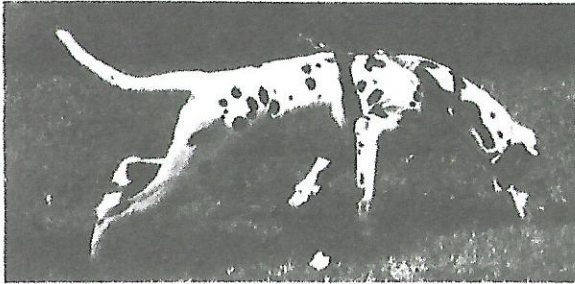


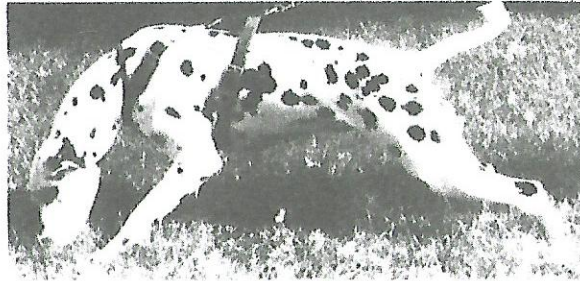
## In Search of the Elusive "T"

by Carolyn Krause



Storytym Jolly  
Roger, T.D.  
(Age - 6 months)

Cee Kay Becky  
Thatcher, C.D., T.D.



My search began several years ago. I fell in love with a dalmatian at a dog show. (Dal Downs Quoin) He had it all; looks, personality, style. I fell hard and began my search for a Dal puppy. Every breeder I talked to said, "When you get a puppy, you really should give it some obedience training." A year later, I had my puppy, Cee Kay Becky Thatcher (Becky). She is of show quality, but unfortunately she had some health problems that caused me to have her spayed.

Becki and I joined the Springfield, Mo., Dog Training Club (SMDTC) and began working toward a C.D. During this time, I attended a training club program with film and slides about tracking dogs. I was astonished. I thought, "Look at these wonderful working dogs. How do they train them. COULD MY DOG DO THAT? I WONDER . . . ?" Becky and I continued working and got our C.D. with some nice scores in Novice A class. However, the images of those tracking dogs were still bubbling around in the back of my mind. I happened to read in one of my husband's magazines, a gun dog writer's rather derisive reference to "stone nosed dalmatians." That did it, I had to teach my dog tracking. Fortunately for me, while I was getting a C.D. on Becky, my husband was getting a T.D. on his Brittany. He also had been bitten by the tracking bug. He had participated in a tracking class and had the know how I needed. He has been my chief track layer, teacher, shoulder to cry on, and cheerleader. I owe him so much. Our tracking program is totally inclusive, we use food. Becky, being a typical dalmatian, was born starving and thinks that tracking is God's gift to good little dalmatians. All that food! Occasionally another dog would enter the area and eat all the food on the tracks. What a disappointed little Dal she was then. Training was tough, time consuming, sometimes exhausting mentally and physically; but she learned well.

About this time, I got a call from Colleen Ratcliff of Storytym Dalmatians. She had a champion sired litter and wanted me to spread the word. I had no wish for a puppy at that time. I was totally involved with Becky's tracking. There were a dozen reasons not to have another pup now, but I knew that someday I wanted a show quality male. I kept looking at the pedigree on those pups. Shadodal and Dal Downs were two bloodlines I admired. Sire was a champion UDT. Granddam was a champion UDT. Grandsire was a UDT Wow! Dam has a C.D. and is pointed and behind the dam I find Dal Downs Quoin, the first Dal I ever fell for. That was enough. The pup is Storytym Jolly Roger, call name, Dodger. Now that I have him, what am I going to do with him? Track him of course.

I would like to offer some thoughts on tracking. It's an incredible confidence builder for the dog. Whether the dog is destined for the breed ring, the obedience ring, or both or neither; a working dog that knows his job has a better attitude about everything. If his obedience work is a little stale, track him a day or two and his energy and enthusiasm will be regenerated. Is his breed ring performance a little "off?" Track him, it may bring him right back up on his toes. My dogs think that tracking is the greatest game we can play. This can create minor problems. If I'm going to track dog A, I try to sneak out to the car with my tracking gear. I does no good. Dog B always knows and is grumpy and irritable with dog A for the rest of the day. Tracking is beneficial to the handler too. There can be no success unless dog and handler work as a team. You must know your dog absolutely. You have to become expert at reading his body language. You really have to get inside his head and every dog is different. There are no shortcuts. Dog training is a mental sport and nowhere is this more true than in tracking. This exploration of the "inner dog" creates benefits which carry over into all other areas of living with, working with, and showing your dog. No one ever gets a tracking degree alone. All members of SMDTC with tracking experience were helpful and open hearted in encouraging me towards my goals. This group of experienced people was invaluable to me. They laid track sometimes, helped to solve problems. I couldn't have done it without them. We used Glen R. Johnson's book with some modifications, but there is substitute for field experience.

