

Corners, Articles, Time – and the Tracking Dog Title

There are three tracks to pass to gain your Tracking Dog Title – this gives you a TD to put after your dog's name, as in Junction Magic TD.

Test 1

This test involves your dog following the scent of a person known to the dog over a track of 400 metres with 2 turns – there's more on turns a little later in the article. There is an article at the start of the track to give your dog the scent – this occurs in all tracks up to track 7. Now is where dirty socks come in, as they are the most used article. There is another article on the track, but for the Track 1 it does not have to be indicated by the dog. We'll talk more on article indication in a minute. The track will be aged between 20 and 40 minutes before you are set out on it. At some trials you will have the choice of leaving a tracklayer at the end of the track or an article – often the club makes this choice based on the terrain and the ease of getting a tracklayer out without fouling the track, or on the need to use tracklayers again in other capacities. Note that all the articles on the track must smell of the tracklayer – so you can't hand your dirty socks over!

Test 2

This test involves your dog following the scent of a person known to the dog over a track of 800 metres with 2 turns. There is an article at the start of the track to give your dog the scent and two more articles on the track, one of which has to be indicated by the dog to obtain a Pass. The track will be aged between 30 and 60 minutes before you are set out on it. Again you will have the choice of leaving a tracklayer at the end of the track or an article – and again the club may make this choice for you.

Test 3

This test is almost the same as the Test 2 – except that the tracklayer is unknown to the dog. This means that the dog can't have tracked this person at a trial in the past 6 months.

Dogs are graded on their performance on these tracks – Fail is obvious – but then the judge has the choice of Pass, Good, Very Good or Excellent.

After your dog has gained a pass in Tests 1, 2 and 3 you can apply to Dogs NSW for your Tracking Dog title.

Articles

Apart from Track 1, all other tracks require that a dog indicate the articles it finds. This means that you want your dog to come to a halt at the article, and make a positive indication of finding it by either sitting, standing or dropping at the article – and not moving off until you've told it to.

Start training this now. Firstly – what position would you like your dog to assume when it finds an article? Sits and downs are the most stable positions, while a stand can allow a dog to wander onwards. Practice calling out the command sit – down – stand (as appropriate) while walking with your dog,

getting the desired response, and praising and rewarding the dog before allowing it to move on. When your dog can do this, we'll move it to tracking.

When you're laying a track, drop a second dirty sock on your tracks at least 10 metres from your start. If your dog works for food, put a small piece of that food on the article, or a small toy if your dog works for toys. Make sure that you know exactly where you have dropped the sock – perhaps 5 steps after a particular bush, or level with a telegraph pole. When your dog pauses to eat the food / play with the toy, call out your command and move briskly up the tracking lead towards the dog, holding the lead to prevent it moving on. Praise the dog, collect the article (and toy if used), and ask your dog to track again.

Corners

You will have noticed above that all the tracks have corners. You must know where you are on the track before you can teach corners. You will now need 2 sightlines and a marker (bush, fence post, gate at least 10m off the track) to lay your track. Head out towards your first sightline, going for at least 50 metres to let the dog settle on the track. At your marker make a small change of direction of no more than 15 degrees, now heading towards your new sightline. Go another 30m or so and place your end marker and food/toy, then another 10 metres before heading back to your dog, making sure to be well clear of your track on the way back.

Start your dog tracking, and watch very carefully when he gets to your corner. Some dogs will continue tracking on the new line without noticing your change of direction. If your dog continues on a straight line he will lose the track, which he may indicate by raising his head or searching more vigorously. Don't allow him to continue forward, rather encourage him to search for the track at the corner. When he finds it and continues on, praise him verbally.

When he is taking these turns confidently, you can increase the angle by 15 degrees, ensuring that he can still handle this. Move gradually to 90% - but don't change your angle until the dog has successfully turned at least 5 times.

Time

Adding waiting time to the track can be done gradually, 5 minutes at a time. Don't age your tracks more than required for the Test 2 until you have your TD title.

Multiple variables

You've now been given 3 variables – articles, corners and time. Vary one at a time so that you can pinpoint any problems. Like training everything, if you strike problems, back up and make it easier for the dog to build those skills.

Next article – decoys and the Tracking Dog Excellent title.