

# Puppy Tracking, or What To Do Until Your Puppy Grows Up

By Sara Pruyne

We studied the pedigrees, researched the parents and decided that the breeding should produce a puppy capable of doing it all. Next came choosing the perfect new dog name, but my husband came across Carina Nebula, a major constellation in the southern hemisphere so our girl became Carina. And with her beauty, drive and brains, she was definitely what we had hoped for.

So what to do to occupy an active puppy while waiting for her to grow up? With 15 acres right out the back door, why not try tracking? For us, the “find-grandma’s-glove-game” took on a life all its own.

Linda McSherry and I studied the books and started with very small puppy tracks. We modified one of my old harnesses and used a regular 8-foot leash to start. Linda used lots of treats and enticed Carina to want to get the glove. With the track only 10 to 15 feet long we wondered if she was even tracking or just diving for the food. Then in a very short time Carina was starting to use her nose and Linda was using less food.



*Carina on the track.*

If she became lost and just seemed to want to play too much, I just picked her up and we ended the tracking session. We wanted tracking to be very positive and fun, but still something she should concentrate on and not get sidetracked.

After about three months we were tracking three to four times a week, with track lengths up to about 75 yards each. We started to add turns and track aging time had inched up to about 20 minutes. Linda and I noticed that Carina worked better when the track was more challenging. She definitely was learning what the purpose was.

The first weeks we did two to three short tracks, and played tug of war with the glove at the end of each. I picked Carina up and carried her to the next start flag so she wouldn't track between flags.



*Sara puts the tracking harness on Carina. Photos courtesy Sara Pruyne.*

One big “light bulb” moment was when the track went through the horse pasture. As we were running the track, the nosy mares had to check things out. Carina pushed her way between them as if to say, “Get out of my way, I’ve got a job to do! Grandma seems to have lost her glove again!”

Another great moment came when Linda had to run ahead and chase the deer off of the glove. They looked at her and slowly wandered away. Carina picked her head up, watched for a second or two, and then went down the track to the glove. That’s when I thought we were ready for our certification.

For the uninitiated, before you can actually enter a tracking test, you have to pass a pre-test, or a “certification”. Talk about nerve wracking! The AKC judge in our area is a two-hour drive away. After watching my other Dals’ feeble attempts, the judge was hesitant when I emailed about trying the pup. Because I had wanted her to certify us, we had deliberately avoided training with her. This meant we really did this on our own.

I took a “personal” day from work and so many thoughts flooded my mind as I drove there. I wondered how dependable a seven-month-old puppy could be? Would she try or just bound merrily through the fields? Would I read her right or would I stand there like a bump on a log and stop her progress?

