

A Match Made in Heaven

Outside the realm of science, there are few universals. However, one that we know as Weimaraner owners is when you take your Weimaraner for a walk, their noses work overtime.

We've all been dragged along by a big grey dog who seems to have been transformed into a nose on four legs. They glue their noses to the ground, sometimes hold their heads up high to sample airborne scents and become so enthralled with sniffing that it invades their being with overpowering purpose. Their attention is focused on what they are experiencing through their most highly developed sense.

A dog's sense of smell is a marvel and is so more highly developed than our own that I doubt we can fully appreciate the sensory bombardment that our dogs constantly experience. Their physiology is so skewed toward everything olfactory that the part of their brain that processes smells is 40% larger than our own.

Not only are their brains hardwired to process smells, their noses are sophisticated structures made to efficiently glean odors from their environment. Ever wonder about the moistness of a dog's nose? (Yes, there is a purpose beyond smearing up our glass windows.) A moist nose allows a dog to inhale a larger number of scent molecules. These molecules are then wafted into the nose where dogs have specialized mucous membranes that are packed with scent-detecting cells and olfactory nerves.

When a dog sniffs it is quite different from when we say we've caught a smell of something. Our dogs' sniffing is a series of rapid intake and exhaling. Each nostril has a structure called the alar fold which allows new air to come into the center of each nostril when the dog inhales but closes down so the dog exhales through the slits in the side of the nose. All those "schnuffing" noises we hear when our dogs are gathering in scent, are the result of this quick intake and exhaling.

Why am I going on about dogs' noses? Because I've become enthralled with the new dog sport of AKC Scent Work. The short definition of Scent Work is that it, "...is a sport that mimics the task of working detection dogs to locate a scent and communicate to the handler that the scent has been found." It is a sport that is made for a breed like ours that loves to use their noses. Couple dogs that live to sniff with training that depends on positive reinforcement with food and you and your Weimaraner have found a new dog sport that is a perfect match.

Giving a Weimaraner a chance to participate in Scent Work is to bring a joyful activity into their lives. They get to sniff and when they find the scent they get food. What a perfect match. Scent Work also gives dogs and handlers a chance to build teamwork and strengthen the human/canine bond. By the very nature of the activity, the handler must totally trust the dog to use an ability that, in comparison to a dog, is so underdeveloped in humans.

Since the first AKC Scent Work trial was held back in 2017, there has been an accelerating increase in the number of participants. Many local Kennel Clubs and training facilities now offer classes and even if you can't take advantage of formal classes there are many "how to" videos on the internet. If you haven't already tried it, take the plunge because you and your dog will love this sport.

Weimaraner + sniffing + food rewards = the formula for great fun for everyone.

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