayer and the awesome volunteer tracklayers. This day is commonly referred to as "plotting day". Whenever possible, the club tries to hire local judges who are familiar with

the area and have, hopefully, held tests at the sites. If not, a representative from the club liaison will consult with as many local trackers as possible, use local DCA club members to try to analyze and, possibly, visit the local sites to evaluate how many tracks can be put in, and try to ensure that all tracks are equal in complexity. The Trial Chair and judges will have utilized a variety of map programs to try to pre-plot the tracks. And while helpful, the programs do not show things such as simple iron chains that cross a proposed track that will now render that track unusable. A field that might be available on a Saturday may have a sporting event on Sunday, making it unusable for the test.

During plotting day, the judges, Trial Chair,

and tracklayers assemble to begin laying out (plotting) the test tracks. Everyone is always extremely patient and thankful to the tracklayers. Without them, there would be no test. Judges and tracklayers draw maps, compare yardage, confirm site markers, note article placement, and discuss possible problems. Watching a group plot a track looks like a group of team players deciding on the next play. Where to put the turn, how many steps to the next turn, exactly where to make the turn and what to head towards, all these things are discussed during those huddle sessions. While the tracklayers need only be there for their assigned tracks, the rest of the players involved have a long day. The judges review and compare their maps for consistency. Tracklayers are encouraged to rewalk their track, making additional notes on their individual maps as necessary.

The test this year has been a huge endeavor for our committee. Tom Hacholski and Jody Fraser made many phone calls to secure test sites, collaborated with local tracking judges and trackers, and contacted town and school officials. Then, at Tom's own expense, he flew to Asheville to meet with the judges to explore the proposed locations, made tentative plans on where best to plot tracks, and computed driving times between sites to lay out the test day schedule.

When the DCA Board postponed the 2020 National, our tracking committee was asked if we wanted to reschedule the tracking tests to July. Due to the possibility of high temperatures, we declined. We are always concerned about the health of our dogs and handlers, and do not want to compromise their safety. DCA has had annual tracking tests since 1987 (33 years!), and has missed only 6 years due to foxtails, heat, and/or

availability of an appropriate site for tracking. Thank you to everyone who volunteered to lay tracks! We cannot hold a test without you! If you have ideas for a tracking seminar or event later this year, please contact any committee member. All ideas are considered and discussed within our committee.

