

# Tracking Training

By Renee Romberg

You can hardly wait to start doing things with your new puppy but don't know what to do? Tracking is one venue that you can start with your Weimaraner pup even as early as 8 weeks old. You can see in the following pictures an 11 - 12 week pup learning to follow a straight track after only about 2 lessons. Tracking with a Weimaraner is like cheating compared to training other breeds. Weimaraners have exceptional noses and are very food motivated.



I like to start my pups out on short lawn grass. There are two reasons for this. I like to be able to see the bait on the ground so that I know exactly where the track is, and I also want my pup's nose to the ground as much as possible. You can either lay your own tracks, or if you have a training partner they can lay the tracks. I already have the harness on the pup before we get started. This way I don't have to struggle with a wiggly puppy and can put him on the track immediately after it is ready. I let my pup watch the track being laid the first few times so he knows something exciting that involves food is going to happen. If I am by myself he can watch out his crate door. If I have a training partner I can hold him in front of the track so he can watch my partner lay the track.



I let the pup know I have goodies with me. I put the starting flag in and step almost heel to toe for about 40 feet in a straight line all the while putting little pieces of string cheese or hot dog down about every 2 feet. At the end of the track I will put my glove down with a jack pot of good treats underneath it. I proceed about 20 feet beyond the glove in a straight line and then circle around my track back to the pup.

I hook the leash on his harness and take him right to the starting flag. I keep the leash very short and point his nose to the ground. It will only take a second and the pup's nose will get going. He may not understand right at first where he's getting the scent of cheese but that is the purpose of keeping the leash short and pointing to the ground. It generally only takes a few yards moving forward until he realizes that this good stuff is coming from the ground and when he moves forward in a straight line he keeps finding cheese! Since the grass is short he will also be able to see it. At this point, I do not care. Do not give the puppy very much slack. Let him pull the leash taught so he isn't too far off the track at any time. When he works his way to the end there is that wonderful glove with the goodies underneath and inside it. Shake the glove and play with him and let him carry the glove around if he wants. Have a party with your puppy.



Generally, I will do two short tracks the first couple of sessions. It will only take about 2 or 3 lessons and you will have a pup tracking like the one in these pictures. As he is getting better you can start laying the track with larger steps and spreading the bait further apart. You can begin to give him just a little bit more leash so he understands that if he gets off the track too much the scent is weaker. Even though you think the pup is just tracking the scent of food, his sub-conscious is also tracking the human scent as he is learning that the bait is always found where the human has stepped. This is also teaching the pup to pull hard when he has the lead hooked to the harness - this is what you will want as your training progresses.

After the first few lessons your pup does not have to watch you lay the track. He is going to know what is going on out there and he is going to be raring to go! When you feel you are ready to go past 30 yards you can put the second flag in the ground and go beyond it. This flag should mean nothing to the pup it is a visual for you to keep a straight line ....he will eventually ignore it. Keep training straight tracks well beyond the second flag until your pup is tracking at the end of a 6 foot lead or longer and pulling you down the track in a pretty straight line.



You can start using a tracking line and adding a little more length as long as your pup is pulling straight and hard. If he starts casting in circles or veering off the track too much go back to a shorter line. You can also start tracking in short to medium length field grass as he has learned to put his nose down and track. Soon you will notice that you do not have to use much bait and in fact your pup will be so excited about finding his glove reward that he will sometimes track right over the bait and leave

it. Don't worry about holding him back if he misses a piece. If he's moving forward on the track, go with him. The crows will love you for it!

If you are working in breezy weather you will notice your pup may zig zag. This is normal, and as long as he is working down the track and not casting around all over that is ok. Step forward with your pup only when he is pulling you down the track. If the lead goes slack, stop and wait for him to pull. This is the one game that you actually want your pup to pull hard. That is why I start with a harness and not a collar on my pup. You will find out the reason you want your pup to have a nice strong pull when you start working on corners.

After several training sessions your pup is pulling hard down the track at least 100 yards and obviously tracking the tracklayers scent down to the end drop with little trouble. His head is down and you are only dropping a piece or two of bait as his reward for keeping his nose down. You are now ready to start teaching your pup how to make a turn. You want to know exactly where your turn goes so you will need to mark the corner with a piece of survey tape or another tracking flag. I myself prefer using survey tape simply for the reason that it will not bend over or interrupt my pup's concentration if the line were to pull it down or move it. Eventually, it



won't matter because your pup will be so involved in his mission that he won't care what he gets tangled up in he will let you be the one to worrying about that!



There are several methods to begin turns but what has consistently worked for me is to make an open angle turn the first few times so that the pup barely notices that he's turning. At this stage I prefer he does not have to do any casting to find the turn. That is why I use an open angle turn instead of a 90 degree turn and why I only give him about 10 -12 feet of line yet. I do not like to use bait at my turns. I want it to be a fluid movement if possible with him tracking human scent

and I don't want anything distracting him on the corner. After he makes the turn completely and goes about 20 feet he finds his end drop and we have our party.

I will do these open angle turns over the next couple of sessions using both right and left turns and up wind and downwind if possible. When my pup is doing nice open angle turns smoothly I will then close them to 90 degree turns. This is where you are going to appreciate having a pup that pulls hard. He will probably track right past the turn a few yards and then you will see his head come up and the line will go a bit slack as he will notice the scent is waning or gone. You will stand your ground when the line goes slack and let the pup figure out he's gone past it and he needs to find it. Since these are "hot" tracks without much ageing he will more than likely switch back the right direction without much of a problem and continue on. If you don't see any slack in the line at the corner and your pup has pulled past the 12 – 15 feet of line, stand your ground until the light bulb clicks on and he switches back. Some dogs may do a complete cast in a circle around you until they "hit" the turn. You will have no problem reading a dog that does this and it is perfectly normal way for them to track.

Once you have had several successful tracks with a turn or two you can start ageing your tracks 10 minutes at a time and start giving your dog more line as he progresses. Add more turns and different wind directions and track in all kinds of weather.

So far up to this point you have always had the track well marked so you knew the dog was correctly following the track. Now is when you can start having someone else lay the track and

you do not know where it goes. If this is your first experience tracking you can start doing this with just one or two turns so you can get the confidence that you know how to read your dog. You will be surprised at how much you have learned about the way your dog indicates his turns and when he is sure and when he isn't.

Keep in mind that this is a team sport but your dog is the only one that really knows where the track goes so you are going to have to trust your dog. Have the tracklayer follow behind you far enough back that he isn't interfering with your dog if he casts or if you need to back up.. If your dog is going past the point of no return and isn't on the track your partner should have land marks and be able to let you know so you can back up to the point where the dog was



correct. Keep practicing. Even if you don't have a training partner on a particular session – you can still work on your own. The more practice you have reading your pup the easier it will get. If I don't have good land marks I still put in ties. Sometimes I will put them 10 feet before my turn just so I know my dog is ignoring the tie and not thinking there is a corner every time there is a tie. In any case, the first time you complete a 440 yard track that is unknown to you it will be a thrill!

As with all training there are many different ways to get an end result. This is a pretty general summary of how I have had the most success. Someone may have a different method that you feel will work better for you. It is always better if you have a tracking partner that has some tracking experience helping you. There are also several books on the subject. Always remember, If you feel that you have jumped the gun and your pup is having a problem getting to the next step– take a step back to where you were successful and work it through until he gets it. Our Weimaraners are excellent trackers and I believe that you will find they will out shine nearly every other breed at this sport.