



Tracking and the Doberman

by Marjorie Salisbury Tracking and Obedience Judge

If as Doberman Pinscher owners you are looking for another facet of enjoyment within the Fancy, working with your Doberman in tracking can be a most enjoyable experience for you and your dog. The Doberman's hunting and retrieving ability, his energetic nature, his sensitivity, and his affectionate feeling toward his owner, and his desire to please, all enter into the potential of his being a superior tracking dog.

As you look at your ten year old veteran, or your nine week old puppy and think "not now", well! why not now? Tracking to a dog of any breed is an instinctive thing, and any Doberman could track his owner-friend anywhere without any preparatory training. If you wish to prepare your Doberman to enter an AKC tracking test all you have to do is to work with him to build up his incentive and enthusiasm for the prescribed task, and above all else you must work with your dog, and learn how to follow him for the time when victory is in sight.

Tracking is considered to be a type of obedience exercise and a dog that passes an AKC tracking test earns the title of Tracking Dog (T.D.) after his name. Obedience should be team work between dog and handler. Tracking must be team work. The one thing that must always be remembered is that you are building his enthusiasm and in the meantime you are learning to read your dog as you follow him. I am sure by now you have thought of many reasons why you just couldn't do it. Getting up early? One of the best times to work together is in the early evening just before his feeding time. No grass? One Doberman I know was trained in a suburban area by working on sidewalks and neighbor's lawns, and passed the AKC test in his first attempt. The time span between the start of training and the T.D. could be as short a period as a month, or perhaps six months. This will depend on you. A dog can be started at any age, and need not have any other obedience degrees.

Once you have decided that this delightful experience with your dog is for you, read the sections in all three chapters of the AKC Obedience Regulations that pertain to tracking.

EQUIPMENT

Also you will need a harness that you can purchase or make (Figure 1 and 2) and about eight stakes that should be used to mark the turns. The type of stake you use will depend entirely on the section of the country in which you live. Tomato stakes in soft ground can be used and stakes with a metal pin on the bottom are useful in harder dirt. Yellow or International orange flags are the easiest to see. You will also need a lead 20-30 feet in length. This may be of any material so long as it is comfortable for you to handle. Don't use the dog's regular walking or obedience lead with an extension tied on it. The equipment used in



tracking is strictly for tracking. The article you use for the dog to find may be his favorite toy, or a ball, or a glove. The article must be something that will be fun for the dog to find. If you start with a glove then there will be no necessity of changing later. A glove is fun to find if there is a little goodie sitting on top of it. Later the goodie can be inside the glove, or the goodie can be in the handler's pocket for the dog when he finds the glove. Two other most important items: a jug of water and the dog's water dish.

