

My Fifth Tracking Dog

by Paulena Verzeano

On April 2, 2000, my eight-month-old Dalmatian puppy, "Cody," ran a beautiful, accurate track in four minutes to get his Tracking Dog title. Dash 'N Dots Decoder "Cody" is my fifth tracking dog and all of them have earned their titles the first time in a test. He is also my third dog to get his TD title at eight months of age. My last three dogs were born in July and received their titles the following April. Needless to say, I love tracking with my Dals.

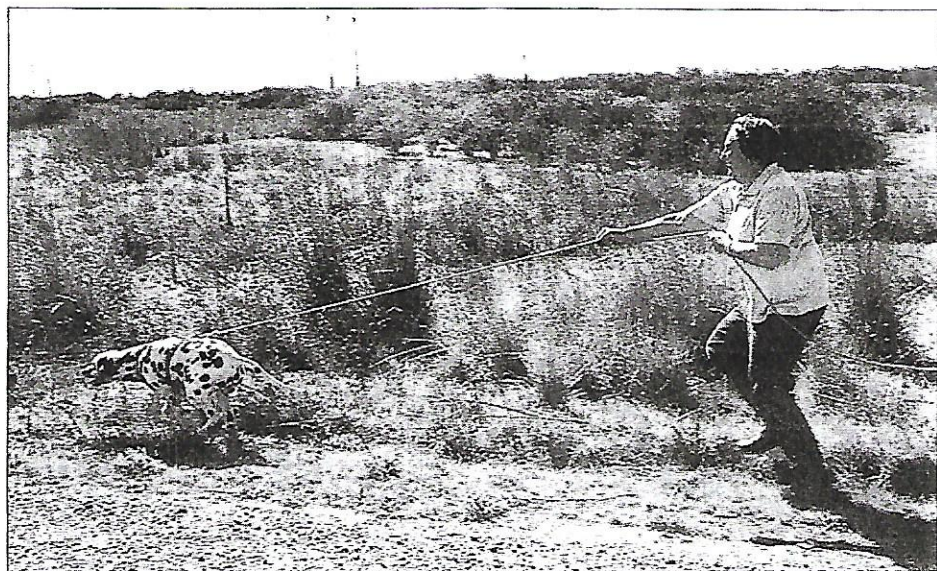
Dals are excellent tracking dogs. Their high energy, intelligence and determination helps in a sport where the dog tells the handler what to do. Tracking builds confidence and creates a real working bond between handler and dog. I think it is the best quality time you can have with your dog.

Cody was confident, enthusiastic, and did not give me time to be nervous. I was too busy watching where my feet were going. The track was 485 yards but it seemed like just 200 yards and there he was, busily shaking the glove to see if he could get out the pieces of hot dog. Of course this time, there was no hot dog in the glove and neither was I carrying his breakfast.

Since beginning his training the third week in January, Cody was very easy to train.

I use the Johnson method, which was one of the first definitive methods that leads you through steps to a TD and TDX. It is the basis for most of the popular methods today. A rigorous schedule, it has nine baby tracks the first two weeks, then three tracks for a few weeks and finally one track a day. At the end of the first week on the sixth day, the dog will do nine tracks, totaling 2,640 yards!

This is definitely not for all dogs!



"Cody" exhibiting his enthusiasm for tracking, with Paulena in tow.

I pretty much follow this demanding schedule, tracking six days a week and as a result, Cody was tracking the very first day. A lot of this was tracking mostly the hot dog smashed into the ground every few steps, but after a few days, the hot dog disappeared and the puppy tracked with his nose down for the fun of it and breakfast when he found the glove.

When he got to the acute turn in week six, which teaches the dog to search behind where he lost the scent, he found it very hard and would come and sit in front of me as if to say, the scent just vanished! We had to back up a bit to build confidence and then he got the idea to circle and look behind for the track. After that, he basically kept improving and by certification time he was solid, never overshooting a turn more than a few feet.

My association with tracking started in 1984, when I attended a Glen Johnson seminar. I knew that this was something the Dals and I would enjoy and there was a local group mentored by a woman who taught police drug dogs. She was a demanding but excellent teacher and one important lesson she taught me was, TRUST YOUR DOG!

I remember how nervous I was the week before my first tracking test. My mentor laid a track for me and then left. I was to run the track, find the glove and then report back to her. The dog went about 75 yards and indicated a right turn. She went down this leg about 50 yards and, confidently,

indicated another right turn. But this wasn't possible! The dog was heading right back to the car! I refused to go with the dog and eventually the dog was discouraged and gave up. When we went back to the group and I described the problem I was told, Why didn't you follow your dog? The dog had been accurately on the U-shaped track of only 175 yards. Although I was upset and would not do this to one of my students, it did get the message across. She also taught me to be extremely enthusiastic and never use obedience commands in tracking.

The key, I think, to my success in this sport is knowing that your dog can be successful and will earn that Tracking Degree (TD). Be patient, keep your attitude enthusiastic and encouraging and help your dog work out any problems.

My hopes for Cody are to get an advanced tracking title, his breed champion title, go all the way through utility in obedience, continue with agility and have a long and happy life!

For the past eight years, Paulena is one of two mentors from the Southern Oregon Kennel Club who help others get started in tracking. Although the tracking season is short, December through the end of April, almost every one of Paulena's beginners, if they get in a test, pass in April or May.

Paulena's other tracking dogs include: CH Coachmasters Pride Sparkler UDTDX, the third Dal to have these titles (Cody's great-grandmother); Dash N Dots Forrest Ember, CDX TD CGC, grandmother; Int. Ch. Dash N Dots Top Knotch CD TDX CGC (mother).