

First Dalmatian Champion Tracker

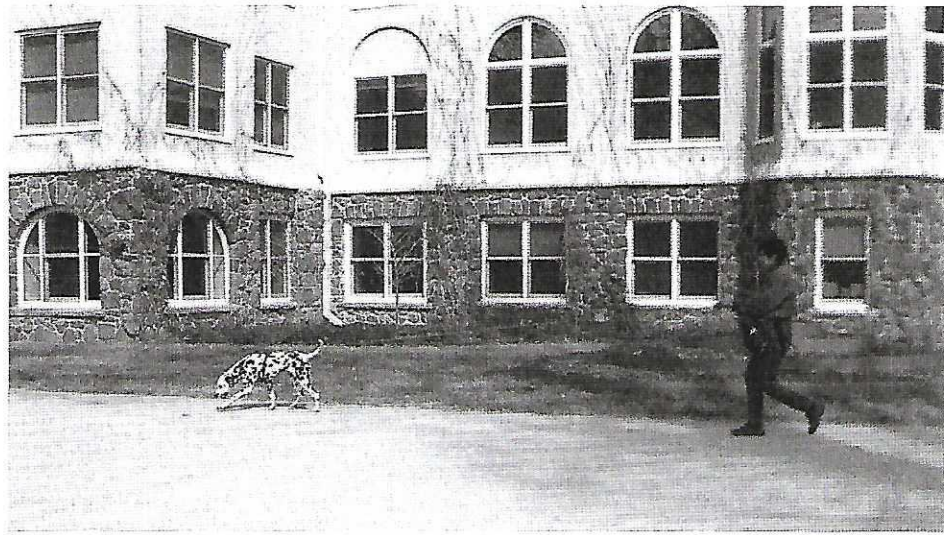
CT CAN/INTL/UKC CH Monumental Moment At Ravenwd RN TT CGC TDInc.

By Tana Rugg

On a warm August day in 1998, Annette Guillaume (DCA member) met me at Chatfield State Park south of Denver and laid a 10 yard track while 8 month old Mackie watched with great curiosity. Annette showed Mackie the glove at the start. I held Mackie on a buckle collar and a 6 foot leash. As Annette walked backward waving the glove and talking to Mackie, the puppy was wiggling and wagging her tail so much I thought she might jump out of her skin. Finally, Annette placed a glove on the ground and put her very best garlic chicken on it. Mackie lunged forward to the glove, ate the treats, and thought Annette was the best person to introduce her to such a wonderful game. We did 2 more 'baby' tracks that day, each a bit longer than the first. Little did we know that we had just begun the training

Champion Tracker: What's Involved?

First, a dog must certify on a regulation tracking dog track that is laid and judged by an AKC judge. The dog can then enter a Tracking Dog test. After passing this test, a dog may enter either a Tracking Dog Excellent Test or a Variable Surface Tracking test. A TD track is 400-500 yards in length with 3-5 turns. It is aged 30 minutes to 2 hours. The dog must find and indicate a glove or wallet at the end. As of 2005 there is an article at the start. A TDX track is 800-1000 yards in length with 5-7 turns. There must be 2 sets of cross tracks on 2 legs of the track (places where 2 people have walked across the track) and there must be at least 2 obstacles (ditches, roads, stands of trees, bridges, etc.) It must age for 3-5 hours. A Variable Surface Track is 600-800 yards in length and aged 3-5 hours. It must have at least 3 different surfaces that will include vegetation and 2 areas that are devoid of vegetation (concrete, asphalt, dirt, gravel, sand, hard pan, or mulch.) The track will have 4-8 turns, one of which must be on a non-vegetation surface.



Mackie is tracking on a sidewalk beside a building. About a foot in front of her left front foot is a plastic article – she is heading to it to touch and identify it. Photos courtesy Tana Rugg.

for the Dalmatian that was to become the first Champion Tracker.

