



On the right track

If your dog excels in the scent discrimination exercises at Obedience trials, it might be time to learn Tracking. Margaret Keast reports.

Tracking is when your dog follows the scent of one person across a variety of terrain with a number of changes of direction.

The dog must ignore the scents of other animals or other people and remain faithful to that one scent.

Most dogs love Tracking – particularly because they're in charge! Dogs as wide-ranging as Dachshunds, Jack Russell Terriers, Dobermanns, Rottweilers, Dalmatians, Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers, Japanese Spitz, Beagles and Border Terriers have joined the usual parade of working dogs and gundogs that excel at this sport.

Early training

Like any other training exercise, the idea is to start small and be positive. As we have about 40 times less scenting capability than our dogs, most of the time we don't know what the odour is that they are reacting to.

This means that we can't reprimand them when they perform an action other than the one we're looking for.

The best approach is to encourage the scenting behaviour you want and ignore the scenting behaviour you don't want.

Where and when

In NSW, Tracking is done only in the winter months to avoid excessive heat and snakes.

Once dogs pass the beginner stage, they wear harnesses so that their breathing is not impaired by collars and, to give them room to move, they track on 10-metre long leads.

With tracks ranging from 500 to 1200 metres, Tracking takes up a lot of space. Tracking clubs are always searching for land within driving distance of Sydney.

Clubs

Many Obedience clubs have Tracking arms, and the Tracking and Rescue Dog Club of NSW offers training to members.



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Why do dogs smell so well?

Dogs use soft tissue, bones, nerves and parts of the brain to handle scent. Bones and soft tissue form spaces into which odours flow. These spaces are lined with scent receptor cells, which connect to scent nerves that are directly routed to the scent centre of the dog's brain.

Mucous membranes inside a dog's nose contain more than 200 million scent receptors; that's 40 times as many as humans. Not only



that, dogs' olfactory bulbs are also approximately four times larger than ours. That all adds up to create an extremely sensitive nose.

Some breeds are better suited for scent work than others. Dogs with longer snouts have more scent receptors in their noses than do short-snouted dogs, so they generally have a better sense of smell.

Long- or short-snouted though, dogs of all breeds can do (and love) Tracking!

Dogs NSW runs competitive Tracking trials through its affiliated clubs, using the ANKC Rules. Through successful Tracking, your dog can earn the titles of Tracking Dog and Tracking Dog Excellent, with titles of TD and TDX after its name.

Your dog can, with a lot of work from both of you, become a Tracking Champion, with CH (T) preceding its name. Recently, new disciplines (and titles) of Track and Search have been added, so that your dog can

continue with Tracking even once it is a Champion.

Why get involved?

Tracking is one of the hardest disciplines you can do with your dog. It requires regular training, early starts and lots of travelling to remote tracking grounds. You'll get wet and cold, and have to push your way through heavy grass and brush, so a general level of fitness is required.

However, the thrill of working with your dog at the peak of its

skill is indescribable. It's challenging and enjoyable, and competitors are wonderfully supportive. Everyone at a trial is trying to complete a successful track and is thrilled when a dog and handler team does so. 🐾

Find a club

For more information about Obedience and Tracking, visit: www.dogsnsw.org.au/obedience-and-tracking or www.trackingclubnsw.org.au

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To register or for more information please contact:

Janelle McCosker
Ph: (02) 6721 9028
Fax: (02) 6721 9026
Mob: 0407491628
Email: janelle.mccosker@tafensw.edu.au

Customer Service Centre
1800 448 176