



Are you training a tracking dog or is it Training you?

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When it comes to tracking dogs you may hear people say “Oh my dog is a natural, he doesn’t need training.” Well in some ways they are correct. Most dogs are naturally scent driven and they will track things. A lot of things! But they are incorrect in the sense that all dogs need training, from the basics of sit and stay to teaching a dog to track one single deer out of a field where there were previously 20 deer standing. This not only takes time and practice but also a very close understanding of your dog.

Say a handler took a dog out that had no previous training for blood tracking. They start the dog at the point where a hunter shot the deer in a nice green clover plot. The dog takes off pulling and tracking up a storm. How would the handler know if the dog was tracking the deer or simply having fun scenting the 50 rabbit trails in the plot? They wouldn’t!

This is why it is very important to set practice lines that you have marked and spend time teaching your dog and learning how to read your dog. You will learn your dog’s posture and attitude when he or she is on the correct line and when they are not. You will also build and bond with that dog that is inseparable. The dog will trust you and you will learn to trust your dog. This is very important in tracking as it is a team effort of the dog and handler.

It is very important to let your dog track the practice lines and be sure that you are not steering him/her the whole way through. If you are steering the dog, the dog is training you by thinking “If I can’t find the line, no problem, the person at the end of my lead knows exactly where it is.” That is incorrect. If we always knew where the wounded animal went, we would not need the tracking dog. It is OK to help a dog in training to learn how to look for the line when they loose it. If a dog overshoots a turn or has trouble at a creek crossing in your training lines, of course you would not want to spend 30 minutes fumbling around with the dog going every which way. Give the dog a sufficient amount of time to correct his/her self. If they go off the line and can not find it, then lead him in the direction of the line and let him pick it back up.

In the beginning stages of training your dog your lines may start out 50 yards long with two turns on 8 ounces of blood. But in advanced training you will work up to 1000 yard lines with several turns, simulated wound beds, maybe a creek crossing, back tracks and more on 3 ounces of blood. Your goal is to train your dog to track wounded game. You will want to simulate your lines whether they are 100 yards or One Mile as close as you can to a live track. A wounded animal knows no boundaries. Creeks, rivers, roads and briar patches are obstacles you can incorporate in your training. (Note: Your dog will not mind the briars as much as you will!) Remember to have fun, practice often and praise your dog for the effort it puts into tracking.

Happy Tracking!