



Tracking Etiquette

By Rosemary Janoch

Every sport has rules. Some of those rules are written. Some are not. In the sport of tracking, there are some commonly followed behaviors that will make you a very welcome member of the tracking community. I would like to share some of those behaviors with you here.

Let's start at the beginning with training sessions with your dog. Be sure to lay tracks for other trackers as often as they lay tracks for you. If someone follows along behind you as you are running your track to pick up all of your flags, clothespins, articles and markers, do the same for them when they run their dog. Be flexible with training days and times so that others can train with you and reap the benefit of your knowledge.

Don't always run your dog first. Don't always use the "good" field. Take into consideration which team is the closest to being ready to enter a test and let that person choose their field first. Don't criticize an individual for how a track was laid for your dog, or you may soon find that no one will lay a track for you at all.

Be considerate about how many dogs you bring to a training session. If any of you train your dogs in field work, you probably know what I am talking about. You arrive at the field to train your one dog, and someone else pulls up a truck with eight or nine dogs on it. You set up a nice set of marks, and they throw for your one dog. You then spend

the next couple of hours throwing for their entire truck of dogs. I have done this on many occasions and it does eventually get a bit old, so don't bring every dog you own to a training session. Bring just the one or two dogs that need the most work, or that you need some advice on. Train your other dogs at home on your own time. Get the approval of the group if you need to bring any additional dogs to a training session. Remember that even a tracking test has to limit the number of dogs that can attend due to the land requirements needed for each track.

Do know where you laid a track for someone else so that your fellow tracker never has to hear you say "I *think* the track is..." Be on time when meeting other trackers for a training session. Have everyone's cell phone number so that if you are going to be late, you can call folks so they aren't standing around waiting for you. At the end of a tracking session, be sure that all dogs, harnesses, and people are accounted for before leaving the area. Be sure that everyone is safely in their cars, and all cars are started, before pulling away.

When you have trained your dog to the best of your ability, it is time to get your dog certified. This is a courtesy that a judge extends to you. They are under no obligation to make time in their busy schedules to do this, so be sure to make it as convenient as possible for the judge. Drive to the judge's home fields. Although some judges will make long drives to certify a dog, do not expect a judge to drive to your location or even to meet you half way. On certification day, bring your dog's AKC information with you so that the judge does not have to mail the certifications to you at a later date when you supply the judge with the proper information.

Ask if the judge charges a fee for certification. If there is no charge, it is common practice in most parts of the country to bring a small gift as a token of appreciation. Ask the judge when a convenient time would be for them to certify your dog. Do not frantically call the judge on Sunday night to certify you by Tuesday afternoon because entries for the National Specialty close on Wednesday and you plan to send your entry by overnight mail. A lack of planning on your part does not give you the right to disrupt everyone else's life. Learn to plan ahead.

Sometimes it is possible to get a dog certified at the conclusion of a tracking test. If you wish to try this, be sure to check with the two judges *before* the test day to see if this is feasible. Flight times may make this impossible for one judge, but the other one may be able to do it for you. If you have no local judges in your area, this may be the easiest way to get your dog certified. Keep in mind, however, that the judges have put in a full weekend of hard work and will likely be very tired by the end of the test and would simply like to go home. Resort to this method of certification only if other methods are not readily available to you.

If two or three of you are ready to certify your dogs at the same time, find a judge that might certify all of you on the same day. This prevents the judge from having to reserve two or three mornings to work with each of you individually. This is possible, of course, only if the judge has a local field large enough for all of the required tracks.

When sending in your entry for a test, print clearly and only write AKC titles on the entry. Have pity on the poor secretary who is trying to read your chicken scratch!

Now let's talk about things to do and not do at an actual tracking test. Please be on time for the draw. Don't fly in at the last minute with tires squealing. Inquire where the

potty area is for your dog *before* your dog steps one foot out of the car. Cleaning up after your dog, of course, is a given.

If you are in the gallery watching a team in the field, do not criticize the handler's efforts. Making a comment like "Didn't he see that turn indication?" is inappropriate. You are not the one standing in the field, and you do not know what the typical turn indication of that dog is. The handler is out there making the best decisions he can make under the given circumstances. Do not try to second guess him, and in return he should not criticize your handling when it is your turn. Any comments you do make in the gallery should be softly spoken so that neither the dog nor the handler are distracted. This is not the time to tell that great joke you heard last week and have the entire gallery erupt in laughter. How would that make you feel if you were the one standing in the field?

When it is finally your turn and your dog does a spectacular job, great! It is easy to be a good sport if things are going well. Here are some things to consider, however, if things aren't going so well.

Know when to blow the whistle on yourself. One of the greatest examples of good sportsmanship I ever saw was at a TDX test where the handler's dog was fooling around at the start flag and refusing to commit to any direction. Since there is no time limit on a tracking test, the judges were perfectly willing to give the dog as much time as needed to start. The handler, however, knew her dog very well and knew he had no intention of starting. Rather than keep the gallery and judges there for an hour watching nothing, she turned to the judges, thanked them for the opportunity, and requested that they move on to the next track rather than letting the next track age needlessly. She then finished the track with the help of the track layer. I am not suggesting that you give up on your dog in five minutes. I am suggesting, however, that since you know your dog better than anyone else, you would know best when to blow the whistle on your own dog.

If you fail a track and you decide to finish it with your dog, remember that this is a courtesy extended to you by the club. Treat the track layer with respect. This is not the time to take out your frustration on the dog, the track layer, the judges, or the club hosting the test. It is not the time to complain about the draw, the crummy field you got, the lousy track that was plotted by the judges, and the weather that was too hot (or too cold, or too wet, or too...well, you get the idea).

If you successfully pass your track, don't take this opportunity to tell everyone how young your dog is, or how many titles your dog now has. Bragging should be reserved for sharing with your best friend, especially if not everyone at the test passed. How many times do you think a losing team wants to hear how fast your dog completed his track and what a spectacular job he did?

After passing a tracking test, it is common for a handler to pull his dog from any remaining tests that he has entered. This helps an alternate team get into a test. I know it would be nice to show your dog in one or two tests after he has earned his title just for the fun of it since all of the pressure would be off, but think how you would feel if you and your dog were alternate 1 for a test next week and someone who earned his title this weekend was running his dog in the test. Would you be thrilled with this person?

If you are in the dog game long enough, you know there will be times you get ripped off and times you get "gifts." Take each of them in stride. It generally all works out in the long run. So whether you pass your test or not, offer sincere congratulations to those teams that did pass. Thank the club, the judges, and the many hard working club

members that put on the test to give you and your dog an opportunity to earn a tracking title.

After you have earned a tracking title on your dog, don't be surprised if fellow trackers now expect a payback. It is commonly known that in a sport with a small core group of workers, *everyone* needs to pitch in. Offer to lay tracks at the next test, or do the food, or pick the judges up from the airport. There are so many things that need to be done at a tracking test, and so few people to do them, that almost anything you offer to do will be greatly appreciated and will make you a very welcome member of the local tracking community.