

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR DOG'S NOSE!!

TRACKING

Someone once asked me why I enjoy doing 'Tracking' with my dogs. The first thing that popped into my mind was a picture of me standing on a hillside just after dawn with cold hands and face, looking out over the landscape dotted with kangaroos and cattle and listening to the birds. At the same time watching some wonderful dog using its great ability to scent, both tracking and hopefully, finding a very generous "lost" person. A very generous person who volunteered to lay the track as soon as there was enough daylight to see where the track had been set, then to lie in the dewy / frosty grass for anything up to an hour and a half until some very wet, very excited dog jumps on them.

Doesn't sound like your cup of tea? Don't knock it till you've tried it.

Tracking is when dogs, handlers, judges and volunteers gather in the bush during the cooler months to test a dog's tracking ability. A track is set out – a person pretending to have become lost in the bush and who has dropped 'articles' along the way – and then the dog is set on the track, in a harness and 10m lead, to find the 'lost' person. The length of the track may be anywhere from 400m to 1,200m and to have aged from between 20 minutes to 90 minutes before the dog is set to work. There will be corners and in the more advanced tracks there will be 'cross-tracks', that is where other people have walked across the original track.



My background is in Obedience so when I became involved in Tracking it was quite a wake-up call for me. In Obedience I was in control (most of the time, anyway) so for me to relinquish that control and to let the dog take the lead and to tell me where to go was a change of attitude that took some adjustment. If you become involved in tracking there is one instruction to handlers you will hear time and time again and that is "Trust your Dog".

Tracking is probably the closest dog sport we can do with our four-legged friends that resembles a dog's natural life in the wild. A dog must be able to track to survive. All breeds can track to a certain degree, although there are undoubtedly some that are better adapted to it than others. The main reason I became a Tracking Judge and then recently a Track and Search Judge was because each and every time I judge a dog I get a thrill out of watching that dog work a track. Whether they succeed or not, just watching them work at something that they were born to do gives me goosebumps.

The camaraderie between 'Trackers' is great. The support we give each other and the joy in each other's successes is fantastic. While you can certainly train on your own – most of my training has been with my dogs following a track that I set down previously – you also need your friends to be willing to be the 'lost person' for an hour or so!



The hardest part of training for tracking is not training the dog to track but training yourself to 'read your dog' so that you understand what your dog is doing when they are tracking well or when they may be struggling a little and need your help. You will need to train your dog to 'recognise' articles and to give good indication when they find an article but the rest is really just fine tuning what is already inherent

in your dog's brain.

Get involved in Tracking and I promise you there is nothing like the buzz you get when your dog finds the person at the end of the track. This can be a great shot of excitement not only for you, but for the dog as well. I always remember when one of my dogs successfully found the tracklayer on her Tracking Champion Title track that she actually yodelled so loudly they could hear her back at camp.

So, if you are looking for something very special to do with your dog, consider Tracking. There are Tracking Clubs out there as well as individuals who run Tracking Workshops or training sessions. Ask about and I am sure you will find like minded people who are willing to become your training buddies. It is great fun for you and for your dog and it is also really great exercise both mentally and physically for you and your dog.



Happy Tracking!!

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