

Getting Started in AKC Tracking Events
(See <http://www.akc.org> for more information)

AKC tracking events are the competition form of canine search and rescue. These Tracking events provide training for dogs and their handlers to meet some human needs for tracking and finding lost humans or other animals, as well as, demonstrating the extremely high level of scent capability that dogs possess. The AKC Tracking Tests allow dogs to demonstrate their natural ability to recognize and follow human scent. This vigorous outdoor activity is great for canine athletes. Unlike Agility and Obedience events that require a dog to qualify three times, a dog only needs to complete one track successfully to earn each title. Owners who do tracking with their dogs find joy in seeing the dogs at work using their innate scenting skills. If you and your dog like the outdoors, try tracking!

AKC Titles:

Tracking Dog (TD)

A dog earns a TD by following a track 440 to 500 yards long with three to five changes of direction (turns). The track is laid by a human tracklayer who is a stranger to the dog. The track is "aged" 30 minutes to two hours before the dog begins scenting. The goal is to use the scented track to locate an article left at the end of the trail by the tracklayer. The tracklayer also leaves a "scent" article at the start of the track which the handler can pick up and use to re-scent the dog if necessary. The owner follows the dog on a 20' to 40' leash and can encourage the dog during the tracking test.

To enter an actual event, you must first pass the same type of test before an AKC judge or an evaluator who will CERTIFY that you are ready. Tracking events can only accommodate a few dogs per day, so this requirement assures that the test slots are given to dogs that have proven their readiness for an official trial.

Tracking Dog Urban (TDU) This is another beginning level of tracking that also requires the dog to be CERTIFIED before entering. This test must be 400 to 500 yards long with 3 to 5 turns and must be on two different types of surfaces, vegetated and non-vegetated. It is also aged 30 minutes to two hours. There are three articles. One at the start, one at the end and one somewhere in the middle of the track. 10% to 30% of the track will be on a non vegetated surface, but turns will only be on the vegetated surface.

Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX)

The TDX is earned by following an "older" track (three to five hours) that is also longer (800 to 1,000 yards) and has five to seven directional changes with the additional challenge of human cross tracks.

Variable Surface Tracking (VST)

In the real world, dogs track through urban settings, as well as through wilderness. A VST dog has demonstrated this ability by following a three to five hour old track that may take him down a street, through a building and other areas devoid of vegetation. It is 600 - 800 yards long.

Champion Tracker (CT)

A dog that has successfully completed all three tracking titles (TD or TDU and TDX and VST) earns the prestigious title of Champion Tracker.

Equipment: Non-restrictive tracking harness
 Light, weatherproof line, 20 - 40 feet long
 Tracking stakes with flagging
 Articles to leave at the end of the track (glove, wallet, & small hand sized cloth personal items)

Basics: the key to tracking is MOTIVATION. Early training concentrates on motivating your dog with short tracks leading to something worthwhile for the dog (food, toy, glove, etc.) No corrections or harsh commands are given. Give lots of praise and be enthusiastic!

