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Just Follow Your Nose

We've all read the hype about the tracking ability of Weimaraners. One early book tells of a Weimaraner successfully tracking a lost child when Bloodhounds failed. A web site for a local Weimaraner club extols tracking and goes on to say, "it is cheating to track with Weimaraners!" Could Weimaraners really be that good at tracking?

Wanting to test these waters, I signed up for a six-session beginner's tracking class. My dog and I embarked on this new adventure with enthusiasm for a new activity that we could share. Our first day of tracking class started by learning how to lay an easy track, salting it with treats every couple of feet and having an ending leather article that was the ultimate prize. Dressed in tracking harnesses the dogs initially did nothing more than look and sniff for the planted food. The dogs loved this chance to munch their way around the field while handlers learned how to keep the dogs on the marked track. Enthusiasm increased and the dogs quickly caught on to this new game.

In subsequent classes length, age and complexity of the track increased and amounts of food decreased. What didn't decrease was the drive and fervor of my dog. The sight of the tracking harness brought excited urgings to hurry up so we could get started.

For those of you who haven't tracked with your Weimaraner I'm sure that you may have misgivings about encouraging all this sniffing. You worry that it will carry over to other activities like showing or obedience where you try to discourage having your dog's nose plastered to the ground. Fear not: When wearing a tracking harness dogs quickly learn that sniffing is the desired behavior but in other venues the previous "no sniff" training clicks in.

My original question centered on just how good Weimaraners are at tracking. To answer that, here are a few words from some AKC tracking judges who have tons of experience in the sport:

Dr. Lily Mummert has personally trained and tracked with several different breeds since the late 1980's. A couple of years ago, she judged for the WCA at our national and when asked what impressed her most about tracking style of the Weimaraners, she remarked on their speed and power.

Michael Clemmens has an interesting insight about training. "Sporting dogs, in general, have a visualization background and have a definite prey drive. This can pose a challenge to the training, where the object is to follow a scent as opposed to looking for something moving. It is important in early training of Weimaraners to stay close to them and keep their focus on the ground scent. You need to be ever aware of the dog's attention to the track, which can be pulled away by a bird flying nearby. You must be able to jump in to show the dog the track and keep the focus intense."

If you have the opportunity to track with your Weimaraner give it a try and let them enjoy using their scenting ability. Dogs love tracking and you may too.

Carole Lee Richards

PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ 08108

y-mar_column@yahoo.com