



Tracking Club of
Massachusetts

TCM

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www.trackingclubofma.com

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Pieces from the Prez

It's been a great winter here in New England. I hope to see more of you out in the fields, or on VST surfaces, training and testing your dogs in the coming season. But before that happens, I want to share some information about the club:

- We have maintained constant membership over the last few years, which is nice to see, as it means folks are still enjoying the sport and the club. Last year brought successes for many members with some hard earned TDXs, as well as TDs. Visit our Facebook page to see some great pictures of happy people and their dogs.
- We have been adding some tracking seminars that educate folks as well as provide an opportunity for us to work with other tracking enthusiasts. I hope more of you will take advantage of these.
- In response to your requests, we started scheduling "training" days instead of relying on last minute e-mail and phone calls. You can get notice of training days via the club website as well as Facebook. We have scheduled training days on Saturdays as well as Sundays to accommodate all folks at all levels: VST, TD, TDU, TDX.
- And speaking of the club website, we've migrated it to a different web-hosting service in an effort to make updates easier. Your hardworking board realized that the old (Go Daddy) host made it too hard for us to manage the site and keep it current. Please check the website regularly because it should have new content, with pictures and announcements.
- In 2015 we held several board meetings electronically, via web-based conference calling. This feature worked well for us, and we hope it will allow you, the club members, to attend a board meeting from the comfort of your own home. We've made the change because your input in the club's activities and decision-making is important to us. Please consider attending a meeting or two this year.
- As you all know, we can't produce tests or seminars without help from all of you. In your 2016 membership renewals, many indicated willingness to help with our events. We need you all. Please watch for alert messages in your email boxes.

Please send any thoughts or ideas you have about the direction of the club to any member of the board as we are always interested in your thought and ideas. Our annual meeting will be on March 19, 2016 at the Westboro Senior Center.

We are looking forward to seeing you all in the warmer months ahead. I hope you have enjoyed the "Pieces from the Prez."

-- Martha

Remembering Marianne Wood

On June 13, 2015 the tracking world lost one of its earliest and greatest proponents and judges: Marianne Wood, who was 86. Marianne was born in 1929 in Arlington, MA, grew up in Groton on a family farm, and graduated from nursing school in 1950. She moved to Ayer, which would be her town of residence for nearly 60 years and where she worked as a registered nurse at the Ayer Community Hospital. Besides her three human daughters, she had a large family of German Shepherd Dogs that she showed in obedience and tracking. She was a long time member of the Tracking Club of Massachusetts, serving on and off as the Corresponding Secretary from 1984 to 2007. Her friends and fellow judges remember her below.



Her friend, Art Twiss: *I have known Marianne for so long that I cannot remember the exact time we first met; but she had a tremendous influence on my tracking career. Shortly after T.C.M. was formed she became one of our first new Club members. Marianne was strong willed, highly opinionated, extremely passionate about tracking, and a firm believer that any dog could track under any conditions if properly trained to do so.*

One needs to remember that A.K.C. Tracking in the late 1960's was not highly endorsed by your average dog owner. A few owners were interested in obedience and/or conformation showing, but 99+% of owners simply wanted a dog as a pet. It during this time period that the phrase - "A well balanced dog has a title on both ends of its name". That theme was pushed by the A.K.C. and obedience clubs across the country. Marianne accepted that concept and promoted it throughout her lifetime, even though she did not compete in the conformation ring. But she did push several local obedience clubs to adopt that idea and promoted tracking as a fun hobby to anyone who would listen to her. In essence, she was a pioneer "tracking promoter" and, in time, people followed her.

By the early to the mid-1970's, the Sport of Tracking started to take off and later a demand for an advance tracking title started to take shape. Canada had such a test. But the A.K.C. wanted to develop its own format and rules and asked for help from those involved with tracking --within T.C.M. that meant Ruth Ridings, Ted Sprague, Marianne, Carol Bolan, Ruthie, and myself. That request for "help" led to umpteen hours of heated debates among our group and our other club members. Practice sessions in the field were held to see if a specific idea about laying a cross track was doable. Marianne was right in the middle of those debates and sessions. The Concord Dog Training Club held early TDX events and several A.K.C. field reps would come to review what we were doing and offer comments. Again Marianne would offer her thoughts in no uncertain terms.

