TRACKING

Facts and Stats
What is Tracking?

- Tracking is a canine sport that demonstrates a dog's natural ability to recognize and follow a scent and is the foundation of canine search and rescue work. It involves training dogs to use their highly developed sense of smell to find lost humans or animals, detect drugs, bombs or other articles.

- A dog's sense of smell is 100,000 times stronger than a human's. It is said that dogs have 2 billion olfactory receptors, versus 40 million in humans.

- In AKC Tracking competition, a dog is evaluated on its ability to follow the path of the tracklayer using only its nose.

- A human walking a previously mapped out path sets a "track." At the end of the track, the tracklayer drops a glove or wallet that belongs to them. The goal is to accurately follow the scent along the track and locate the article at the end of the trail. The tracks can range from 440 yards to a maximum 1,000 yards depending on test level.

- The tracks used in competition are highly sensitive and there must be ample space to lay the tracks properly. The tracks are used one time by one dog in competition. The entries in tracking competitions are limited due to these constraints.

- A dog can earn four AKC Tracking titles: Tracking Dog (TD), Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX), Variable Surface Tracking (VST), and Champion Tracker (CT).

- Each tracking test challenges the dog in different ways:

  - The TD test includes following a track 440 to 500 yards long with three to five changes in direction. The track is "aged" between 30 minutes to two hours before the dog begins scenting.

  - The TDX test includes following a longer and older track. This track is 800 to 1,000 yards and has been "aged" between three to five hours. There are also five to seven direction changes and human cross tracks as an added challenge.

  - The VST test is one of the most difficult tests for a tracking dog. This test replicates tracking in a real world situation. The VST challenges the dog to track on a three to five hour old track over various surfaces such as vegetation, concrete, and sand. Rain, snow, and various weather conditions may also add to the challenge.

- After successfully completing all three tracking titles (TD, TDX, and VST), a dog earns the prestigious and highest title of Champion Tracker.

- The first tracking test at which a dog could earn a TD title was held October 7, 1947. Until that time, tracking was part of the Utility Dog title. The first tracking test (as part of the UD title) was held on September 13, 1937, as reported in "The Story of Dog Obedience" by Blanche Saunders. The first TDX test was in 1980 and the first VST in 1995.

- Since tracking is a natural ability of all dogs, any breed can compete. In 2002, 218 tracking titles were awarded to Sporting breeds, 55 to Hounds, 75 to Working breeds, 21 to Terrier, 190 to Herding breeds, 15 to Non-Sporting breeds, two to Toy breeds, and two to Miscellaneous breeds, making for 579 total tracking titles completed last year.

- Of these, 475 were TD titles, 91 TDX titles, six VST titles and six CT titles.

- In 2002, 859 dogs competed for a TD, 531 competed for a TDX, and 191 competed for a VST.

- Since 1995 there have been only 76 total dogs to achieve the difficult and prestigious VST title.

- When beginning to compete in AKC Tracking events, a dog must first earn a certification to compete.

- Certification is granted if the dog completes the basic TD track test under the observation of an AKC judge. If successful, four certificates for official entries in tracking competitions, good for one year, are given to the handler. Each time a handler enters a dog in an AKC Tracking competition a certificate must be relinquished.

- Once in competition, a dog only needs to complete one track successfully to earn a title, unlike other AKC sports. The dog can then move onto the next level of tracking test.

- The first annual AKC National Tracking Invitational will be held September 20th and 21st, 2003 at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina.