

Training for the TSDX

To gain their Tracking Search Dog Excellent title, dogs must face a range of new complications designed to test both dog and handler. **Margaret Keast** shares her training techniques.



Lure your dog across a dirt trail to help it become used to tracking on different surfaces.

Tracking Search Dog Excellent (TSDX) tracks replicate a search for a missing person, testing the dogs abilities and enthusiasm in a situation as close as possible to a real-life search.

Therefore, there are some differences once a dog moves to this level of the competition. Let's begin with meandering tracks. These are more of a problem for the handler than the dog. While dogs don't need straight lines or a set numbers of corners, both can be very reassuring to handlers.

Dogs tend to follow the scent trail, and only need assistance from their handlers when they are uncertain or discouraged. The meandering tracks tend to challenge handlers' assumptions, forcing them to trust their dogs. So get used to reading your dog's tracking behaviour; if it's on track, follow it, if it's not, encourage it to search.

Introducing a new trail

The track should follow a dirt road or trail for part of the distance. Following a few basic steps in training will help both the handler and dog to

“The track should follow a dirt road or trail for part of the distance – so start adding the crossing of such a road at 90 degrees to your tracks.”

gradually become comfortable with the change of surface and master this new terrain.

- 1 Start adding the crossing of a dirt trail at 90 degrees to your tracks.
- 2 Place articles after the crossing to encourage your dog across the trail.
- 3 As the dog becomes more comfortable crossing the dirt trail, change the angle at which you cross the trail, altering it a few degrees at a time. As the angle becomes more oblique, the dog will spend more time on the trail, and slowly become more comfortable with the surface change.
- 4 Work towards your dog being able to track down the trail without problems.

On your marks

A starting point that has been contaminated shouldn't cause you or your dog too many problems by the time you reach TSDX tracks. Remember, you still get a scented article to cue your dog to the chosen track.

Be sure to give your dog a good sniff of the scented article before asking it to search for the

track. Then, tuck the article into your tracking bag in case you need it later.

As there are still two flags to mark the start, you could cast your dog in front of the flags as done in the Tracking Champion Track. But remember, as soon as you cross the line between the flags the judging will commence.

A TSDX4 Trail should also cross at least one paved or gravel road, stream or shallow body of water. If you work towards your dog being able to follow a scent down a dirt trail, crossing a paved or gravel road should not be a significant issue. Use the same technique as listed above for crossing trails, placing an article on the far side, and encourage your dog to cross.

Streams or shallow bodies of water can be more problematic. Encourage your dog across the stream on the same line as it was tracking, then coax it to search for the track on the far bank. Some of the tracklayer's scent will remain on the surface of the water. Be sure to move right and left along the bank to find the scent, in case you went off course while crossing the stream. ♡