AKC has a new Tracking Title, the VST (Variable Surface Tracking) which clubs can begin offering in September of 1995. Dawn Antoniak-Mitchell sent us the following information on her Dals in Tracking, plus her first experiences with the VST. Kashka's impressive work on her first VST track as a demonstration of a dog's ability to do this type of tracking is another confirmation of the outstanding tracking ability and love for the work inherent in most Dalmatians.

Dawn writes: "Paisley's Phantasy Phlute CDX TDX finished her UD June 3, 1995, at the Platte Valley Kennel Club show in Fremont, NE. Kashka earned her CD in three shows in 1989 and finished her CDX in four tries in 1990. Because of health problems Kashka had, we thought she would never finish a UD so we decided to try her in tracking while continuing to show her in Open. Unfortunately there weren't many trackers around Lincoln, at the time so we were on our own to muddle through Glenn Johnson [Glenn Johnson has an excellent book on training your dog to track] and teach Kashka to track. Luckily, Kashka has a natural drive to track; she caught on very quickly and required no more motivation than 'killing' the article at the end. She earned her TD in 1992 and by that time Jeff and I were hooked on tracking. We made the draw for the first TDX trial we entered, drew the first track of the day and passed the 900 yard long track in nine minutes, earning Kashka's TDX one year after her TD.

"By this time Kashka's health problems were resolved and we began UD training in earnest. It took ten tries, but she earned her legs with two all-breed first places, one all-breed second place, and a Highest Scoring Dog prize. We're now concentrating solely on training for the Variable Surface Tracker title approved by the AKC this past March. This new tracking title requires the dog/handler team to follow a stranger's track which is 3-5 hours old, 600-800 yards long over various vegetated and non-vegetated surfaces (concrete, gravel, etc), and identify three articles dropped along the track by the tracklayer. While tracking on non-vegetated surfaces is not impossible for dogs it seems to be more challenging for them.

Last spring I took Kashka to a VST seminar presented by AKC representative John Bernard and we were selected to run a building track. I had just begun working Kashka on non-vegetated surfaces so I was unsure how she would handle a track that started in grass, turned down the middle of a sidewalk, PAVED UP SOME STAIRS AND THROUGH AN ABANDONED ARMY BUILDING, CAME OUT ON A SIDEWALK, turned onto grass and ended in the middle of a parking lot. The building was literally falling down - we had to pick our way through fallen ceiling tiles, holes in the floor and years worth of trash. To complicate things even further a metal article was dropped in the middle of the building in a pile of trash. Kashka took a good sniff at the start flag and took off at a run in the grass. She worked the first corner for a while before step-tracking down the middle of the sidewalk, up the stairs and into the building. At this point I had to worry not only about keeping the lead from getting tangled but also about tripping over my own leg which was dragging on the ground! She found the metal article immediately and retrieved it back to me. Before I could put the article in my pocket she was tracking out of the building, finishing the rest of the track easily. I was amazed at Kashka's determination and became 100 percent committed to training her for her Champion Tracker title at that point. Any dog earning all three tracking titles will earn the C.T. prefix title, signifying Champion Tracker. Clubs may begin offer-