After that day, I began tracking each week with members of the Denver Foothills Tracking Association. Mackie loved the game and progressed quickly. There were TD tests that fall, but I didn't feel either of us was ready to certify and enter. So, we tracked on through winter, spring and summer; and in the fall when the first TD test was approaching, I began thinking about getting her certified. CJ Evert, a judge who has been involved in tracking for about 30 years, laid a certifying track in a blinding snowstorm, but didn't tell me it was a certifying track. She let me think it was practice as usual so that I, being a novice, wouldn't be nervous. We waited for the track to age for 30 minutes. When it was time for Mackie to run her track, the snow was really coming down, but Mackie didn't care. She tore down the 440 yard track, made 4 lovely turns, and pawed for the glove at the end as it was buried in the snow. She had certified in fine fashion. Three weeks later she was entered in a TD test. This day was very different from the day she certified. It was very dry, warm, and windy. Once again she ran her track in fine style. She picked up the scent of the track layer as we approached the first flag and didn't put her nose up until she found the glove at the end of the track. Instead of pawing at the glove like she usually did, she

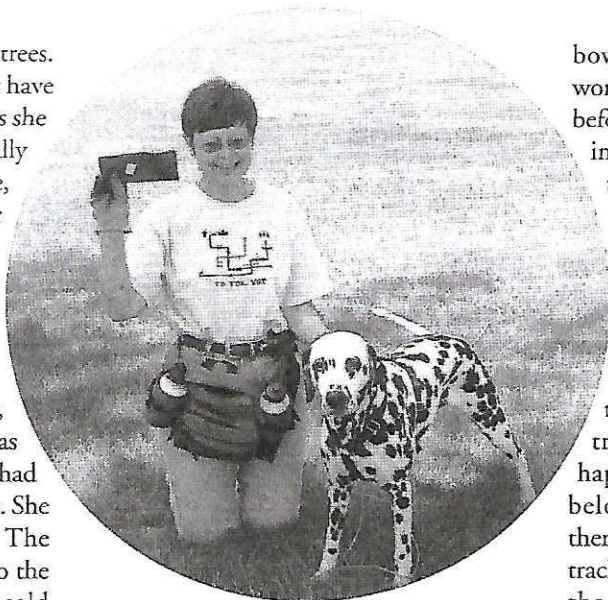
flipped on her back, rolled on it and grinned with delight. It was quite the scene.

She enjoyed tracking so much, that I decided to train her for the next level test: TDX (Tracking Dog Excellent). This took time as there are many components to master and I had a very young dog. I needed to give her time to mature mentally so that she could handle the obstacles she might encounter on a track. I also had a lot to learn about scent and what happens to it in all kinds of conditions. I did enter her in a test at the National in 1999. I felt she was ready, but wasn't sure how she could travel and track in conditions very different from what she was used to. She didn't pass at that test. Instead, she found some rather interesting critters and decided to hunt. After we had gotten the whistle, I restarted her on the track. She finished up very well, and I was actually happy with her work that day.

Mackie did pass a TDX test at Chatfield State Park in the fall of 2003. There were six dogs entered that day and she was second to run. We drew a track in an area that I had never used for practice. We started out at the top of a hill, went straight down to a small stream, which we had to cross, then up another steep hill. From there the track crossed another hill, where Mackie found the first article. She turned around and smiled at me as she stood over it. From there the

track went into a large stand of juniper trees. The trees were covered in ice and must have looked like huge monsters to Mackie as she stopped and barked at them. She finally decided to go around the first big tree, then immediately went back onto her track. She hurried through the junipers and made another turn, which led us down yet another hill where she found her second article. Again, she turned and smiled. We continued on down the hill, made a turn and 200 yards later, she had found the glove. My heart was pounding. I was out of breath as she had completed 825 yards in just 17 minutes. She was the only dog to pass that day. The weather was very cold, and she was also the only short-coated dog to run. The cold weather hadn't bothered her. One of the judges told me that she felt terrible when I had drawn that track as she felt it was the hardest of the day.

I then began training her for VST. I knew it was very different from the field work and would most likely be very difficult as the pass rate the previous year had been 5.38%. It was like beginning all over again. However with her understanding of tracking, and her love of the sport, it didn't take long for her to figure out tracking on concrete, pavement, dirt, sand, short grass and around buildings. She came to enjoy the urban tracking as much as she had the field work. In January of 2005 I decided that I could possibly have her ready for a test in the spring. We practiced short VST tracks incorporating small pieces of what we might encounter. In March I began pushing harder elements at her. Some days I would track only on pavement making 5-7 turns. Other days, her tracks would work around tall buildings. Sometimes I would start her on grass; at other times I would start her on non-vegetative surfaces. For physical conditioning, I exercised her when it was really warm outside. We also ran in the rain and the snow. She seemed to love the challenges I was giving her. In May we entered our first test. She started in a bowl and worked it beautifully, went across a parking lot, down a long driveway between buildings, and into another bowl. It was in this bowl that she seemed to lose the scent. There had been a lot of evaporation that day and the scent had spread. She cut a corner, but picked up the scent in a parking lot. By doing this she had missed an article and the judges had to blow



Mackie and Tana with the final article at the end of the track.

the whistle. Once restarted, she finished the track easily. We hadn't passed, but I felt she had tracked very well. I was fully confident we would pass at the next test two weeks later.

