

The TRACKING Report

by Gayle J. Geiger

unraveling the mystery

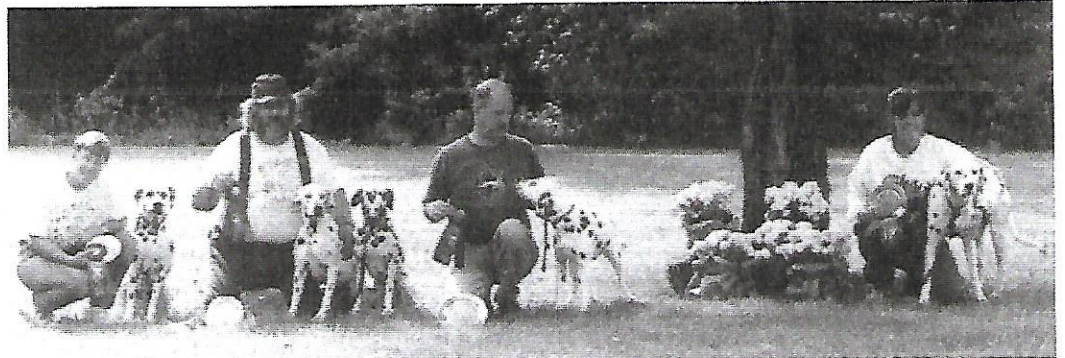
It is a known fact that all dogs have the ability to follow a trail. Just exactly how the dog is able to follow a track is not completely understood. Does the dog follow a ground scent made by crushed vegetation, disturbed earth, the scent of the shoes of the track-layer or the airborne trail that drifts and settles in the terrain? Or is it the specific chemical anatomy of an individual that the dog recognizes? We can theorize indefinitely without increasing our understanding of how the dog tracks. What is known is that the dog is unique in its capability to recognize and follow scent. We don't teach the dog to track, a dog knows infinitely more about tracking than we do. We teach the dog to follow a specific track regardless of the difficulty of the track due to more interesting scents or obstacles along the way.

There are varieties of reasons for participating in the sport of Tracking. The AKC offers the following definition: "Tracking, by its nature is a vigorous noncompetitive outdoor sport. Tracking Tests demonstrate the willingness and enjoyment of the dog in its work, and should always represent the best in sportsmanship and camaraderie by the people involved." Many people enjoy spending time outdoors with their dogs. Both the dogs and handlers gain the extra benefits of exercise and relaxation while enjoying nature. Others are fascinated by the ability of the dog to use his sense of smell to follow a path and find articles along the way. Some feel tracking can help build confidence in the shy, uncertain dog. There is very little pressure for the dog to perform and tracking itself is taught in a totally positive manner. This helps promote trust and bonding with the owner/handler of the dog. Tracking is a wonderful activity for the older, retired dog. There is little stress on the dog and activity maintains the dog's mind and body.

There are various methods used to teach tracking; generally all utilize positive methods with little correction. Motivation is the key to success in tracking. It is up to the handler to discover what will best motivate the dog. Food motivation is often used to train tracking dogs and Dalmatians seem to embrace this method of training! All tracking sessions should be enthusiastic and fun. Sincere praise and play time right after the track serves to let the dog know you are happy with his performance. By slowly increasing the challenges of a track, the length, the age of the track or the terrain, you are increasing the dog's level of skill and confidence. Every training session should be positive and the dog should be

made to feel successful.

Thinking about training your Dalmatian to track? Wonderful! Our Dals make fantastic tracking dogs and are certainly beautiful to watch in the field. There are tracking groups and instructors around the country that will help you get started. There are a number of good books (listed below) that can guide you through the process. It isn't necessary to work with another person, but having someone share your interest is beneficial. All you need to get started is a healthy dog, a tracking harness and tracking line,



The 1997 DCA National Tracking Test qualifiers from left to right: Libby Simendinger and Roundhill Charlie's Heart CDX TD; Phil Gallagher and Duquesne's Suite Judy Blue Eyes TDX RDX and Duquesne's Gros Venture TDX RDX; Tom Hacholski and Tilbury's Circus Cornucopia TDX; Kate Derrick-Hardman and Celt TD

flags to mark the track, (we use surveyors flags,) small pieces of food such as dime size pieces of hot dog, and a glove for the end of the track. In the beginning stages, you won't need large areas of land. Depending on what part of the country you are in, you can generally start tracking any time of the year. Dalmatians generally progress quickly, but rushing a dog through training can develop problems that can be difficult to overcome. Take your time and enjoy the experience!

A short list of tracking reference and training books follows. If you are interested in a more complete list, please contact me - Gayle Geiger, 1191 E. Hookstown Grade Rd., Clinton, PA 15026 Phone: 724-375-7181 or by email: gjgspots@usaor.net. I would also be interested in any tracking stories or training tips and questions for future articles. If anyone interested in tracking will be in Perry, GA for the 1998 DCA Nationals, please consider attending the tracking test. It is a great way to learn about tracking and the exhibitors welcome your support.

Tracking books: [Tracking From the Ground Up](#)
by Sandy Ganz and Susan Boyd
[The Puppy Tracking Primer](#)
by Carolyn Krause
[Practical Tracking for Practically Everyone](#)
by Julie Hogan and Donna Thompson