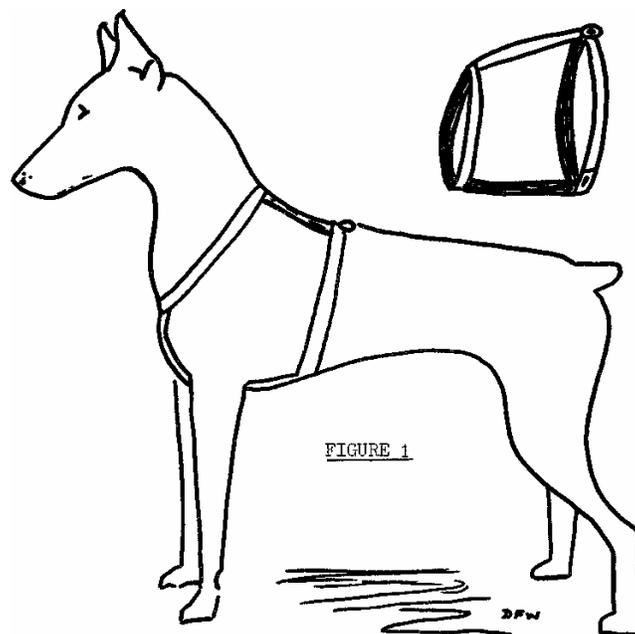


FIGURE 1

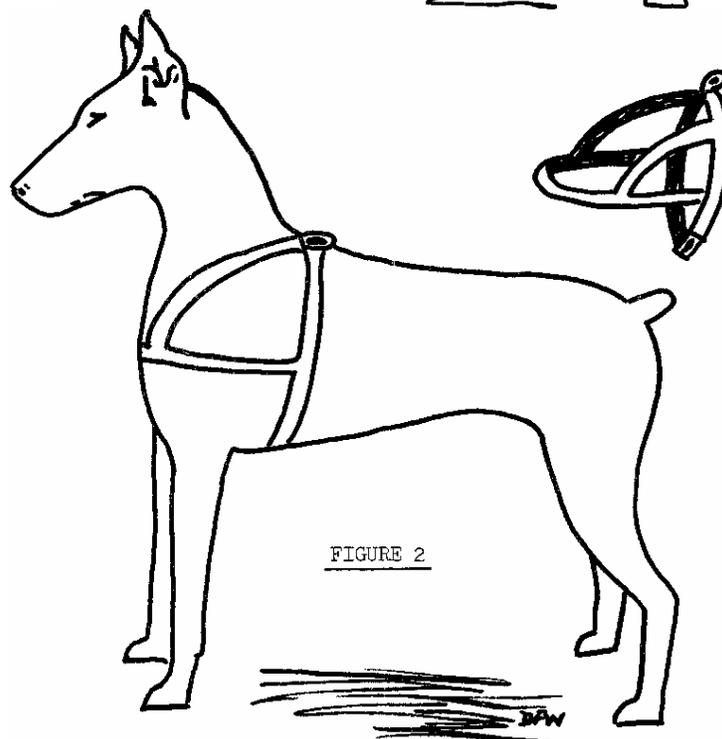


FIGURE 2



Your dog has probably never had a harness on before, so for a few days prior to starting him in the field put the harness on him at home to let him become accustomed to it. Leave it on for a short time each day so that when he has it on for the first time in the field it will seem natural to him.

The type of cover you start in actually makes very little difference to the dog because he will be tracking you, and he could track you anywhere even at this point, but to make it as easy as possible for him at first the cover should be grass anywhere from 4 to 10 inches high and full, and without trees or bushes in the immediate area.

From the first time you take your dog out into the field it should be an enjoyable experience for him, and always you must think of his comfort uppermost. For you it should be dead seriousness, but with your dog you must maintain an attitude of "Hey! wasn't that fun." Verbally it is always "good boy, good", always praise. Later on when corrections must be made if the dog takes off after a rabbit or a bird or picks up something in the field other than the correct article or just "goofs off" give a quick verbal correction, "No", and immediately "good boy, Track". Never use the lead to make a correction.

One other word of caution, don't practice or use obedience in the field, other than to keep the dog under normal control. Don't make your dog do a sit-stay while he is watching you go out with the glove. If later on you want the dog to down at the first stake and to pick up the glove and bring it to you, teach these exercises at home so that it will be a natural thing for him to do it in the field on command.

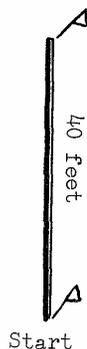
THE FIRST TRACK

The first lesson in the field should be on a happy note. The dog should be feeling well and he should be hungry. The temperature should be moderately cool and a wind from 7 to 15 mph. would be helpful. When you are ready to start put the harness on the dog with the lead that you are going to use. Have the dog sit in your car where he can watch you, or have a friend hold him on lead outside the car, but where he can see just what you are doing. Your first track should be laid directly into the wind. Go into the field about 10 feet, put a stake into the ground and stand by it. There is no need to scuffle the ground. If you were to scuffle the ground, and then lean over and smell, you would smell freshly scuffled ground naturally. The dog should have just a path of your scent and the resulting scent from where you walked in a natural manner. When your first stake is in the ground, turn to your dog and show him the glove, wave it at him, (a couple of keys tied to the glove will make the dog notice the glove more, and actually it may be more fun for the dog to go out and find something that makes a noise.) Talk to the dog, tell him you are going to "hide" it. Do anything to make the dog watch what you are doing. Make your dog know that this is a brand new game that is a heck of a lot of fun. Emote as you never have before. When you leave



the stake walk directly toward a tree or bush or pole in the near distance for about 40 feet. Wave the glove over your head a few times. Drop the glove at your feet while the dog is watching you, put in the second stake, and don't forget to put a goodie right on top of the glove. Walk directly back to the first stake over the same path. (Figure 3). Take your dog immediately, and say "track, let's find it." Your dog will probably go right out to see what you put there. When he gets there and puts his head down for the glove or the goodie, that is the psychological moment for all the praise in the world from you. Let him eat the goodie, then throw the glove in the air, jump around, the two of you have a "ball". Wasn't that the best game you two ever played together? Would you believe that that is all there is to tracking? Basically that is it; from the first track over any type of terrain, at any time of day, different ages of track, and under any conditions. Learn his style of tracking and how to read him.