Tracking training with Becky, while challenging and hard work, proceeded more or less routinely. Becky and I made it through the terrors of the certification track. My husband refused to allow me to become discouraged and he always devised a fresh approach to problems. I owe him a lot. Now I had to figure out how to track my puppy. SMDTC tracking people had told me that puppies take beautifully to tracking. With this encouragement, I began to track Dodger. He was ten weeks old! I had a good idea how I wanted to train him and I wanted to proceed at his pace. I would strongly caution anyone considering this with a young puppy. Remember, this is a tiny baby; watch him closely, don't allow him to be over stressed or over heated or chilled. His bones are soft and still forming. Make it an easy game and he'll love it, thrive on it. If the book called for nine tracks, I might do three with the puppy. I greatly reduced the distances tracked when Dodger was so tiny. He still got the idea. If he seemed a little unsure or confused, I simply repeated that day's work. This wasn't a race and we had no tracking class to keep up with. I did, however, constantly increase the age of the tracks even more quickly than in Johnson's book. We do this with our adult dogs too. By the fourth week of training, Dodger was making two turns and tracking tracks 60 minutes old. This at the age of 14 weeks. We kept on working, increasing distance and age of tracks and removing the food. I contacted an AKC Tracking Judge, and on August 24, 1985, Dodger passed his tracking certification test at the age of 4 months and one week. I don't know if he is the youngest dog of any breed ever certified, but he may be the youngest dalmatian.

The next two months were filled with worry and frustration. I had two good tracking dogs. Every dog has peaks and valleys of performance. How did I keep them at peak performance until I could get them into a test? I didn't want them burnt-out, overtrained. I had to be especially careful with the puppy. He was still very much a baby. I made mistakes and had to correct them. At one point Becky quit tracking completely. It was a combination of too much hard work and her jealousy that I was tracking the puppy. Each dog was an individual and required different handling. I felt like I was trying to juggle feathers. There was such a fine balance between too much and not enough. Another frustration was having to wait for Dodger to be 6 months old to enter a test. There was a tracking test at Elkland, Mo. on October 6, Dodger was too young but Becky was entered and passed . . . I was so proud and happy, lots of tears, she's my first tracking dog. However, the job wasn't finished yet. Dodger had to wait for the Greater St. Louis Training Club test on October 20. He would be six months and three days old at the test date, we barely made the age requirement.

When we arrive at the test site in Edwardsville, Illinois, the fog is so thick that visibility is almost zero. We draw for tracks at 7:45 in the morning, our track is number 3. The fog is so thick that you can't see the second flag at thirty yards. There is nothing to do but crawl back into the van and wait. There is time to think . . . think of months of work and worry, joy and pain. There is time to think of Bob and Marge Sullivan who have been so kind to me. Is it really possible that Dodger can become the third generation Dal from their line to earn a tracking degree? It so is because of all the work the Sullivans have done with their wonderful dogs. I think about Willie White of Shadodal, she has always had to time to listen and advise. Her generations of fine dogs are part of the foundation that Dodger and I hope to build on today . . . Will we pass? The knot in my stomach says "No, we can't possibly. It's too hard, he's just a baby." My head says "Yes, he can do it. We've done it together all summer." My heart says, "Can he do it today?"



Track number 1 is not even laid until after 10:00. The tracklayers can finally see to lay the tracks. Finally, dog number 1 is started. It completes the track and passes, wonderful! Dog number 2, sadly, does not pass. That's the average, about 50% pass. It's nearing mid-day and at last it's our turn. The fog lifts a little more, the judges are ready, and we're off. Bless him, he never makes a wrong step, never deviates from the track. His work is so very accurate and so quick that I must run some of the time to keep up. He completes the track in 3 minutes and 45 seconds, finds the glove . . . makes it look easy! A great cheer rises from the gallery and Dodger dashes over to make friends and see what the shouting is about. I am overcome . . . Jubilation . . . We have done it. He has done it! Next comes relief. I no longer have to get up at 5:00 a.m. to work my dogs. I don't have to go out every day; rain, wind, heat, cold, snakes, sprained knees, brush, rough terrain, all of that is past now.

Next comes the thought . . . Is there a TDX Dalmatian? TDX is so hard. COULD MY DOGS DO THAT? I WONDER . . . ?