

ODDS AND ENDS

Recent comments heard at tracking tests prompted this article touching on a few different points regarding articles, starts and other features of a tracking test.

Articles

Regarding articles, the regulations are pretty clear. For all test levels, articles are to be approximately the size of a glove or wallet and inconspicuous in color. For TD the start article must be fabric and the final article will be a glove or wallet. In the TDU the start article may be leather or fabric. There is also an intermediate article placed approximately half way through the track and it, too, may be fabric or leather. As in TD, the final article must be a glove or wallet. For TDU, the regulations spell out that articles are to be personal and dissimilar. In TDX we once again see that the articles are to be personal and dissimilar and about the size of a glove or wallet. There is no mention of what material TDX articles are to be, but the final article must be a glove or wallet and neither a glove nor wallet can be used as an intermediate article. VST has the most explicit description of articles, stating that the first article must be leather or fabric and there must be one each of fabric, leather, metal and plastic. Further, they are to be dissimilar, common, everyday items that can be easily carried and safely picked up by the dog. Only VST lists specific sizes with items required to be between 2x4 inches and up to 5x5 inches and weighing no more than 8 ounces. If you are volunteering as a tracklayer for any level of test, it is always a good idea to give the judges their choice of several articles. While there is no prohibition of plastic or metal articles in TDX, most judges will prefer fabric or leather articles in that test. In VST, most judges will turn down the use of gloves or wallets at that level. Most clubs offer gloves or wallets to tracklayers as final articles in TD, TDU and TDX. For VST tests, clubs provide a #4 sticker for the final article, but all articles are supplied by the tracklayer.

Starts

In all tracking tests, the start is marked with a flag. In TD and TDU there are two start flags, the second flag being used to indicate the initial direction of the track. In TDX and VST there is only one flag, and an integral part of the test is for the dog to determine the direction. Particularly in TDX and VST, the judges will indicate to the handler which way they are to approach the start flag. As a handler, it is of great help to pay attention to the judge's directions when approaching the flag, as the regulations are quite specific as to the angle of approach, and deciding on a different approach may very well put the dog and handler at a disadvantage from the start. There is nothing in the regulations that dictates any preference for terrain at the start, other than in TDX it is to be in an area of the predominate cover. For VST tests there is probably the most variation as starts can be near buildings or out in large open vegetated areas. In all tests, variations in elevation are common, with hills, valleys, berms and such all being acceptable starting points. Just because an area is predominately flat does not mean the entire track will be. Such changes in elevation are not considered obstacles unless they are especially steep and provide a scenting challenge.

Obstacles

While roads in TDX are considered to be an obstacle, in the urban environment of VST they are simply a part of the track. So, while it may sound like a contradiction to consider a road an obstacle in one but not the other, the very nature of the test is what makes that determination. Simply put, in an urban environment there are roads, and roads are often incorporated into tracks. Most judges will avoid heavily travelled roads, but some light traffic does not preclude their use. In TDX, they are considered obstacles due to the change in cover, but VST is all about changes in cover as part of the test and thus such changes become an expected part of the test and not an obstacle.

Gallery

In tracking tests, galleries are to be expected and encouraged! Typical field tests preclude anyone following in vehicles, but the urban nature of VST occasionally finds folks wanting to follow along in their car. Problems can arise when said vehicles try to position themselves to see the track being run but have no idea where the track goes. Some vehicles may end up sitting on or near the track itself, possibly even blocking the track and thus influencing the dog's direction. If you should decide to follow a track, your first choice should be to do so on foot, behind the judges. If you must follow in a vehicle (and this applies to official drivers as well), please ask permission from the judges first, and keep your vehicle behind the judges. If you are on foot, keep conversation to a minimum so as not to distract the dog from working. Remember to stay behind the judges. Most judges are happy to answer any questions along the way and most allow photography as well, but leaving the immediate area behind the judges to get a better angle for a photo could interfere with the dog's work. It's always a good idea to ask the judges before heading off to get a better picture.

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