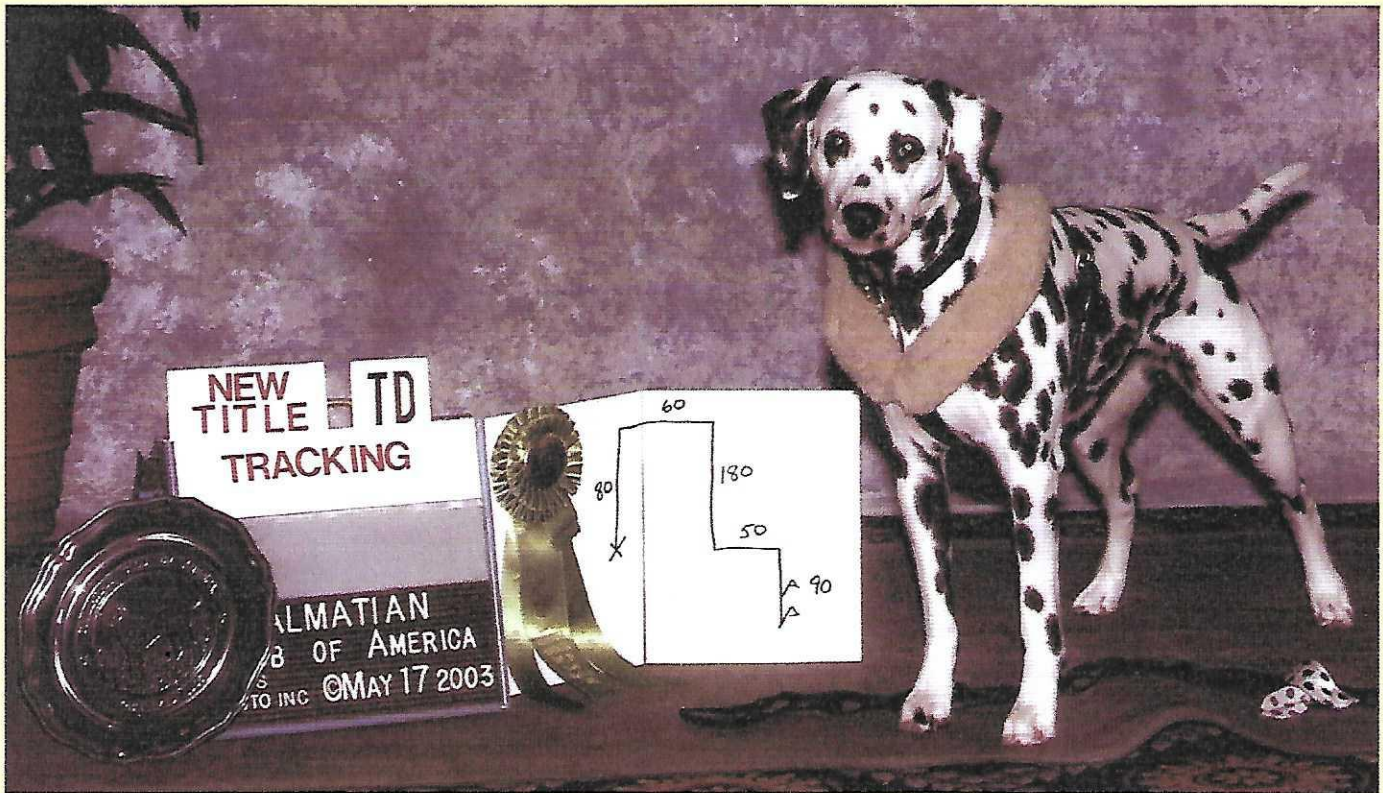
Then the time came. Carina actually stood while I put the harness on her, then she took off down the track while bumbling me was still fumbling with the tracking line. She pulled, I followed, and away we went. I didn’t even see the second flag until we were passing it. Twice I got tangled in the line, but she just kept on going. Carina acted like she was on a mission and I was there as her “rudder”, to keep her at a steady pace and concentrating. Finally, after what seemed like a small eternity, Carina indicated the glove by going into a puppy down and nosing it, ever hopeful for treats.

The judge, Ms Suzanne White, said the puppy was a natural and a star, but the owner needs work. So what else is new? We will practice until Spring and attempt our tracking title possibly at the National. Hopefully our bright constellation-girl will shine there too!

Carina is Patchmnt C Pepper N Paisley by (Ch Paisley Pragmatic x Ch Paisley Patchmnt Amazing Grace CD NA Can CD) Bred by Linda McSherry and owned by Sara Pruyne.



# What to do while growing up? Learn tracking!!



Carina had a wonderful time at the National. She went to new fields and got to play her favorite "Find The Glove" game. At 13 months, this little hot pepper is now:

## Patch Mtn C Pepper N Paisley Tracking Dog (Ch Paisley Pragmatic x Ch Paisley Patch Mt Amazing Grace CD NA RD)

A big thank you to the Western Reserve Dalmatian Club for hosting the tracking test.

With all the wonderful compliments we received, Carina and I are now out there working on her TDX skills. Carina is also pointed from the puppy class.

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