

Working towards your Tracking Dog Excellent

When your dog has gained passes in Tracks 1, 2 and 3 under at least two different judges, you can apply for the title of Tracking Dog. This title becomes part of your dog's name and is added to the end. Thus a Main or Limited Register dog named Junction Magic would now become Junction Magic TD, while a dog without a kennel prefix in its name would change from being registered as Sophie, to being Sophie TD.

Now you are eligible for Tracks 4, 5 and 6, which you must pass to gain your TDX title.

TDX Tracks are aged longer before you are sent out on the track so you need to build up the time in training. Each track has a specified time span indicating the minimum time you will be sent on the track after the tracklayer has departed, and the maximum. This time span has been set because circumstances can change in tracking trials, and the Chief Steward may be forced to delay the start of your track for a variety of reasons. Such reasons can include accidents, lost dogs, injuries to dogs or people, other competitors failing their tracks at the start thus making more time available, dogs that track slowly or fail at the end of a track thus making less time available, bogged or broken cars, the late arrival of competitors, helpers or judges, locked gates and an almost infinite variety of other circumstances that can conspire to delay a track. Judges too have set times that they like to leave certain tracks. However, the Chief Steward's job is to ensure that you will be sent out within that nominated time span after the tracklayer has set out – so don't panic.

Remember that on all these tracks your dog must indicate the article by either sitting, standing or dropping – so keep working on your article indications.

Turns on these tracks will vary from open turns with small deviation from the current track line, through turns of approximately 90 degrees to acute turns where the new track line forms an acute angle with the current track line. The rules itemise which turn can be used where, and the terrain often limits the turns that can be used.

Track 4

The Track 4 is laid by a person unknown to your dog. The track is approximately 1,000 metres and has 4 turns which should not be acute. Three articles will be placed on the track, and your dog must find and indicate at least one to be eligible to pass.

You will be sent out anywhere from one hour to two hours after the tracklayer has set out.

Track 5

Track 5 is nearly the same as Track 4 except:

1. The track will be crossed once by a known person that you nominate. The decoy crosses the track thirty minutes after the main tracklayer has passed, and generally the decoy won't be close to a turn. Please don't pick your dog's best friend as your nominated decoy, or your dog might drop everything to follow the decoy track and find their friend!
2. Your dog will need to nominate two of the three articles on the track.

Track 6

This track is much harder, because it gives your dog the TDX title for Tracking Dog Excellent. It's longer, has more turns, more decoys (this time unknown ones), more articles and a longer wait before you go out.

The track is 1,200 metres long.

There are five turns, one of which must be an acute turn.

The track is crossed twice by decoys – these can be one person crossing twice, or two people crossing once. The decoy is meant to be unknown to the dog, and you have no say in or even knowledge of who it is until after the completion of the track. Most Chief Stewards will use one person crossing the track twice as it's easier to manage logistically – however the rules allow for the track to be crossed by two people.

The minimum time wait is one hour, and the maximum three hours before you are set out.

So, get practicing on your article indication and your turns. Add distance. Add turns. Remember to increase the age of your tracks, a few minutes at a time. Vary only one thing at a time so that you can pinpoint the problem.

Build your knowledge by laying tracks for others at training, and by following other dogs on tracks – you can learn a lot about tracking and handling your own dog by just watching.

And remember that this is a sport, designed for you and your dog to enjoy. Always make it fun for your dog.