

How Often Do You Practice?

By Terri Everwine © August 2008

Your answer to this question doesn't really matter. What matters is that you adjust your training schedule to your dog's level of comfort with the work.

This is one of the many things that distinguishes tracking from other dog sports. In tracking, it's all about motivation.

A dog that's burned out on too much work will not track well.

Why not? Because while a dog may feel compelled to try because they know its what we want, if they are uncomfortable, confused or stressed in any other way, it will curb their desire. Desire means motivation, and without motivation you don't have a tracking dog. Because ultimately, the dog has to want to do this work and tracking IS work.

A stressed dog will more readily follow a handler's cue, and will not be confident enough to strike off on his own, a necessary component of a successful track.

One of the common causes of this type of stress in tracking dogs is over training. Either training beyond the dog's confidence level, or training too frequently. Each has it's own pitfalls.

It pays to spend time introducing new elements in a track on a regular basis, but it's important to have a game plan, too. Throwing too much new at once can cause a drop in confidence. Take things one at a time, and take other elements away so that the dog can concentrate on the new challenge. Repeat lessons the dog has trouble with and incorporate these lessons into harder tracks once the dog is working the lesson without issue.

So how often do you repeat a lesson? Once again, it very much depends on your dog. Some dogs do great with Glen Johnson's rather intensive daily work. Most dogs seem to do very well when worked on a weekly basis. Some may not tolerate daily work, but will benefit from a mid-week session as well. Other dogs show more success when worked in an even more sporadic fashion. Dogs having some trouble overall may benefit from a layoff, from a few weeks to a few months. They don't forget, but it could be what it takes for that dog to get over a tough spot in training.

The key is for you as a handler to tune into your dog's behavior so that you recognize how much training is enough, and when you need more or less. As with all other aspects of tracking, your dog will tell you exactly what you want to know.

Trust your dog!