

BEFORE THE DAY OF THE TRACKING TEST

1. Phone the secretary, or a tracker that is familiar with the test area, and ask about site conditions. If pastureland is to be used for the test, find out if it has been used recently for grazing and, if it has, accustom your dog to cow, horse, or sheep droppings. Goose droppings seem to be a dog's favorite!
2. Find out if the tracking fields involve high or low cover. If you are traveling to a more arid region than what you normally track in, find dry creek beds to work into and out of. City parks make excellent tracking sites for work on mowed grass. Dillon passed his TD on an airplane field (one inch tall grass)!
3. Have your dog prepared for a 35 to 45 minute old track when preparing for a test, even if he has been doing 5 hour old tracks at home in practice. Bring him back to fresh tracks before the test.
4. Don't practice 800 yard straight tracks without a turn. It would be better to practice a 100 yard maximum leg and lots of 65 to 75 yard legs since that is what you'll probably get.
5. Don't practice 10 turns on your tracks.... do 4 or 5 instead.
6. Ask about the terrain at the test grounds, so you can practice either flat fields or rolling hills.
7. Drive to the test site from your motel the night before the test so you know how to get there, and how long it will take you to arrive there in the morning. Be prepared to arrive at least 30 minutes before the draw for tracks. This will give you time to potty your dog and check in with the test secretary to let him or her know that you are there.

ON THE DAY OF THE TEST

Be aware of these pre-track considerations:

1. Does your dog track better on an empty stomach? Or a full one?
2. Is your dog disturbed by new sights and sounds, needing exposure prior to the running of the track?
3. Does your dog need a lot of time to completely relieve himself?
4. Will he need to be offered water? How much?
5. What does it take to motivate and/or cue your dog?
 - A. A small treat?
 - B. Playing with a glove or toy before hand?
 - C. Using a specific phrase such as "Do you want to go tracking?"
6. Does your dog need to be crated and kept calm until the last minute? If you are a nervous wreck, leave the dog alone. Keep him crated in the car.
7. Is your dog so hyperactive that he needs to be extensively exercised to wear him down before he tracks, and to calm him down?
8. Does your dog benefit from a "starter" track? While this is not permitted at the test site, you could do a simple one turn, short track at the motel before driving to the test site.
9. Is it beneficial to keep your dog away from other people and other dogs?
10. Do you and your dog need a quiet minute together before you work?
11. Check the distance to your track. You may have to drive (or carry a small dog) so that your dog does not have to walk an excessive, tiring distance before you arrive at the start of the track (especially on a hot day).
12. Completely unravel your tracking lead at the car. Attach it to the dog's collar and let it drag behind you as you walk to the starting flag. Never hurry to the start flag. It will only make both you and your dog nervous.

DURING THE ACTUAL TRACKING TEST

1. Do what you do when practicing. If you generally remain quiet, don't pick now to start chattering away at your dog.
2. Concentrate. Keep your wits about you! Line up the first two starting stakes as you approach them and pick out a distance marker that the judges may have used for the first leg. If your dog varies from that line, make sure he is still tracking.
3. Be aware of your surroundings such as a particular tree, a group of unusual weeds, a rock, a fallen log, etc. as the dog works the track. If your dog indicates loss of track at one of these items, it may have been the judge's marker for the turn. Let your dog search and as he commits to the new leg, raise your eyes up above his head and look for a new distance marker that your tracklayer might have been heading for.
4. However....don't second guess the judges. Let your dog tell you where the track goes. He is the one with the nose....remember?
5. Always know the last position where you were sure your dog was tracking. Use that as a point of reference if the dog looks confused or lost. Gradually gather up the lead as the dog allows, and back up to that point of reference where you know the dog was tracking. Let the dog pick up the track from there. Remember, however, that at a test you may not point to the ground to physically restart your dog, nor may you guide the dog in any way. You are simply backing up to a new location and letting the dog do the work of finding the track. Be a team player...helping him out if you can.
6. If your dog becomes tangled in the lead, either call him to you to untangle him, or if he is wrapped around a bush or tree (ask a judge first!) go to him. Be sure to return to your original position. I once left my hat on the ground in the woods on a TDX track because I was not sure I could remember exactly where I had been when my dog became tangled.
7. Take your time. Don't rush yourself or your dog. There is no time limit on a tracking test. I failed my very first TDX test because I hurried my dog to make a decision on a turn where he was confused. He made the wrong choice in direction, but it was my fault not his! I rushed him into deciding.

8. Keep track of how many turns you have made. After the third turn, look sharp for any article indication. After the fourth turn, really look sharp and after the fifth turn (the maximum number of turns allowed on a TD track) the glove must be somewhere directly ahead of you, so keep your eyes peeled! I will sometimes slow my pace when I am expecting the glove soon.

9. If the unthinkable happens, and you hear the judges blow the whistle, go ahead and finish the track as a training exercise for you and your dog. Remember that the dog has no idea he just failed a test. Finish the track and praise the dog for finding the glove.

DON'T:

- A. Throw in the towel and leave the field in a huff.
- B. Lose control of your emotions and take it out on your dog.
- C. Berate the club, judges, tracklayers, or field conditions for your failure.

DO:

- A. Take a deep breath and get control of yourself.
- B. Try to realistically evaluate your dog's performance up to the point of failure.
- C. If the dog was not really tracking (perhaps he was not feeling well that day), throw out an article for the dog to retrieve and call it a day.
- D. If the dog was tracking and just made an honest mistake, have the tracklayer guide you back to the track and restart your dog. Try to complete the track from that point without any additional help.

WHY COMPLETE THE REST OF THE TRACK AFTER FAILING?

- A. Completing the rest of the track reminds the dog why he is out there. How often in training do you have the opportunity to run a full length track that was plotted by an AKC judge with all the necessary elements?
- B. If you traveled to a test in an area with different tracking conditions than you usually have, why not take advantage of those conditions to practice?
- C. Remember that two judges and a tracklayer put a considerable amount of time and effort into plotting and laying your track, so you're trying to finish at least a part of the track shows some consideration for their efforts.
- D. Even if you do not complete the track with your dog, consider handing your dog to someone else for a few minutes so that you can walk with the tracklayer as he/she goes out to pick up the glove. Seeing the rest of the track can be a learning opportunity for you for the next time. Be sure to take advantage of it!