



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs & Tracking

2023 #6

Introduction ► Tracking is a performance event that dogs enjoy. The tracking dog follows the scent of the tracklayer who laid the track (walked a path directed by the judges). It is an activity that a dog of any age can do, from puppies through veterans. Those who track are passionate about tracking, eagerly dedicating countless hours to teaching, mentoring, and training. Dog and handler are equal and work as a team. Hence, you'll often hear the mantra, "trust your dog." In addition to being fun, it is a great form of exercise for both team members. Tracking is not a timed event so teams work at their own pace.

History of the Sport ► AKC Tracking has been in existence since 1936, when it was originally part of the Utility Obedience class. Today there are several AKC titles a team can earn, with each title becoming more challenging. An exhibitor only needs to pass once in a tracking test to earn that level's title.

AKC Titles ► **Tracking Dog (TD)**: The TD track is 440 to 500 yards long over moderate terrain, such as open fields or pastures. There are three to five turns, and each leg must be at least 50 yards long. The track is aged (time period between when the scent was laid and the tracking begins) anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours before the entered team runs the track. There is an article (bandana, sock, etc.) at the start flag so the dog can identify the scent to follow. There is a glove or wallet at the end, which the dog must indicate has been found.



Tracking Dog Urban (TDU): The TDU track is 400 to 500 yards long, has three to five turns, with a start article, an article somewhere along the track, and a glove or wallet at the end. As much as a third of the track goes straight across non-vegetative surfaces, such as a parking lots and sidewalks. However, all turns must be on a vegetative surface - typically grass. A team must earn a TD or TDU before they may enter TDX or VST tests.



Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX): A TDX track is 800 to 1,000 yards long, has five to seven turns, is aged three to five hours. In addition to more challenging terrain and varied cover (steep hills, woods, fields, etc.), TDX teams face two additional challenges unique to TDX: cross-tracks and obstacles. About a half hour before the track is run, a pair of cross-trackers cut across the track in two places. And, if that's not enough, there are two obstacles (rock walls, streams, fallen trees, roads, fences, etc.) the team must work around, across, over, or through and regain the track once on the other side. TDX is extremely challenging but very rewarding.

Variable Surface Tracking (VST): A VST title is the most difficult but the most thrilling and rewarding. The track is similar to the TDX: 600-800 yards long, five to eight turns, aged three to five hours, with four articles. A VST track is laid in an urban setting, such as a college campus or an office complex, on a mix of vegetative and non-vegetative surfaces. The articles are different as well and sometimes are disguised as trash (e.g. crushed soda cans and water bottles). Thus, if the dog touches anything, the handler picks it up.

Champion Tracker (CT): An AKC Champion Tracker title is achieved by a dog that has earned three tracking titles; either the TD or TDU, and the TDX and VST.

Teaching a Dog to Track ► As stated earlier, dogs of any age can track if they are in good physical condition. Tracking can be done alone; however the team will progress faster if they have a knowledgeable tracking partner or mentor. To

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start, one only needs a collar, six foot leash, and a discarded glove. One will quickly move onto using a tracking harness and longer line for in a TD test you must be at least 20 feet behind your dog.

There are several ways to start a dog. No matter what method you use, always start with very short tracks (about 10 feet). Very slowly increase distance, age of track, the addition of turns, etc. This will probably take several months.

One method of starting to track is to drag a hot dog on the ground beginning at the start flag and ending at the article. The dog follows the hot dog scent to the glove. Reward the dog with a toy or treat at the glove.

Another method is to rub a hot dog or other food on the soles of your boots and walk from the start flag to the article. Then have the dog follow the food-scented footsteps to the glove.

Yet another way is the "Hansel and Gretel" method. Use a visible treat, such as string cheese cut into tiny pieces, and drop a piece in between your feet as you are slowly walking your track. In the beginning, the pieces are dropped close together and gradually. Over time, the food drops are farther and farther apart. Gradually increase the distance between food drops and slowly add age and turns to the track.

When you feel that your dog is successful most of the time tracking a full length track aged the proper length of time without food drops and stays on the track, you are ready for a "blind track". This is a track that an acquaintance lays and you have no knowledge of it. This is a good indicator of whether your dog is ready for a test. If you and your dog can successfully complete the track with no help or guidance, then you are ready to contact either a tracking judge or someone who has earned a TDX in the last ten years. They will lay a full length, fully aged TD or TDU track for you. If you qualify on this certification track, you may then start entering TD and/or TDU tests.

There is nothing quite like the thrill of your dog finding the final glove or article on a test track! Happy tracking!

Tracking Resources, Books & Videos ►

The following resources, books, and videos will get you started in tracking. Check <https://www.amazon.com/>, <https://www.dogwise.com/>, and various dog catalogs or bookstores for availability.

- AKC Tracking - <https://www.akc.org/sports/tracking/>
- **AKC Tracking Regulations** (<http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RU9999.pdf>). Read and know the rules.
- **Tracking From the Ground Up** (Show-Me Publications) by Sandy Ganz and Susan Boyd. An easy-to-use resource that is perfect for the beginning tracker and good with Berners.
- **Tracking Fundamentals** (video) with Sandy Ganz. A wonderful tool to help beginners.
- **Tracking Dog: Theory and Methods** (Arner Publications) by Glen R. Johnson. This is a classic and the "bible" of restrictive tracking. This book is more technical than Ganz & Boyd, but highly recommended. The Johnson program needs to be diluted for Berners. Together, these two books provide all of the information you need for success.
- **Practical Tracking for Practically Everyone** by Julie Hogan and Donna Thompson. Another good how-to

manual from authors with a combined total of 70 tracking titles.

- **Enthusiastic Tracking, The Step-by-step Training Manual** by William R. Sanders. Presents a structured and thorough motivational training method that prepares the dog and handler for the TD and TDX Tests. The author helped train the first TDX Berner (1985), Viva's Graemlicker Bischof, owned by Carolyn Gramlich.
- **Modern Enthusiastic Tracking: Advanced Skills for Urban Tracking** by William R. Sanders. A good step by step approach to Urban Tracking.
- **Component Training for Variable Surface Tracking** by Ed Presnall and Christy Bergeon. Written by authors with three VST titles between them.
- **Keeping Track: A Record of Your Dog's Progress in the Tracking Field** (Mueller Publications). This nifty package includes blank maps, mobile map maker, and Pocket Tracker. Available from Direct Book Service.
- **Scent and the Scenting Dog** (Arner Publications) by William G. Syrotuck. A very technical manual about the dynamics of scent and how dogs perform this amazing feat. Read this after you're completely hooked on the sport.
- **Puppy Tracking Primer** by Carolyn Krause. Puppies can start tracking before they're old enough to do much else, and the relaxed atmosphere and no-stress exercise is perfect for developing minds and bodies.