The test was held on May 22, 2005. The temperature was 88 degrees. Mackie was number 108, which meant I would be the eighth (and last) to draw for a track. We drew track #8. I watched seven other dogs run tracks that day. Six didn't get past the first leg, and one got to the third corner. No one had passed. In fact, we had not had a dog pass a VST test in Denver for two years (over 48 entries). I still felt confident. As Mackie and I approached our track, I could feel her excitement. At the start flag, she downed on the grass, did frog legs, looked up at me and smiled. She got up, turned around, did frog legs, looked up at the judges and smiled. I'm sure they thought she would never start. I knew she was happy and was planning on having a good time.

Here is a description of the track written by one of the judges (permission granted by Judge Allison Platt):

"The best was saved for last. We were at the Firehouse/Police Station at the municipal center. The Dalmatian bitch did not seem as bothered by the heat because of her color and short coat. She was full of energy at the start and went off strongly on the first leg along the grass near a road. The first turn went right on a concrete walk crossing a small stream, then up in a grassy

bowl toward a large building. The dog worked the first corner for about five seconds before galloping over the culvert, then up into the grass. The dog worked left of the track, then up to the next corner near a set of steps. The dog went slightly right while the steps went up to the left, and was distracted by a dog barking at her (on leash!). She was momentarily distracted, then went back to work, paralleling the stairs rather than taking them (I am told by people who have trained here that this often seems to happen—that the dogs prefer the grass below the steps rather than the steps themselves). From the top of the stairs the track crossed the edge of a plaza tucked into the building, and then paralleled the building to and past its edge. We had placed a leather article at the building past the plaza, and the dog was drawn right to it once she had paralleled the stairs. From there she stayed right on track along the building and past it, turning right with the track into a parking lot filled with police cars, through it, and up to the wall of another building and the dog's moment of truth turn, which could have gone left or right. Here again the dog worked left for only about 10 seconds, then confidently turned right and into an underpass between two buildings and to a metal article 25 yards from the corner and down a set of stairs. The track then continued out to the entryway of the building, and turned left out into the parking lot. At this point the wind had shifted and strengthened and was coming from the left across the parking lot and the track and into the building (which was curved to catch the scent!) to the dog's right. The dog followed the building along to the right rather than turning and at this point the dog was close enough to finishing that we were worried. However, she broke off after about 15-20 yards and went out into the pavement, paralleling the track downwind and coming into it strongly as it exited the parking lot to the right. The dog then searched briefly to the left of the track and then ran to the final article, cheers, and horns! The whole track took the dog only 13 minutes. Very impressive! Congratulations to owner/handler Tana Rugg and CT Can/Int'l/U-Ch Monumental Moment at Ravenwd. You made our day (as well as yours, of course!)"

cont'd to page 84.