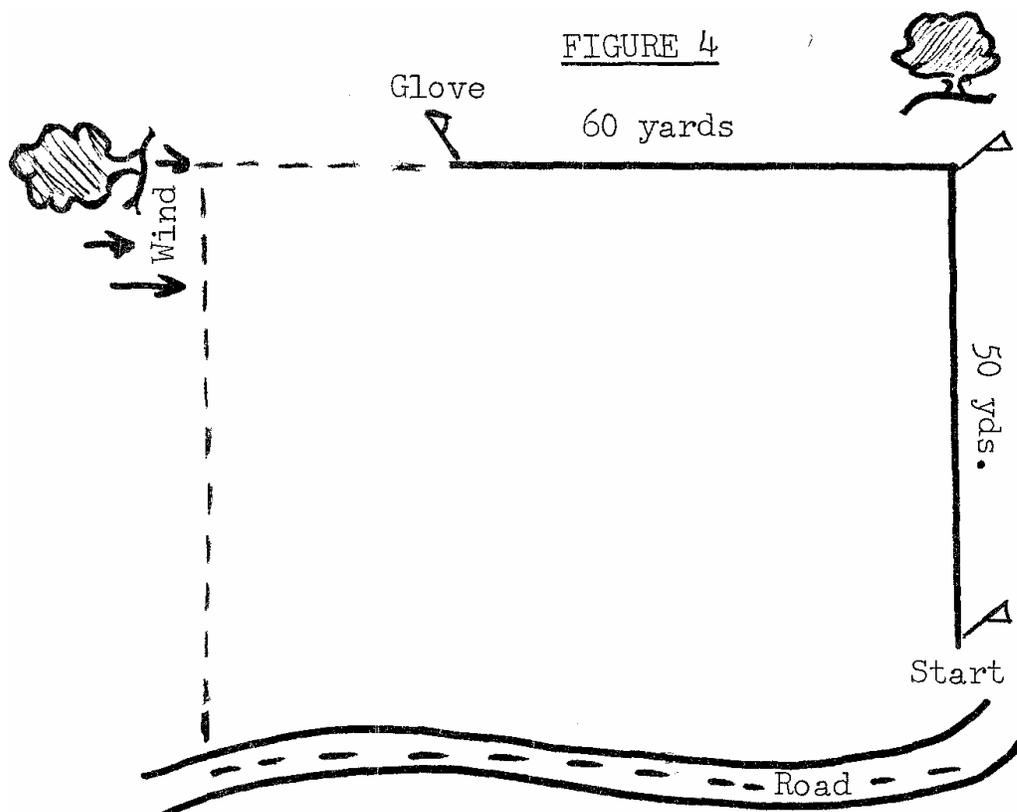
FIGURE 3



The tracks that you lay for your dog from the start should be a gradual build up. Never progress ahead of your dog's enthusiasm. Always lay a track in a new area. Don't reuse the same area within a week. If other people or animals have been in the field it is perfectly alright that you use it for track. With your first tracks that go directly into the wind lay as many as four tracks within 20 yards of each other, and make each track longer until you have reached a distance of 200 feet or more. When your dog is going out for the glove with enthusiasm then introduce the first right angle turn to him. From this stage of your training, walk only single track, but always remember to walk straight toward something. This is most important, When working behind your dog you will be gently holding him in a straight line, and if you didn't walk a straight line, then what? The dog will eventually say to himself, "O.K. let him do it if he knows so much." (I thoroughly believe that Guide Dogs know that their handlers can't see, and tracking dogs will eventually realize that their handlers can't track if you will follow the dog where he



knows the track is.) You *can't* track by scent, you know.

