

Track and Search Excellent

A number of differences are introduced in the Track and Search Excellent Tracks. **Margaret Keast** explains what they are and how you can incorporate them into your training.

Unlike the Tracking Tests that lead to a Tracking Championship, Track and Search Tests do not require you and your dog to find the articles. This is because others may have removed the articles before you and your dog work the track. While this is more likely in the TSDX Tests 5 and 6, which are urban tracks, there have been instances where articles have been removed by wild or domestic animals.

Finding articles assures the handler that the dog is on the right track, but you need to cope without them in TSD. If the article has been removed recently, it may have left a scent pool that is strong enough for the dog to indicate the article. If your dog does indicate by either a drop, sit or stand, use your normal behaviour when the dog indicates articles. Move up the lead, praise the dog and briefly check for the article (including under the dog's feet or belly), and then ask the dog to continue. Don't conduct an extensive search for articles in TSD tracking, they may not be there anymore.

There are no formal decoys or cross tracks on the TSD Tests 4, 5 and 6, because the tracking area has been contaminated by at least two cross tracks. In the case of urban tracking, there will be many more than two cross tracks as cars will have crossed roads or parked on them. Bikes, pedestrians and animals will most likely have crossed or moved along the track too.

Practising tracking in a local park, including the roads around it, could be a good way to simulate this type of contamination. As your dog moves up in the TSDX tests, use the local roads more than the park itself.

Cats, birds, food scraps, stray dogs and telephone poles with scent markings will all distract your dog. Gain the dog's attention and calmly remind it of what it should be doing, then continue tracking.

If your tracking area contains dogs off lead or off property, work with a friend who can act as your safety steward.

Urban tracking

A scent on the street can blow a long way. Even if there is no prevailing wind, passing traffic adds odours and spreads scent. You will find



that your dog sometimes tracks on the other side of the road from the track, or crosses the road a number of times. Scent may also blow up against a solid fence. Your dog could overshoot the mark by a considerable distance, before backtracking to the correct track.

When tracking in fields and paddocks, many handlers allow the end of the lead to trail when shortening it. This can become a death trap for you and your dog if a passing car hits the trailing lead. Collect your lead in hand if you need to shorten it, like when tracking across a road.

Get your dog used to stopping tracking on command; sometimes cars reverse from driveways just as you are about to cross. Like any change, introduce tracking at night gradually. Both you and your dog need to wear

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reflective clothing. Your dog could have a light or reflective strips sewn onto its harness. You need to wear a safety vest and a headlamp.

To get used to these changes, first add them to walks, then to small and easy daytime tracks.

To introduce night tracking, start tracking later in the day, towards dusk. Again, make the first dusk tracks easy for your dog and vary as few things at a time as possible. As the dog becomes more comfortable, move the tracks towards full darkness and make them more challenging. And remember, be sure to take a friend as a safety steward. 🐾

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