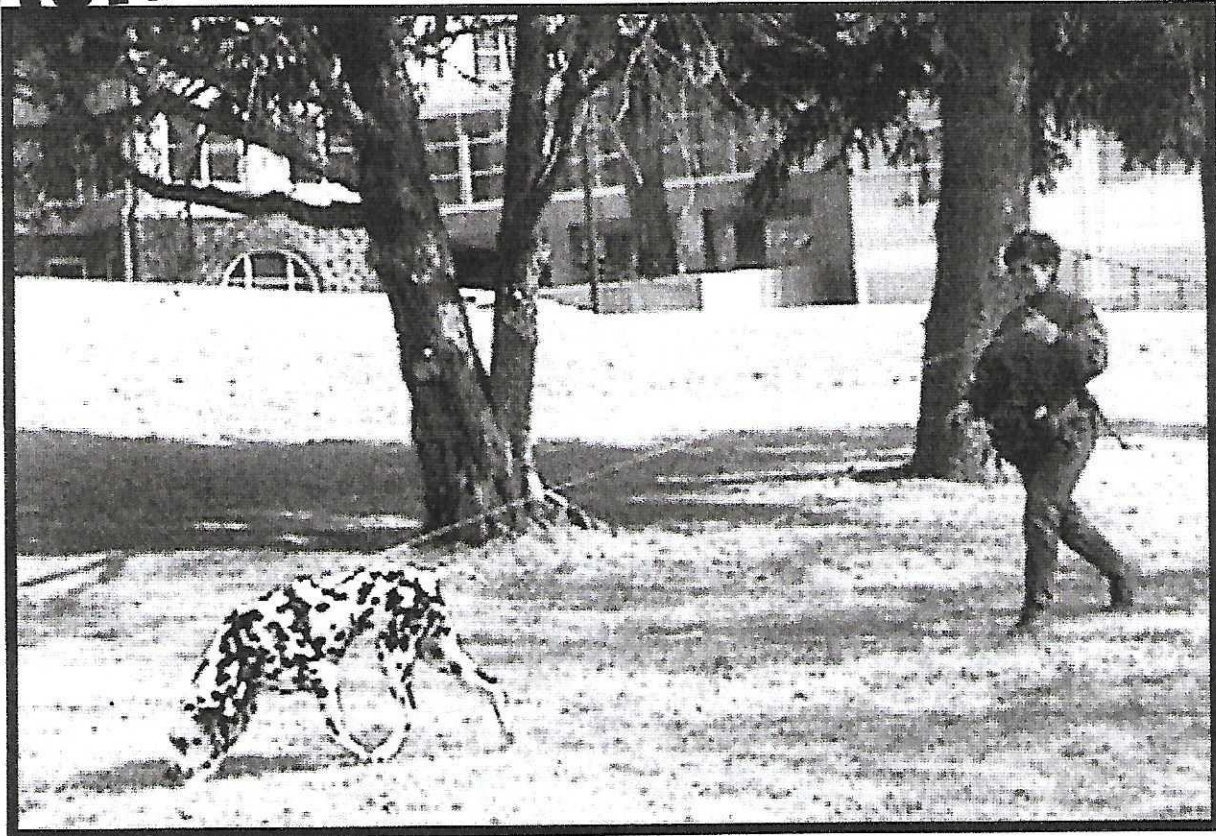
It was truly thrilling. I told the judges they had just passed the first Dalmatian VST as well as the first CT. I later learned that she was the 100th dog of all breeds to become a Champion Tracker since the title's inception in 1995.

I look back nearly a year later, and am still in awe of Mackie. She is truly exceptional. Actually, she is Monumental! Mackie will continue to track until she decides it is time to retire. Until then, Tuesdays will always be reserved for tracking with Mackie.

It is my hope that many Dals will follow in her pawsteps and become Champion Trackers.

Note: A dog must pass all 3 tests to become a Champion Tracker. It is not easy. In 2004 the pass rates for tests were: TD-58.87%; TDX-17.547%; VST-5.38%. In 2005 only 20 dogs passed a VST test. Twenty-two dogs became CTs. As of this writing, complete statistics for 2005 have not been published by AKC.

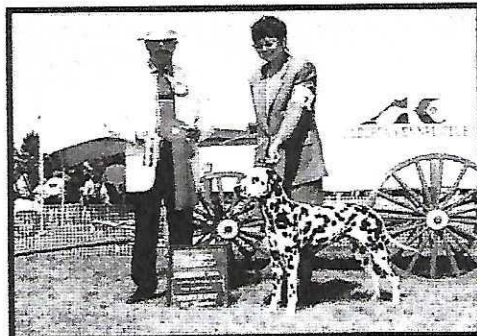
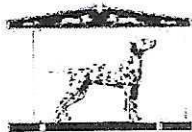
MACKIE: ALWAYS MONUMENTAL



**CT CAN/INTL/UKC CH MONUMENTAL MOMENT AT RAVENWD RA TT CGC TDInc.
The FIRST Dalmatian CHAMPION TRACKER
#7 Dalmatian in Canada in 2004 (shown 5 times from BBE)
Earning Rally Obedience titles with placements**

On May 22, 2005, Mackie gave us yet another 'Monumental Moment' as she passed a Variable Surface Tracking test when she took just 13 minutes to run a track of over 1/2 mile in very warm temperatures and windy conditions. She thrilled owner/handler Tana Rugg as well as the gallery of tracking enthusiasts by conquering a difficult track with confidence and enthusiasm.

Co-owned/bred/loved/handled by
Tana & BJ Rugg
Monumental Dalmatians
email:
monumentaldals@adelphia.net



Group 2 Alberta Kennel Club 2004
Judge Goran Bodegard MD (Sweden)

Co-owned/bred/loved by
Kathy McCoubrey
Ravenwood Dalmatians
email:
ravenwooddals@earthlink.net