I will admit that my own views of tracking have been influenced to a large degree by Marianne Wood, Ruth Ridings, and Carole Bolan. Without their help, I'm not sure what my role would be in tracking today. I just hope that I can pass on what I have learned about tracking and be as stubborn as Marianne was in promoting the sport regardless of any negative influences upon it.



Her fellow judge, Mike Clemens: *The tracking community lost a true champion when Marianne Wood passed away. I always looked forward to judging for T.C.M. and working with Marianne. Marianne and I met in the mid-1980's when I first started judging. She and I hit it off right away, being fellow German Shepherd people. I always appreciated Marianne consulting me when she had a question on potential tracking fields for tests. She brought me in when she discovered High Ridge at Gardner and after driving me all over the huge area, we pulled off a double TDX test, putting in 11 TDX tracks! I can't count the number of times that Marianne had me judge for T.C.M., but it always worked out well. Marianne kept the tests going in spite of the volatile nature of T.C.M., because she was an incredible promoter of tracking. Even when she could barely walk, she would be there at the tests to encourage the participants and to give a hug for me. I will truly miss Marianne, although I don't think the same can be said for the Mass Troopers or the toll booth attendants who were subjected to her traveling terror mobile -- her Subaru full of a pack of German Shepherds.*



Her protégé, Martha Campbell: *I first met Marianne in March of 1994 at Concord Dog Training Center. She scared me right off. She noticed me as I walked into the center because I had a German Shepherd. (This was always Marianne's dog breed of choice.) My dog was pulling me into the doorway, and Marianne said in her loud, commanding, and strongly opinionated voice, "Unless you want that dog to pull you off your feet in 5 years, you'd better stop that behavior now."*

But, obedience was not Marianne's best suit. She loved tracking. After a few obedience classes I got to understand Marianne's passion for dogs and tracking. I was so interested in doing things with my dog, and she made tracking sound like fun while she was recruiting for helpers at the classes. I signed up to help out a tracking trial and that was where I met Art Twiss, Mike Clemens, Mary Thompson, Miles Garrod, and the rest of the founders of T.C.M.

That is when I saw the passion Marianne had for both tracking and dogs. She was straightforward and you always knew what she was thinking. I have never been able to walk a straight line – in fact, I was so poor at it that Marianne would get upset with me when trying to teach me to lay a straight track. What I thought was straight was not what she saw as straight. I thought she only communicated by yelling! I came to learn how important walking straight was at that first tracking trial. She always told me to look up when walking a track, and I struggled with this for a long time. During that first trial, I finally understood. I laid the track, the dog failed, my track was not straight, and I was not able to find the third corner. I did not know at that time, but Marianne had been watching me. I think she knew how bad I was ...

Rather than dismiss me as a future tracklayer, Marianne reached out to me after the trial, and wanted to work with me on laying tracks. She used tree lines, birds, clouds, planes, and all sorts of things to get me to look up when walking a track. I started to feel a passion for the sport myself. It was at that time that I understood Marianne and her commitment to tracking and the fun I could have with dogs. I wanted to learn exactly what she was teaching me and my dog as I saw my dog having fun at the sport.

Without Marianne, her passion for the sport, and her charismatic ways, I am not sure I would have continued on with tracking. Years went by and I became more and more involved, getting together at High Ridge, and laying tracks for others time and time again. If Marianne saw something she didn't like, she would make you watch, and watch, and watch others. Then and only then would she let you get a track in with your dog. See Marianne was forever in control of the tracks being laid and for whom. It was important to her that your dog have fun doing something so natural. More important we all did it her way ...

Thank you Marianne for your commitment and passion to the sport of tracking!

When It is All About the Handler's Body Language

In tracking, it is the handler's responsibility to allow the dog to do his or her job and to accurately read the dog's body language to understand when the dog has lost the track or is checking at corners, or has gone astray on a cross-track. But there are many things we do with our dogs besides tracking, such as agility or obedience (including rally), and these venues require the dog to pay attention to the handler's body language. For those of us who cross-train, it is important that we learn to take the responsibility for leading in those venues where we're in charge and for following in those venues where the dog is in charge.

