

## Tracking Champion

Champion – has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

Now let's be a little more elite – Tracking Champion! That sounds better, and the club is even more exclusive! Further, unlike the other Tracking Titles, this one goes before the dog's name – Tracking Champion Dalmeadow Ticket to Ride, for example.

OK, that's the ambition – how do we achieve it?

There are a number of steps to get there – and we have been working on those throughout the last year.

- Your dog now enjoys tracking, can find starts, track in a straight line, take corners up to and including acute corners, indicate articles by sitting, dropping or standing, and can ignore scents that are not the main scent.
- You have learned to harness your dog, read her, work at a lead length appropriate to the terrain by shortening the lead in heavy trees and letting it out in open country, encourage her where appropriate, and work with her as a team to find the end of the track.
- You have worked as a team to attain Tracking Dog and Tracking Dog Excellent titles.

The Tracking Champion track can only be entered by dogs that have already attained their Tracking Dog Excellent title.

In many ways it's an extension of the TDX tracks – quite a lot of it is familiar. It's the same distance as a Track 6 - 1200 metres. It has 6 turns, 2 of which are acute – so that's 1 more turn (and an acute one too) than the Track 6. There are 2 decoys who cross the track at least ½ an hour after the tracklayer, just like the Track 6. The track is aged longer than the Track 6 - anywhere from 90 minutes to 180 minutes before the handler and dog are sent out. Like the Track 6 there are 3 articles on the track and at least 2 articles must be indicated to the satisfaction of the judge to attain a pass.

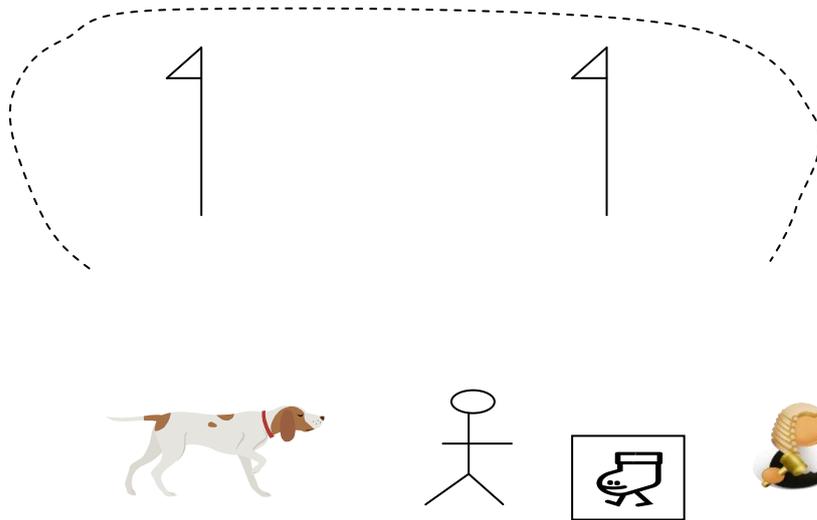
However ... it's a championship track, so there are a few areas that will extend your skills.

The first is the start article – this is placed in a plastic bag by the tracklayer, and given to the judge. When the track is ready to be set up, the judge will give it to you 30m from the start flags, still in its plastic bag (make sure that you remove the bag before scenting the dog).

Yes, flags plural. The start of a Track 7 is marked by 2 flags approximately 20m apart. The track can leave from either flag or an area between the flags in any direction.

This new start thus requires new starting tactics. You don't know which direction the tracklayer has gone (that's usual) – however you also don't know precisely where they started from, unlike a single flag start.

Some tracklayers will leave a larger confused scent pool at the start than others depending upon how they place the flags – so the best way to handle this is to avoid it and get your dog to search a pattern around and in front of the flags.



Here you can see the 2 start flags, the judge, the sock in its plastic bag, you the handler, and your dog. When you are ready and your dog has been harnessed and the tracking lead has been attached, the judge will direct your attention to the start flags, and then hand you the sock in its plastic bag.

After the judge has given you the sock, remove it from the plastic bag and scent your dog. Tuck the sock back in your pocket or bag – you might need it again if your dog becomes confused.

Then, on a shortened lead to control your dog's direction, walk the dog around in a loop from one flag to the other as shown by the dotted line above, moving to the sides and in front of the flags to avoid the possible scent pool between them. Be at least 1 – 2 metres away from the flags.

Hopefully part way through this loop your dog will hit the track and begin following it. However, if she doesn't, just turn back and redo the loop, moving another metre further away so you're not casting her over the ground you and she have just traversed.

These starts are tricky, and a whole new way of working. Do lots of starts – with short happy tracks after them. Get other people to set out your starts and your short happy tracks as well as you, so that your dog gets used to finding a variety of scents in front of those flags.

Tracking is hot and thirsty work, even in the depths of winter. You and your dog must be fit to complete a Championship track – an unfit dog will sometimes detour from the track to easier terrain, and thus lose the track.

Happy tracking.