

Tracking: It's All About The Journey

By Sara Pruyne
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From the AKC: "The purpose of a tracking test is to demonstrate the dog's ability to recognize and follow human scent, a skill useful in the service of mankind. Tracking, by nature, is a vigorous, noncompetitive outdoor sport. Tracking tests demonstrate the willingness and enjoyment of the dog in its work and should always represent the best in sportsmanship and camaraderie by the people involved."

So what do you do with your ever-nosey dog? Get him involved in tracking or scent work, where he can sniff and smell to his heart's content and demonstrate his natural ability to recognize and follow



a scent. It's a perfect way for you and your dog to enjoy many hours together, outside in the fresh air, honing his natural abilities. Nowadays with so many things in our busy life, we often opt for quicker gratification, hopefully without a huge time commitment. Scent work IS a fun sport, one that can be taught in a variety of locations. I have trained in my pajamas in the back room during a blizzard. Obtaining a Tracking Dog title is a much more challenging endeavor. Do you have access to fields or large lots that will allow you to train your dog? Do you have time to travel, lay a track, and then wait patiently (sometimes for hours) for the track to age? Are you willing to train small components to start, adding time and distances slowly, perhaps even over the course of a couple of years? Training a tracking dog is a huge time commitment. This could mean driving several miles for a few minutes on a couple of quick training tracks.

But, oh, what great rewards there are! Spending time in the field or business park, in all types of weather, building a relationship with your dog, learning to trust your dog and the dog learning to trust you.

The Tracking Dog test (TD) has a 55 to 60 percent passing rate, the Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX) has a 20 percent passing rate, and the Variable Surface Test (VST) has, at best, an 11 percent passing rate. A TDX and VST are required to become a Champion Tracker.

"...Training a tracking dog is a huge time commitment....But, oh, what great rewards there are"

With that information, why do I track? Because of a love of learning everything my dog has to teach me. Did she whine with excitement

the minute we pulled into the field? Did she tremble with enthusiasm as I put the harness on her? Did she charge to the start flag, lay down and stare at me to get a move on? Their love to track is obvious to all who watch a well trained, happy tracker motor down a track with near perfect precision.

Our committee members answer the question: Why do we track?

From Tana Rugg:

I track because of all the events in which I participate with my dals, it is the one that gives the dogs and me the most joy. It never ceases to amaze me how the dogs figure out this game. I love every track I do with my dogs. It doesn't matter whether it is a pup's first track or one that completes the requirements for the Champion Tracker title. It's always fun. It's always amazing.



From Jody Fraser:

I have tracked for 30 years, and still find that laying a track early in the morning, in the quiet solitude of nature, with the sun rising, is extremely peaceful and beautiful. Every tracking dog is a puzzle, and I like figuring out the subtle signals my dog

gives me. Sometimes I catch the signals, sometimes I don't. Our practices have provided me with many wonderful memories, and I hope to continue for a long time.

From Sara Pruyne:

It's all about the journey of developing a deep, trusting relationship with my dog while helping her channel her natural scenting instinct. I learn to read and trust her; she learns to trust me to keep her safe and follow where she leads. Out in the fresh air, following my dog, what more could I want? Whether they pass on their first attempt (Corey - my best tracker) or on their 5th (Clair the Wild) it IS about the journey. Tracking is not a quick, easy sport. But the joy of watching them do the problem solving, checking in with you for support but them making the

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decisions, is a true moment of joy. And every handler can tell you step for step of every test track they have ever run, pass or fail. The thrill of finding that last article is unforgettable.

From Tom Hacholski:

Along time ago, when I was a young man living in Chicago, the Chicago Tribune published a comic strip called Rick O'Shea. Rick was the sheriff of an old west town and Snidely Whiplash was the town gambler. Every Easter Sunday they would reprint this particular strip.

In the first panel Snidely, with his black handlebar mustache and usual black outfit, was sitting on his horse riding out of town. In the next three panels, major characters in the town - Rick, the school teacher, and the mayor - all would ask if he was going to church. His reply was always "Nope" as he rode on. In the last panel, Snidely, sitting on his horse, was overlooking a wide vista of the Grand Canyon. His comment was: "Lord, this is my church".

I feel the same about tracking with my dogs. Nothing like being out in nature and in awe of the dogs' ability to follow the scent left behind by myself or tracklayer, sometime under very difficult conditions. It's my joy to see the happiness they have when they reach and indicate the article. Did I do good Dad!

When not going out to track, I find it interesting that the dog I'm training at the time frequently goes and nudges his or her lead hanging in the dog room. They seem to be asking: "Are we going tracking, huh, huh?" They love it as I do. Being out in nature, bonding and all of us getting exercise. It's a joy and pleasure following behind and watching them work.

From Linda McSherry:

Tracking develops a relationship with your dog that is unlike any offered by other performance venues. This unique partnership results from miles of walking in nature and hours spent in fields with your dog team building. It's learning from

your dog as well as teaching, listening and watching. I find myself grateful to my dog for sharing this beautiful partnership that we can do in beautiful surroundings. The Dalmatian Club of America has a very dedicated group of trackers. We share a friendship across the country

based on our love of tracking. While most have also crossed over into the world of scent work, tracking remains our first love. Like to join our group? Just send me a quick message and we will help you experience the joy of tracking!



*Photos courtesy:
Suzi Wahl, SpotShot*