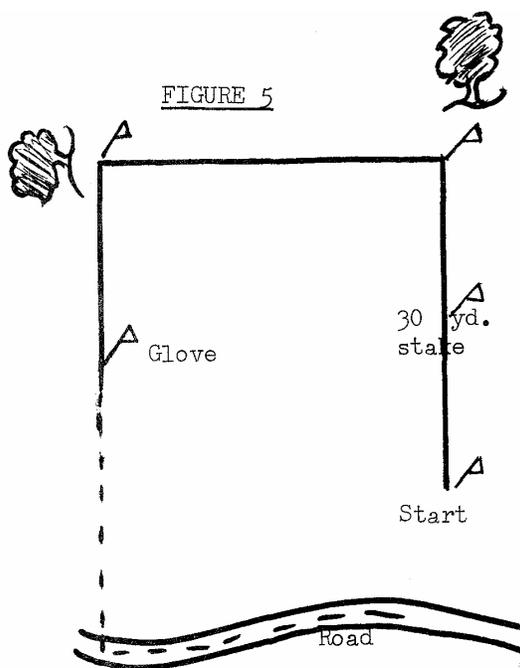


SECOND TRACK

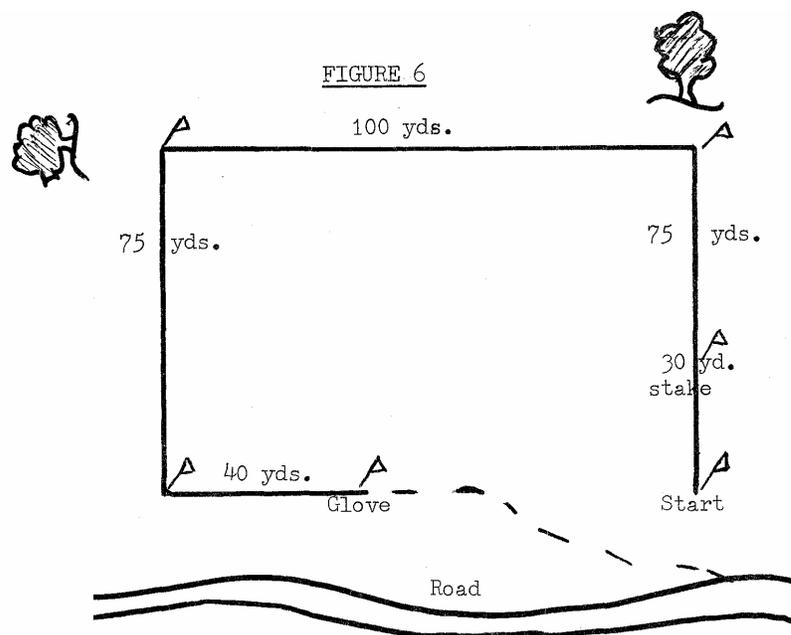
The second type of track introduces the first right angle turn. (Fig. 4.) Lay the first leg of the track across the wind, and then make the first turn directly into the wind. Make the first leg approximately 50 yards long and the second leg at least 50 yards long. Put a stake where the turn is and also exactly where the glove is is, and then walk ahead at least 50 feet, make another right angle turn and walk out of the field. You have now made a square box track, but you will track your dog only on the first two legs.

THIRD TRACK

The third type of track should be a three sided square with legs of equal length, (Figure 5), or a track that is rectangular with the glove dropped on the fourth leg, (Figure 6), but at a distance of at least 40 yards from the start. In practice the last leg of the track on which the glove is at the end should never be a short leg.

