

Track & Search Dog Information for Judges

The purpose of these tracks is to give dogs the opportunity to train and track in a more real-life manner.

There is a world of difference in the way an “Operational Tracking Dog” works than the Competition Tracking Dog. The sole purpose of the “Operational Tracking Dog” is to find the missing person as quickly & efficiently as possible. It matters little if it shortcuts the track or tracks on the other side of the road following the air scent above the footsteps.

In Competition Tracking we still need to keep the dog as close to the footsteps as possible while making allowances for the associated difficulties of the changes in terrain.

If Judges have an understanding of the complexities that the contaminated and varied surfaces and conditions of the Track & Search Dog tracks, and their impact on the dog’s ability to cope with and work these type of tracks, then they are able to judge each dog as fairly and openly as possible within the rules as set down by the ANKC.

Variable Terrain & Hard Surface Tracking:

The amount and type of vegetation makes the task for the dog easier or harder. The dog obviously will have to work harder on hard ground.

Grass verges, brick paving, and pea gravel, wood chips, mulch, and grainy concrete, concrete slabs as these have weeds etc in between, bitumen, wooden planks all hold scent quite well. Ploughed land doesn’t present a problem unless it has been freshly ploughed. Newly mown grass is extremely difficult for a dog to work.

As a person walks from one surface to another the vegetation, soil and the scent that it carries, sticks to the shoes and are then deposited on the new surface for a certain distance, which can vary according to conditions. This scent eventually fades away, but it gives the dog the chance to adjust to the elements of the new surface. The human factor, individual scent, stride, weight and size of shoe etc. remain all the time.

The slope of the land may also affect a track. If the day is very hot, the air rises quicker so the dog may be higher up the slope than the person has walked. In cooler weather the opposite may be the case with the dog working below the line that the tracklayer walked.

If a tracklayer enters a stream the disturbances made by the person will remain on the surface for some time. The dog will pick up on these and the human scent still in the air. If the stream is narrow [and it should be for our purposes] then the vegetation on the sides of the stream will be disturbed and the dog will pick that up.

The Start:

Tracks 1-4 inclusive do not have an exact starting point. The starting line is indicated by 2 flags 30 metres apart. The dog will be scented from an article left in a position nominated by the Judge or given to the Handler by the Judge prior to the commencement of the track and at a minimum distance of 30 metres before the start line. It is essential no person apart from the handler is to be permitted in this 30m area while the dog is searching for the track, unless stated otherwise in the description of the individual tracks.

Judges should note that some dogs may choose to search in the area beyond the start line; other dogs may search in the area before the start line.

Some handlers will opt to work their dogs off lead and free quarter at the start, wait for a clear indication that the dog has located the track and then call the dog, clip the tracking lead onto the harness and then commence tracking. Handlers that choose this method may elect the distance they wish to work from their dog while their dog searches for the direction of the track.

Handlers that choose to have their dog search for the start on lead must work the dog on a loose lead and be at a distance of approximately 10m away from their dog to ensure that the dog has complete freedom to search for the track.

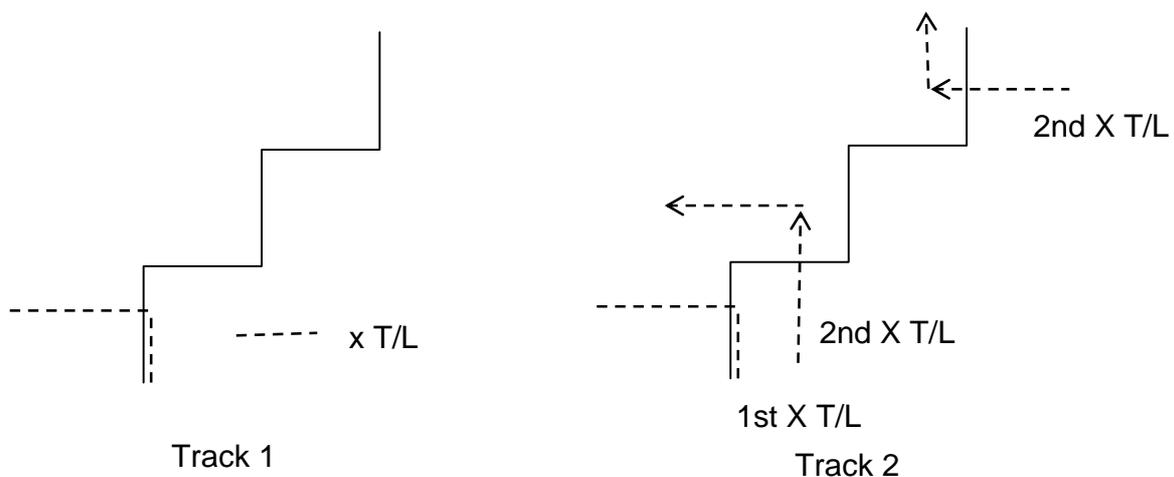
Whatever method is chosen, the lead must be attached to the harness before the handler crosses the start line after which judging will then commence.