So let's talk about a venue where we're in charge and need to provide adequate information for the dog to follow: obedience, and particularly the heeling part of obedience. Heeling is a difficult exercise. It has two main training components: the dog has to maintain a particular position at the handler's leg and simultaneously pay close attention to the handler so it can follow or even anticipate the handler's changing movements. And the dog must do all of this after only a single first command, without any additional verbal information or obvious help from the handler.

Competitive heeling is really a "dance" with the handler leading and the dog following. Good competitors give their dogs the right "lead" for each turn, halt, or change in pace so that the dog can react quickly and correctly. Good competitors carefully practice and program their body movements to give the dog the best communication. Their dogs also pay attention to them, because paying attention results in rewards from the handler for good performance. This means that good trainers practice eye position, head position, a certain type of walking, foot and shoulder movements that cue the dogs about changes in direction, and subtle changes in upright position of the torso that can cue changes in pace.

Dogs Communicate with Body Language

Dogs are biologically programmed to communicate with body language. Verbal noises are much less important to them, and when a handler works with their dog, the handler's body language has much more meaning to the dog than verbal commands. Handlers and many trainers think that they are teaching the dog to respond to verbal commands, but, in reality, the dog is also looking closely at all of the handler's body language. For those of you involved in agility, the position of the handler's eyes, feet, arms/hands, and chest are far superior cues for which obstacles the dog should take next, and this understanding forms the basis of the OneMind Dogs agility training program.

You can test the importance of your body cues in the following way: have your dog on leash and, assuming he or she knows the command sit, think of the command "sit" (without saying it) while doing all of the usual hand motions, body positions, and breathing you normally would do. Many dogs will sit without the verbal because the handler may lift up on the leash slightly, look at the dog, inhale, and do all the actions that precede or accompany the word "sit" when it is used. Many dogs will not perform a command unless they see the proper body actions that usually accompany it. Often the handler is making body motions they aren't even aware of, like lifting the hand holding the leash or a hand that usually holds a reward in training. If a handler really wants to test or train verbal commands, he or she should train until the dog responds with the handler's back to the dog or with the dog in another room out of sight.

Dogs Know the Emotional State of their Handlers

The senses of dogs are much keener than ours. They can hear and sense our breathing, our smell, and instantly analyze every movement of our hands, arms, and legs. They notice where their handler is looking, the rate, strength and length of the handler's stride, and they can probably hear their handler's heart beating when they are in heel position. They know what mood the handler is in, whether the handler is sick or tired, and what emotion the handler is experiencing. The handler is the leader, the "god" who hands out the good and bad stuff on a daily basis, and the dog quickly learns what body language is present when the "god" is angry or pleased. The key here is that the dog understands your various states and responds appropriately.

So what happens to the handler when they enter a competition? First of all, they usually invest in a great deal of extra training time. In other words, the handler has investment in the process. This time and financial investment creates an emotional investment. Added to this is the pressure of having to perform in front of peers. If the handler lets the emotional stress of entering the competition get to him or her, the handler starts to worry about the performance.

The stress raises the heart rate, sweating, breathing, etc.; hormone levels change until the handler is feeling half sick before the competition. The handler's reptilian brain is saying, "Let's get out of here", but the higher brain says, "No, I have to see this through" and the conflict within the handler's body gets worse. It's like the handler is unconsciously trying to rush the performance and get it over with, and this changes the handler's body language, voice, gait – everything. The dog is left wondering who the heck this person is, because it sure isn't the person with whom it normally trains.

Added to the altered emotional state of the handler is a change in voice and body movements. Verbal commands are given too quickly and too loudly. Hand signals are stiff, quick, and jerky. The dog isn't given time to mentally process the changes or the commands. To the dog, the handler even walks funny. The breath inhalation before the verbal command that the dog has become used to in training doesn't happen, or it happens and is held for a while, so the dog doesn't "hear" or see the precursors to the verbal command that the dog is used to. So the dog doesn't sit, or down or heel or whatever, because the dog doesn't see the body language and hear the verbal commands it is used to in training.

So what do we see on the obedience field with our dogs? Some try to leave. Some heel, but do so poorly and at some distance from the handler, some run to the nearest judge, and some just "take control" and do what they want. Every dog is different and some are more handler sensitive than others. The sensitive ones tend to wither, and the tough ones take over or ignore their handlers. Yes, competition is stressful, but if a handler can conquer their nerves in the competition ring, and train so that they and their dog perform under stress, their ring work will be better.

