

From Rescue Dog To Tracking Dog

by Machell Koss

Three years ago Mingo came into my life. For what reason, I still don't know why. Was I possibly the one person that could manage this dog? Was I the person that could take care of this dog's health problem? I do believe everything happens for a reason. This is Mingo's story of starting from a lost dog in Mingo County Park found by some wonderful horse fancier and brought to me when I was doing rescue for the Pittsburgh area.

Someone named Lori brought this large, malnourished Dalmatian to me one day and I tried my best not to look into those huge dark eyes of his. She offered to help get him back on his feet until we found a home for him. But, of course he needed his exercise and she couldn't exercise him in her postage stamp yard. So, of course, she brought him every week to my house to run him. I stayed away. I tried not to pet him or attempt to look his way for that matter. I wanted no part of this dog.

Mingo had three different kinds of worms and was 24" tall and 35 lbs. He was also aggressive with other dogs. I knew that this was a dog that could not be placed. The amount of water he consumed was unbelievable.

I agreed that I would try my best to readjust this dog's attitude and get him under control. I had little hope for this dog. In the back of my mind I felt he should be put down.

I took Mingo to some knowledgeable obedience people who were familiar with aggression. They assured me that this dog could be worked with and that he could be managed. There started my long journey of rehabilitation. I learned about electronic collars to control aggression and fence scaling, methods to teach the dog how to ignore distractions and how to watch for aggression before it happens.

I spent countless dollars and hours on gizmos to control him. I thought this dog needed some serious confidence boosting. The best way to give a dog confidence is to teach him tracking. So, Gayle Geiger and I thought we would try. The first time was ridiculous. He tried tracking on his stomach and I almost got pulled down on top of him.

Seeking advice, I went tracking with a local woman. Cindy suggested the Dildei method of teaching him how to track to get him started correctly. This meant a little more work than we usually do when we start out a dog. I used a loose leash instead of a tight leash and I put the wieners down for each step to teach him step tracking. The reason for the loose leash was to teach him not to pull. Something which is the opposite of what I was taught. You want a dog to pull you tracking. In this case, for now, we didn't. Gayle Geiger and I watched the Dildei tape. It was at this point that poor Gayle, who has been with me every step of the way, put down wieners in a field for yards. To our amazement, this worked wonders. Mingo was getting some rhythm and he was starting to understand what we wanted.

One day Mingo didn't want to move. I rushed him to the vet. They gave him prednisone for the pain. In a few hours he was back to normal. How strange. This happened every time we would discontinue the prednisone dosage. By then, I noticed Mingo had gotten anemic, gums pale and his urine was orange. My vet said more than likely he had hemolytic anemia. The test came out positive. Mingo would be on prednisone for the rest of his life. While waiting for those tests, the only thing he would eat was chicken. All my work with this dog was going out the window. I kept thinking, maybe I should have put him down.

When my vet and I found a regulated



Mingo, owned by Machell Koss

dosage of prednisone that improved his PCV (Packed Cell Volume) levels he made remarkable improvements. He was stronger than I even imagined he could be.

Back to work we went. Instead of being gloomy and worrying about this illness and wondering how long he had to live, I decided I was going to make this dog's life worth living as best I could.

Onto indicating articles. At first, I couldn't figure out what he was doing. He just stood over the top of it and dropped his tail. He did this from the first time he tracked. Every dog has a different indication. This was his. Sometimes he would down on his own, but he seemed to like the stand indication.

As time came close to Mingo being certified, I was getting very nervous. Every dog is different tracking and he was a total opposite of my other one. I also didn't feel mentally connected to him either. He was very aloof and doesn't like to be hugged. He was shy of people and scared of dogs.

On our first certification by a visiting judge, I was pretty uptight. We didn't do very well, he breezed right past the first turn and just kept going straight. I couldn't get him back on track after that and I felt like it was my fault. This dog and I just didn't have a good mental connection.

Phil Gallagher and Gayle assured me that there was no reason to be so upset

because I didn't pass my certification the first time. In my mind, I was still learning about this dog. Phil came out and laid us a track. I was a wreck. We started out great and on the next to last leg we ran into something on the track. Mingo started eating it. I remembered that he had done this before and he would restart if I would wait him out. He finished the track and we got certified.

The first test was in Pittsburgh and I was more nervous than I should have been. When everyone started driving up to the test site and the other dogs were barking, Mingo got this look of fear. His tail went under and he started backing away from me. I had a feeling this wasn't going to be too good.

We had a tough start and he was tracking different. I even got my line tangled around both my feet because I was so stiff. I didn't know what my dog was doing. We managed to make it to the 3rd turn and when he made the turn finally, I pulled on the line too hard. He thought I was correcting him and went right instead. That was the end of our first try.

We could have muddled through it and we could have made it that day if I didn't make a handling error. But, I didn't want

him looking like that. I wanted him to track the way he always does. We had to enter yet another test.

We got into the Buckeye Tracking Club test and there were seven T tracks. I drew number seven. It was the longest three hours ever and Mingo was getting impatient. He wanted to track and you could tell he was ready to go. I was working on his attitude and getting him pumped up for the last three hours. I was hoping it would work.

When he started off, he started to search a little more than I would have liked back and forth, right and left between the first two flags, but I stood my ground like Gayle always told me to do. He took a little too long and I was starting to get nervous. Then I remembered what Gayle told me to say to myself and under my breath to him. She said it worked for her. So, I said those words "You can do it Mingo. You can do it." For some strange, unforeseen reason it worked! Instead of being negative and thinking, "Why are you doing this to me!" I became his cheerleader. We made our way down the track finally and he took off like a wild man. By the second leg he found something to eat, and I had to wait him out. He dropped what ever it was and continued.

On the second leg I heard a whistle. I turned around and the judges were looking at me like I was crazy and my dog was still pulling. I thought, "Oh well, I must be wrong." Then I realized, in Canfield, Ohio they have these black birds that make a noise like a far off whistle! I kept hearing them in the morning when I got there. We were right! We hadn't gotten off track!

After that, I said under my breath "Good Boy!" He flew down that track like there was no tomorrow. Better yet, the judge that tried to certify me the first time was the same judge judging this test. I thought to myself, "See my dog can track. I proved it to you".

Our track was soaked with water and Mingo was all muddy. I didn't care. I hugged him even though I know he hates those hugs I give him. I almost picked the big lug off his feet.

As we started back down to headquarters, my van got stuck in the mud. But, yah know what? I didn't care. I was too happy to care. My rescue dog, the one I thought would never amount to anything got his Tracking Dog title that day. He showed me that he was capable of a lot more than I gave him credit for in the beginning. He has overcome a serious illness and he has

overcome fear. Most of all that day he overcame his track and we did it together.



Mingo and Machell tracking.