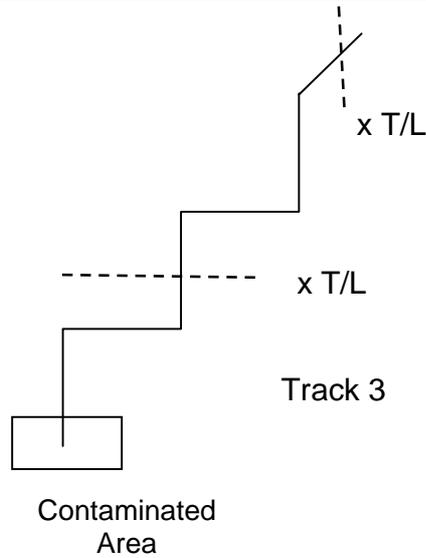
All dogs more than likely will take off at an extremely fast pace after a restart so be prepared to move quickly to follow the dog/handler team. The dog of course should settle and slow down and then continue to work at a more acceptable pace.

Diversion or Cross Tracks:

The dog will fail if it continues more than 10 metres down a diversion track.

The following are **suggested examples** of the type of cross or diversion tracks that may be used on the various tracks. **The track designs are examples only.**





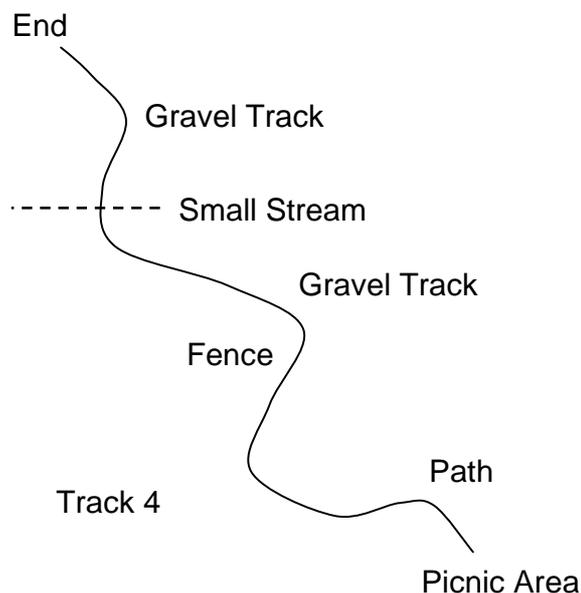
The Meandering Style of Track:

Be careful when laying this type of track to keep the track always moving away from you. The dog will very quickly learn to air scent should you have the track coming back on itself. This is especially true when laying Urban tracks when the scent is blown for considerable distances because of vehicular traffic and this wind blown scent may drift between houses so that it is possible for a dog to pick up the scent from a block away.

Whilst judging the Urban tracks, if the judge can imagine that the tracklayer was in fact a real missing person, it may simplify their decision to allow the dog to go off the actual track, but will enable the dog to still find the lost person by another route.

In the bush avoid too many little changes of direction as this will make it too hard to map the track. Remember to try to make the tracks as close as possible to that made by a 'lost' person.

For the person following up behind the handler on this type of track, know exactly where the track goes and make allowances for slight deviations from the track.



Articles:

The type of articles used, should represent the type of items as would be carried and or dropped by a missing person. i.e. mobile phone, bunch of keys, wallet, glasses, asthma inhalers and so on.