Don't Blame the Dog

If you are new to dog training, you may blame the problems on the dog. If you have some dog training knowledge, you know to blame the training, not the dog. And you continue to train for better performances.

What can a handler do to conquer stress? First of all, be aware of what is causing the performance problem. It is not the dog, it is the handler's emotional state. Practice deep breathing, and practice this during training when you are not stressed, just before you start your training routine, so the dog is not freaked out when it happens the first time in competition. The dog will get used to it and it will become part of the "start" routine and body language for the dog. The dog may even deep breathe with you!

Second, understand that the dog's performance depends heavily on the handler's emotions and how they affect the handler's body language. If compulsion and negative handler emotions have been part of the dog's training, and the dog perceives that handler is stressed during competition, dogs can be slow to come to the handler or become too stressed and shift into flight mode and go out of the ring. In short, the weaker dogs may resort to avoidance of the situation. Understanding that the handler's mood controls body language can give the handler the motivation to learn how to control their stress.

Some Training Exercises to Think About

Be aware of your body language as you train in obedience. Take note of when you inhale, exactly how your hand signals are given, how you walk, your footwork on turns, etc. Take note of what body language creates the best dog performance. Refine your signals, and, for heeling, your footwork. I walk in a particular way, kind of a half walk, half march, and it looks natural, but it is not the way I walk when I am out for a walk in the woods with my dog. When I walk in heeling mode, the dog knows instantly that we are heeling now, and my very gait serves as a command to follow along. If you can't do this yourself, have someone watch and coach you.

1. You can help your dog immensely with small signals like inhales (dogs that anticipate commands often move prematurely on a loud inhale), a half step in heeling before a turn, turning your head before a turn, etc., without causing point deductions as long as the movements look natural.
2. Standardize your body language and voice commands and practice them, even if you have to do them without the dog so you don't confuse the dog. While you're practicing your moves, use the time to practice a down or a sit stay for your dog. Make body movements, breathing and footwork second nature so that you don't have to think about them during competition, and do them the same way every time. Your dog will thank you.
3. Do some training after you have run around the field enough times so that your breathing is rapid and heart rate elevated. Give commands in this state and acclimate the dog to the changes in your commands and body language
4. Train as if you were going into a competition. Train at new locations as often as possible.

As you train, and as you perform at the competition, learn to shut out the outside world and concentrate on your dog. This helps to focus you on the most important thing out there: how you and your dog interact. Push the emotion aside and take charge. Notice how you are giving commands and how they affect the dog. If the dog missed a command, how should you practice this to fix the problem? An extra command might be needed, or you may need to use a different tone of voice. Learn to be "in the moment" and not get emotionally lost over a mistake. Mistakes will happen, so move on. Try to anticipate the next thing you have to do as a handler to maximize performance. Strategize how to get the maximum points out of an exercise.

Lastly, be realistic about your limitations as a team. Measure your performance against the last trial or training, not a perfect score. There are some things that a team may never get right. Older dogs may not be able to perform all the agility obstacles they did when young. Be honest about what you as a team can accomplish given your talents as a trainer, the time you have to train, and your dog, and don't try to push so hard that you cause your relationship with your dog to be damaged. If you and your dog can perform in a trial at a level that is 95% or better than what you do in training, you can be proud of that performance, because it tells you that your emotional control and handling are working in a high stress situation.

Good Luck & Have Fun!

-- Martha

Some Observations On Scent

What is scent? Scent is defined as an odor that is left behind as you walk, sit, run, or otherwise move. All persons will drop thousands of skin particles per second and up to 2 billion per day and these will represent our particular and individual "scent" as they include the soaps, lotions, shampoos, and powders we use on our skin as well as our own glandular secretions onto the surface of our skin through our sweat pores. Skin particles are light in weight and virtually invisible, so it is not something we can see, but they leave a trace or trail of where we have been.

The dog's olfactory sense is known to be a thousand times more sensitive than that of humans. As a result, they can smell these skin particles or scents that are left behind from anyone and can identify the distinct "odor" plumes of individual people via their complex olfactory system (see TCM Newsletter Volume 4 Issue 2, February 2011 for a detailed description of the canine olfactory system). This distinct odor will be on all things related to us: clothes, shoes, keys, anything we touch or hold, sit on, or wear.