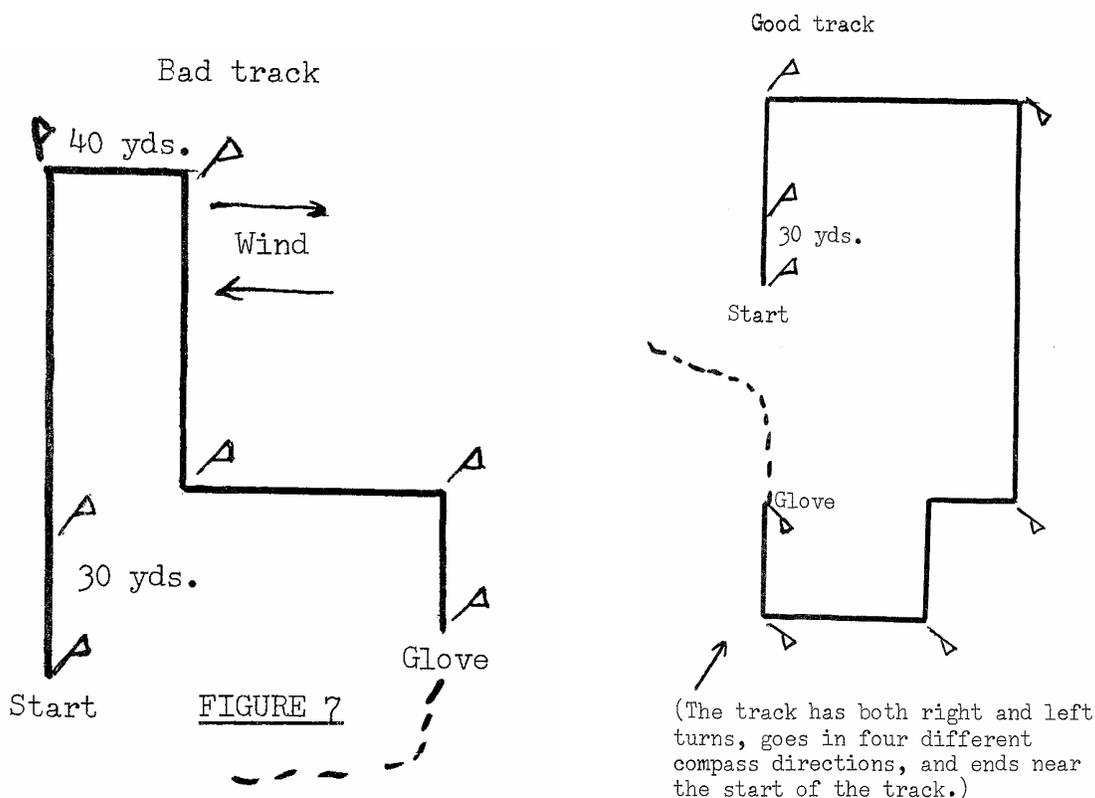


The last leg of a track should always be at least 40 to 50 yards long. A dog should not learn to cut a short leg to a glove. Once a dog has found out that it is more fun to search for a glove in a field, believe me, the dog and you have had it as far as tracking to the article is concerned. After the dog has learned how to make a turn on the second type of track, then disregard the wind when you are laying track, because the dog must work tracks under any wind condition, *but* you must take the wind into consideration when the dog is working the track.





Don't do anything to confuse the dog. Don't walk parallel legs separated by less than 70 yards, particularly in a strong cross wind because that could be most confusing to a dog. (Figure 7). Feasibly the dog could go across the parallel legs, and still be following the air scent. If a dog seems utterly confused on a track and just doesn't do it, that is the time you should stop and figure out what you did wrong. It could be that you were in the same field four days earlier, you didn't walk the 100 feet straight ahead after you dropped the glove as you should have, or maybe you were trying to lead the dog too much away from where he knew the track was. When laying track always use stakes, and put them on the turns! Your dog will not learn that a stake designates a turn, he may smell of the stake, naturally because it has your scent on it. If you still want to prove this to yourself, put a stake in the middle of a straight leg and see what happens. Of course the dog will track in a straight line, that is where you laid the track. Always know where the track goes.



SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

The length of the track and the number of tracks in one day, and how many times a week you go out together will depend entirely on you and your dog. A possible guide would be, four of the straight line tracks in one day, two or three of the two legged tracks in one day, and two tracks of possibly 250 yards each. You are not building up the distance the dog can track, you are building up his enthusiasm for the game. On a new type of cover make the tracks short and successful and fun.



If on one day your dog has done a full length track (440 to 500 yards) the next time you take him out make the track short, possibly 150 yards, and a lot of fun. Remember the enthusiasm. Three tracking sessions a week would be a good norm.

To age a track, go out with your dog one day and let him see you lay a track, return to the car and drive to another field and lay another track, then work him on the second track that you laid, then return to the first track and work him on that. Doing this, the first track has aged at least half an hour or more. Now the dog has learned that when he is taken up to a stake in a strange field and he has his harness on he should track.

