

"Re-Spotted"

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The First DCA Tracking Test

By Michael P. Pumilia, Tracking Judge

On Friday, August 14, 1987, the DCA held its first ever Tracking test in conjunction with the Colorado Dalmatian Group. I had the rare opportunity to observe the event from inside, both as a member of the DCA and also one of the judges officiating the test. From both viewpoints and from the response of the exhibitors and spectators, the day was a resounding success.

The whole idea to hold a tracking test started with a single postal card sent by Pat Sayles. The Colorado group got behind the idea and soon the DCA Board not only expressed interest, but gave it a full and enthusiastic green light. Pat took on the task of organizing the test as chairman and had many helpers. Because any AKC track can consume some 20 acres of ground, a large area was needed to lay out the 8 tracks needed for the test limit of 8 entries, plus one alternate track. Jack and Beth White, DCA members, lent their Rim Rock Ranch of more than 1,000 acres and it proved to be just right for the day, close to the show/trial site and successful for the exhibitors.

On Thursday, fellow judge Craig Green and I plotted out the nine tracks and were aided by two sisters of the Sister of Mercy order from Denver. As I was told, the Sisters had become very active in all aspects of obedience and the dog fancy. To try to describe the ranch for those who were not there is hard. The valley where the test was held stretched miles to the south of the main house, bordered on both sides by high mountain rims, a natural bowl for the event. The vistas were breathtaking; the ground both hard red clay-type and in most places very dry. The terrain was rolling mounds with lower areas in lush grass, and crests in sparse dry scrub grass. Thursday also told me a lesson; at high altitudes, the sun burns the skin much quicker, and has less oxygen than I was used to in Georgia. As in any tracking test, there is always the possibility that no dogs will pass. The altitude of the ranch at 6,000 feet and the dry ground cover added to the concern. As it turned out, they were a factor but not as drastic as I feared.

Of the eight entries sent in, six teams were able to travel to the Fort Collins area and compete, representing the East, Southeast, and the Mid West. Phil Gallagher and his bitch Disney's Conscience Guides, CDX selected the Colorado/DCA coffee mug that had the number 1 on the bottom and just a few minutes after 7 AM started out to the first flag. The altitude and cover proved no problem. It took just a few minutes for the Dal to scoop up the glove. You should have seen the size of the smile on Phil's face! The trip from Pittsburgh, PA was quite memorable, to be the first Dal to show at a DCA tracking test and to earn the first ever TD title awarded from such an event. Just like that! In a dozen or so minutes!

The terrain proved too difficult for the next two non-TD Dals. Both Janey Baughn of Florida and her CH. Bottoms Up Apricot Sour, CD and Darlene Chirolas of Illinois and her Honeylane's Lava Spatter, CDX could not tame the plotted tracks. Considering that Colorado is quite a ways from their home turf, they gave it a good try.

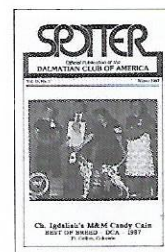
The oldest Dal in the test was CH. Dominique's Chablis, CDX, TD. Although Carol Simmons of Georgia and Chablis made a valiant effort, the 6,000 foot altitude proved more than the 12 year old bitch could cope with.

Next up was Ann Thornhill of Vermont and her bitch Erin's Nutmeg Candy, CD, TD. By this time, the morning had worn on and both the temperature and the wind were rapidly rising. What was comfortable earlier was becoming oppressive, the temperature sweltering and the wind gusting from zero to 20 mph and back to zero. They started the first leg well. making the first turn and then turning towards a crest. This rise was very exposed and as the grass thinned out, the wind also whipped up, swirling all about. For several minutes the Dal worked on the track, back tracking and advancing, trying to make some sense of the scents being blown about. In a brief respite, the wind dropped to zero and the dog not only found the right scent path, but pulled into the harness, dragging Ann along. After being still for some 10 minutes, the team rapidly covered the remaining 300 yards, through a few turns. The final assault on the glove took just a few seconds. Though a hard test, there was Success! The second Dalmatian to pass a DCA sponsored tracking test.

The final entrant of the day got the brunt of the wind and the height of the day's temperature. And it was the wind that caused several tracking stakes to blow over on the next track, such that the tracklayer could not successfully lay it. Thus another track had to be used, a more difficult one. Tom Hacholski of Texas and Tilbury's Special Delivery, TD drew the last track. Off to a good start, both Craig and I commented to each other how good this team was working. But as they got up into the exposed portion of the hills, the swirling wind really took hold. Valiantly for more than a half hour, the bitch tried to work out the two legs and the corners. Again and again, she back tracked, found the track and tried to push forward, only to have the wind roll in over the several rills, moving the scent around. It was the most difficult conditions I have seen in a number of tests. At a distance, we talked to Tom and it was mutually decided to end the track. The Dal had really worked her heart out. Mother Nature just was not kind in that half hour.

Afterwards, we all sat around in the garage near the main house, making huge sandwiches and just simply having fun. Two Dals passing out of six entered is a good number for a tracking test. Yes, we all wish it could have been six of six. But the DCA recorded its first two Passes at its own event, and we all made a brand new TD title for a Dalmatian.

As a tracking judge, I can assess the event as being well organized, smoothly run, and very hospitable to the judges. Craig personally told me it was a lot of fun and he definitely would like to do it again. As a long time DCA member, and with a personal interest, I would say - let's do it again! My personal thanks to all those individuals that made this test as good as it was: Pat, Cathy and Raymond, Jack and Beth, Ginger, Denise, and the DCA membership.



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