One might equate our skin particles with maybe something like boxed baby cereal. If you were to take a leaf blower to a poured out box of baby food you might get a good idea of exactly what might happen to our scent on any given day. How that leaf blower might blow the cereal around would depend on the weather (dry, rainy, hot, cold, windy) and the terrain (flat, hilly, mountainous). This is something we must take into consideration and understand as we train our dogs and as a tracking judge watches a team working a track during a test.

If it is windy, what will happen to the scent as well as the dog?

The wind will affect the scent for any track. The direction of the wind, or the speed of the wind, will alter the dog's tracking of the tracklayer's scent and will affect what a judge might see a dog do on the track. Scent can list to one side or the other, or move fast depending on speed of the wind. The wind might cause swirling in a gully or around a given hill. These are just some of the things to consider on a windy day.

Is it raining? What will rain do to the scent left behind on plotting or test day?

The rain will typically hold the scent in place. Then, you will have to factor in possible run off from the heaviness of the rain. Is there a hill involved? Rain will pull the scent down the hill if dirt is the primary surface simply from run off. This will pull the dog off the track. These are things to consider when judging a dog on a track in rainy conditions.

Are there any obstacles that might stop or divert scent? How big? Where will the scent go if there is an obstacle?

What might be some of the obstacles involved? It could be a hedgerow, or a tree line, low lying bushes. A tree edge might stop the scent. Lower lying brushes might cause the scent to roll over the brush line, pulling the dog on the other side maybe, or cause a scent to pool in that area. These are some things to think about in terms of what scent can do.

What about temperatures? What will hot versus cold do to scent?

Well, have you ever heard the phrase “hot air rises”? Heat will cause scent to rise. Once the track is laid and the sun is out and getting hotter, the temperatures rise will cause the scent to rise and we should expect to see a dog’s nose also rise to follow the scent.

These are all the things important to understand about scent when watching a dog work a track, and this is why recording the weather conditions when you both lay a track and have your dog work a track is important. This is also why videotaping your tracks can be helpful as often you cannot typically see how your dog is following scent when you are in the moment behind your dog. But you can go back and review the tape and, with your recorded information about the conditions at that time, you often will be able to see that the dog was affected by an obstacle or lifted its head as the temperature got hotter, or stayed more strongly in the footfall of the track if it was raining. In addition to this being important information for the handler, this is vital information for judges to determine if a dog is on or off the track, and working or not working the scent in relation to the original track. The more you understand, the better you can judge both your own dog’s performance and the performances of dogs you might be helping to train or observing as part of a galley.



2016 TCM Upcoming

**Saturday, March 19 – Annual Meeting,
Westborough Senior Center, 4 Rogers Rd,
Westborough, MA from 2-4 pm**

**VST/TDU Practice Days (9 am) –
Westborough Industrial Park: March 19,
March 27, April 30, May 14, June 5, June
26, July 10**

**TD/TDX Practice Days (9 am) – High Ridge
Wildlife Management Area, Gardner: April
10, May 8, May 28, June 18, July 4**

**Beginner's Tracking Clinic – April 23-24 at
High Ridge Wildlife Management Area,
Gardner (15 working spots; unlimited
auditors)**

**VST Tracking Clinic – May 21-22 at
Westborough Industrial Park**

**TDX Tracking Clinic – July 30-31 at either
High Ridge Wildlife Management Area or
Chase Farm (RI)**

**TDX Trial, October 9 – High Ridge Wildlife
Management Area, Gardner, MA**

**VST/TDU Combined Trial, October 30 –
Westborough industrial park,
Westborough, MA**

**TD Trial, November 6 – High Ridge Wildlife
Management Area, Gardner, MA**

See the TCM Website for details on upcoming 2016 meetings and events.

Also, please encourage your training buddies to join TCM. Membership rates are:

\$10.00 for Junior Members

\$15.00 for Associate Members

\$20.00 for Full Voting Members

NOTE: TCM hats (\$10) and bumper magnets (\$10) are available for purchase. We also have the old edition of *Tracking! A Practical Guide to the TD and TDX* available for \$10.00 or the newest edition for \$20.00. Contact Martha Campbell at kcans@comcast.net if interested in any of these items.



And if you lay track for the club, you will receive a tracklayer patch!