It is recommended that clubs conducting the trials mark these items. A suggestion is as follows: -

“DEAR FINDER

THIS OBJECT WAS PLACED HERE DELIBERATELY. IT IS A TRAINING AID FOR A SEARCH & RESCUE DOG. PLEASE REPLACE THE ITEM.

THANK YOU [name of club] “

These labels could be laminated and attached by means of tie wires.

Before commencing the track the tracklayer could be given tie wires and then proceed to fasten the labels to the various articles to be used on the track.

Tracklayers:

Most of the tracks require aging for a period that makes it impractical to leave the track layer waiting at the end of the track, be very careful how they leave and get back into position. This is especially important in Urban tracks.

Never drive the tracklayer anywhere near the track with the windows of the car down. Switch off the air conditioner, and if there is no other way to get back to the end, drive the same way the track goes. A certain amount of body scent will escape from the car even with the windows up.

Buildings:

Perhaps one of the hardest challenges facing the dog is working around buildings. Scent can be drawn up and deposited some distance away, especially when air conditioners are in use. Scent bounces away or deposits along buildings depending on many factors and much patience is required to let the dog sort things out.

As a Judge you must also allow the dog time to work out the problem.

Distractions

Distractions can come in the form of other dogs or animals or other people, cars, garbage or food scraps. Birds disturb many dogs, especially the Gun Dogs while cats can be a huge problem to others.

Stray dogs can also be a problem, in which case you may have to tell your handler to stop while the situation is handled.

When tracking in the streets one of the biggest problems is the council trees and lamp posts which seem to have an abundance of animal smells left behind by other dogs when having their daily walk. The tracking dog’s concentration may be severely hampered because of this.

Working the Urban Track:

Scent may blow a great distance from the track depending on how heavy the traffic is. Often a dog will work on the 'wrong side' of the road, follow a solid fence, or want to walk along the concrete edging on the road. Some dogs may want to walk down the middle of the road & follow the white centre paint line, others will cross from one side of the road to another making it difficult if there is a turn and the dog is on the opposite side of the street.

Streets, unlike the tracks in the bush & paddocks are however easier for us humans to negotiate. The dog again depending on traffic may overshoot a greater distance than you normally would expect and it may have to go back.

A dog may not show loss at all but continue on and then turn a block away and come back onto the track. This is where the Judge following up, is able to give the dog the opportunity to keep working knowing it can always get back on track if it continues in a certain direction. It is however up to the discretion of the judge to allow this or not depending on the wind conditions at the time of judging.

A detailed map of the area is essential, a mud map in urban tracks is not sufficient as it will not help if the dog becomes lost and the track steward has to find the track again.

Although the judge's map will show exactly which side of the street the tracklayer walked, it really had no bearing on what the dog will do because there are so many variables to take into consideration.

General Guidelines:

- Be open minded in your evaluation, remember the object is to find the 'missing person' but still be considered to be tracking. The tracks are however titled **Track & Search**.
- The dogs [especially in Urban Tracks] will not footstep track for the entirety of the track, allowances have to be made for contamination, conditions & Terrain.
- Try to make your tracks as real to life as possible within the confines of the distances set.
- You may talk to your handler at any stage during the working of the track if safety is an issue, or if there is a perceived problem with stray animals.
- Position yourself so you can at all times see the dog working, never allowing anyone to be in front of the dog apart from local pedestrians.
- Whilst there must be no verbal abuse from the handler, it will be necessary for the handler to lead or guide their dog at times, especially when working corners or crossing busy streets.
- Because of the issue of safety, it is most likely the handler will not allow the dog to track across a busy street, but once the dog has indicated the direction of the track, they will lead or guide the dog across the street as quickly as possible and cast it around on the other side. This is seen as good lead handling and good team work. The object is to find the 'missing person' and be safety aware at all times.

- It is recommended that handlers and all stewards be reminded before the commencement of Urban Night Tracks, that lights should be used sparingly as not to impair night vision. It takes about 30 minutes to achieve full night vision, though eyes start to adapt after about 10 minutes. Anyone who has a head light attached must be careful not to shine it into another person's eyes if they turn to face them. Either flick the headlight into an upward position or don't directly face the other person. Remember to will take another 10 minutes to readjust your night vision if you are temporarily blinded by another headlight shining directly into your eyes.



Example of Track 5 [Broken Lines indicate a possible route dog may take]