

Life in the Show Lane

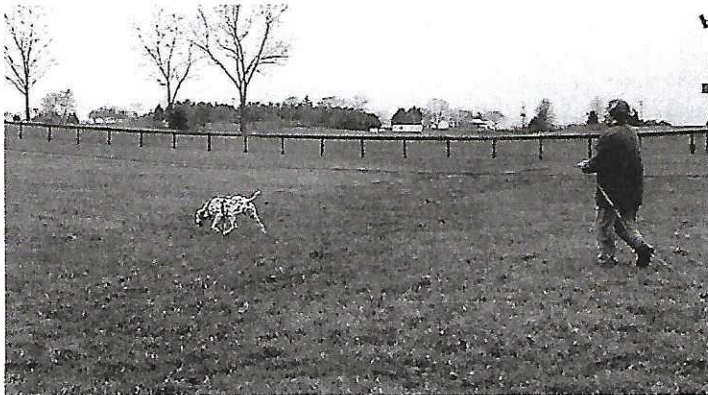
My First TD

By Kathy McCoubrey

I have always wanted to track. I started my first champion, Ch Atlantis Conquistador CDX AD, way back in the early '80s, but the second time out in the field I saw two very large snakes and that ended that. Over the years I tried to pick it up again but fear of snakes, lack of time, and no tracking partner always kept me from sticking to it. Still, in the back of my mind, I always planned I would get to it one day.

In 2002, I went to the Netherlands to bring back Gwynmor Power Point to use in our breeding program. My Dutch friends, Rosemarie Sweeny and Peggy Van Hal, graciously opened their country house to us so I could have a week to bond with Jamie before I had to toss him in the belly of an airplane for an 8+ hour flight back to the states. One of the things I did with him there was to introduce him to tracking. I was amazed. He seemed to pick it up right away and was really excited about it. When we got home, I started to seriously work at tracking. I have a wonderful tracking buddy, Terry Johnson, who has great Bearded Collies. We lay tracks for each other and provide encouragement and support for each other. Our training was interrupted by very hot, wet summers, and very cold, wet winters, but still we muddled on. Considering how much we didn't know...neither of us had put a TD on a dog...our dogs seemed to be doing very well. Jamie learned to track up and down hills, to go from deep grass to short grass and back again, to cross roads, bridges, creeks, and anything we could find. I found myself walking through fields that I would never have gone through except to track. Our tracking guru, Tana Rugg, helped as much as she could with email lessons.

Then in May of 2004, I realized I had to find out where we were and what I needed to do to get him ready for certification. You have to be certified by a licensed judge before you can enter a TD



Jamie on the track.



Jamie works a turn. Photos courtesy Kathy McCoubrey.

test. I asked a local tracking judge if she would lay a track and evaluate us on it. We didn't do it completely right...Jamie found a dead rabbit about 15 yards from the final turn and didn't get back to the track...but the judge said Jamie was really very close and that I needed to learn to read my dog better. She referred me to Patrice Leipham who agreed to give us lessons. With Patrice's help I did learn to read him, and I learned to trust him and follow him.

In November, a tracking judge happened to be at the Bearded Collie club's agility trials and she said she would be happy to lay a certification track for Jamie and me. Fortunately, I was busy competing and working at the trial and did not have a lot of time to stress. After my last run, I headed over to meet the judge at the start of the track. We approached the start flag; Jamie sniffed a few times, and took off down the track. He did beautiful turns and stuck right to the track. When he indicated the glove at the end, it meant we were now certified to enter a tracking test.

There was a test coming up just a few miles from here but I heard there would probably be 4 or 5 people vying for each of the slots. I am one of those people who couldn't win fifty cents if I paid a dollar for the raffle ticket, so I had doubts about making the draw. (Tracking tests usually have more entries than they have available slots, so there is a draw to get in.) Then Terry told me that her friend in Tennessee belonged to a club that was having its first tracking test and so far there was only one entry. It was 500 miles away but the odds of getting in looked better. By the time the draw was held in Tennessee, there were 10 entries, but I was drawn 5th and there were 5 tracks available. This had to be fate.

I drove to Tennessee on the Friday before the test, planning to spend Saturday resting and taking Jamie to some fields or parks to get the smell of the area. Saturday night I spent a lot of time telling Jamie that he was a really good tracking dog and that I was just going to follow him. I'm sure he felt that would be the best plan. Sunday morning I was more nervous than I had ever been about anything in my entire life. We drove out to the test site to draw for the tracks. I was really hoping I would draw the 2nd or 3rd track. I didn't want to be first, but I also didn't want to be last. I drew the second track. I was really feeling like we were meant to be here.

The first dog passed and it was time for us to head down to our track. Jamie was so eager to track that he actually walked by the 15 or so people in the gallery without stopping to meet and greet, and

meeting and greeting is his mission in life. It was very cold and I was shaking both from the cold and from my nerves. However, when I snapped the line to his harness it all went away.

Jamie started beautifully and made a perfect first turn. The second leg took us across a hillside and he was really pulling in the harness. The second turn took us up a hill and he pulled so hard when he committed to the turn that I almost lost my balance. He started up the hill and then suddenly stopped and struck an absolutely gorgeous pose. Although he only hesitated for a few seconds, it seemed to be hours. He started forward again and, as I came up the hill a little more, I could see what had caused the interruption. There was a herd of cows on the other side of the fence watching us run the track. At the top of the hill Jamie made his third turn, across the hill again and then another turn to take us back down. When he picked up the scent of the article he pulled even harder. Suddenly he pounced on the glove and pawed at it. I ran up the line and waved it to the judges, then fell on the frozen ground, hugging and kissing my dog. It was one of the most thrilling moments of my life with dogs. Jamie had run the 460 yards in about 6 minutes and was now a Tracking Dog, my first TD.

We are now working toward a Tracking Dog Excellent title and, when spring comes and the snakes reappear, we will work on Variable Surface Tracking. I am also getting Jamie's daughter, Romy, ready for certification and hope to have her in a test along with her Beardie friends this fall.



Finding the glove always involves a big celebration.

I will warn you that tracking becomes addictive. There is absolutely nothing like watching a dog do what only he can do. We can teach a dog to do obedience or agility but it still amazes me that a dog will choose to track because, ultimately, he is the one who decides to do so. We are only along for one very, very glorious ride. Thank you, Jamie, for taking me on that ride.