PROPER HANDLING

The way you handle the dog is very important and it is essential that you do it correctly and with understanding of what your dog is doing. After your dog has learned that if he follows your path of scent there will be a reward at the end, either the goodie, a short play time or whatever, and the dog is going out with eagerness, then is the time to start holding him back and making him pull into the harness, but at the same time urging him ahead, with a "good boy, good boy." The lead should never be tight so that it will tire the dog, but it should be firm so that the dog will have the feeling that the two of you are working together. That is what you are doing you know. When using a firm lead all of a sudden you will notice that the lead will go slack, and it will happen in the vicinity of a turn. When in a test your lead slackens, that is the dog indicating to you that there is a turn in the vicinity. Let the dog work it out. In practice when you know in which direction the turn goes, keep quiet while the dog is working the turn. Sometimes dogs will go to where the scent isn't before they will go to where the scent is. Never say "track" when your dog is going in the wrong direction, wait until the dog comes around to the correct direction or guide him gently around and when he is on it say "good boy, track," and *go with him* again using the firm lead. Don't ever run with your dog. The two of you may get to going so fast that you will out run the scent on the track, and then where will you be? Neither one of you are on the track, that is for sure. When you are working your dog in a test and the lead slackens and the dog seems confused, back up. You will not be guiding the dog, you will be giving him more area in which to work. Maybe you were standing on the turn, or possibly he had over-shot the turn.

It is hard to give a rule of thumb on how close to keep a dog to the track. Each dog has his own style. It would be ideal if every dog tracked in the foot-steps of the track layer but they don't. That is not where the guide line of the path of scent is for some dogs. If you have a dog that uses the ground scent, be happy. If you have a dog that air scents, try to keep him within reasonable confines of the 30 foot lead taking into consideration the wind.

In your handling never forget the praise when the dog finds the glove, and at the



end of the session for the day let the dog go for a romp in the field, off lead naturally, or take him for a swim, or let him have a game of chase-tag with the other dogs. Anything that he enjoys, so that the next time you get the harness out at home you will be overwhelmed with perhaps 100 pounds of eagerness in a Doberman bundle. Always think of the dog's comfort. Don't make him sit in a hot car while you go for an hour for a short coffee, don't make him track in fields full of burrs or sand spurs. In other words don't do anything that will make him think, "heck! that wasn't much fun".

TRAINING TIPS

Some of the following suggestions may be of assistance in working with your dog. Establish in your mind a rule of thumb for distance. Five or six feet is about your height, 100 feet could be the front footage on your home property, 45 of your steps could be 30 yards, 100 yards is the playing length of a football field. Use different gloves for your dog to find, cloth or leather, small or large, light or dark, and use wallets sometimes. Never track your dog after feeding him, you both will work better when hungry. Establish a routine with your dog when he is about to track. At a test you usually know when your dog has the next track. Exercise him well before he is to track. When you have been given the word that the judges are ready for your dog, put the harness on him near the car, or at least 50 feet from the first flag. Offer your dog a drink in case he is thirsty. Check the goodie in your pocket if that is part of the ritual. If in your training you have had the dog sit or lay down at the stake do so in the test, and place him on the down wind side. Keep his head high on the way to the stake so that he will not get ten other scents up his nose. Never use the lead to make a correction, use a verbal correction when the dog takes off after a bird or a rabbit or whatever. If you use the lead to make a correction a bush may do the same thing in a test and the dog immediately will think he is wrong. You may talk to your dog while he is working, but it would be better if you just let him work without you keeping up a nervous chatter behind him. Never use the dog's name while he is working, he might return to you. When practicing in the field have one or two friends follow you at a distance. The judges may do this at a test, and if your dog is protective or inquisitive, it may throw him off completely.

Don't listen to all the "old wive's tales" to which you will be subjected. Everyone knows that dogs track better early in the morning, rain and hot sun ruin a track, dogs can't track up wind, automobile exhaust kills the scent, it is harder for dogs to track on a windy day. Don't you believe it. Learn what your dog shows you and believe him. He is the expert.

If at sometime you work with a breed other than a Doberman Pinscher, and the dog seems reluctant to track, there are several things you might try to build up the dog's interest. Have your dog watch you work with another dog in the field and let him see how much fun the other dog has and the praise and goodie you give him. That method can work wonders. Make the dog track you through the



back yard for his supper. Don't let him search for it, make him track for it. With a small dog, several gloves dropped along the track lends encouragement. This, incidentally, is good training for any breed.

Never work your dog on a stranger's track until he is certified, and then not again until the dog is entered in his first test. There is absolutely no necessity to work with a dog on a stranger's scent. Once a dog has learned that there is always a reward for him at the end of the track, the track to him becomes a path to the reward. It makes no difference to him what the scent of the track is.

If in training the Doberman the handler has built up the dog's incentive and enthusiasm with good training and has learned the dog's style and through teamwork a mutual confidence and faith have developed, the result will be an excellent Doberman tracking dog.