

Subject: 2425 miles for Jeff . . . and a few extra yards for Jack

I just wanted to give everyone a quick note about my travels to the greater Chicago area with "Jack" to take a stab at his VST title to make him a Champion Tracker. After driving 2425 miles, buying 137 gallons of gasoline, and spending 40 hours in the car, Jack managed to pass his VST test despite my best efforts to ruin his hard work. First, I wanted to thank all of the folks in the Glenbard Training Club for their hospitality and offer particular thanks for Vickie, the tracklayer for track no. 2 which was Jack's track.

Judges for this event were John and Darlene Barnard from Batavia, Illinois. I was very happy to be able to complete Jack's champion tracker title under Mr. Barnard since he was one of the judges involved in awarding Jack his TDX title in Kansas City a couple of years back.

I knew it was going to be a good test when the Rottweilers that were entered drew tracks 1 and 2. Track 1 was originally scheduled to start around 7:30, but due to some track difficulties, had to be moved to an 8:00 starting time. The Rottie on track 1 tracked very well but did not pass. By the time track 2 was scheduled to start, it had already gotten dark. I am assuming the Judges anticipated tracks 1 and 2 running in daylight. Consequently, track 2 was plotted with a start in an area of the campus of Northern Illinois University where there was little or no lighting. In fact, the start looked like a TDX field. I did have a small flashlight with me however, on the second leg the flashlight fell apart and the batteries poured out into the dark field. I was unable to retrieve any of the "parts" consequently, ran most of the track that was in an unlit area without the aid of a flashlight.

Jack started strong in an open area of grass. He pulled a little to the right toward a creek line but came back to the track after each venture. I didn't know it at the time but the first turn was a right turn across a wooden bridge over the creek. The bridge could not be seen due to growth of vegetation around it. Also, the first leg was full of fireflies which Jack had apparently never seen or noticed before. He thought these were quite interesting and spent some time standing and staring at them. When you turned toward the right and headed to the creek, I thought he was simply checking out the creek again but after we got closer, I realized there was in fact a wooden bridge there. He crossed the bridge quickly and proceeded up another hill along a tree line with several residential yards (and no fencing) to the left. I was warned that there might be barking dogs on this track so at this point anticipated being accosted by loose dogs. It must of been past their bedtime as we had no visitors from these yards. Since I don't have my map back from the Judges yet, I'm not sure of the length of any of these legs or the exact position of the turns. The second leg seemed to be a fairly long leg up a hill into an open field. Jack apparently overshot this second turn by a few yards but made several loops to the right then pulled me to back up until he got back to the corner. He then made a right turn and proceeded across the field and down toward the campus. From what I understand he was tracking a few feet left of the actual track. This leg contained a clear plastic article. Since my flashlight had already died by this point, there was no way I could see the article however, when we got near it Jack pulled me to the article and stood over it.

After getting the plastic article (the first was leather), Jack immediately took off down the hill toward the same creek which wound it's way back towards campus. About this time among the several tents set up a few hundred yards away for a bike rally, someone decided to set off fireworks. Since Jack really hates fireworks, I thought for sure we would be finished at this point. After stopping and staring for just a moment, he proceeded down the hill and made a left turn then a right, which took us over another wooden bridge and onto concrete. At this point, he could have gone to the right next to a building or followed a concrete path between a building and a lake. He took a left pretty quickly following the concrete pathway. A few yards later next to a bench, he stood over the metal article. By this time, I started sweating as I thought we might actually have a chance at finishing this one. After a quick sip of water and pocketing the metal article, Jack proceeded along the lake and between the building. At the edge of the building he had the opportunity to continue left along the lake or make a right turn across varying patches of concrete, driveway and grass between 2 buildings to the right. He briefly checked the pathway by the lake and took a right turn. This was pretty much an uphill leg between the 2 buildings

over various surfaces. He checked out several nooks and crannies in the building. He then made a left turn a few yards before the actual moment of truth turn. He crossed a fairly wide driveway and headed straight for the side of the building to the left. There were 2 cars parked there. I did not have a flashlight to look under the cars but got down on my knees to check and make sure there was no article hiding under them. I didn't think the track had been long enough yet but he was indicating that the track did go to the left so I wanted to make sure. There were 3 gentlemen sitting in the second car. As Jack got within a couple feet of the vehicle, they all rolled up the windows! After finding no article, Jack went back the way he had come and proceeded up the hill.

As I said earlier, I don't have the map so I can't be sure about this, but I believe the last turn was a moment of truth turn on concrete. It was in the middle of a fairly wide expanse of driveways and sidewalks surrounded by grass on various sides. He did indicate a possible turn to the left and proceeded straight ahead for a few yards into a grass area with some Evergreen trees. He went around several of these trees, looking under them. Consequently, I checked to make sure there were no articles there. He then went back onto the concrete and checked to the right. Finding nothing of particular interest in that area other than a dumpster which he did walk around, he then went back to the left and made the moment of truth turn although probably at more of a 45 than a 90 degree angle. This put him on some grass probably 70 yards from the final article. After looking for a few seconds in the grass, he continued to head to the left and pulled back toward the concrete next to the building where the final article, a sock, was located.

Upon arriving at the sock, I picked it up but found nothing marking it as the number 4 article. I held it up to the Judges but heard no applause from the gallery or the judges. Consequently, I was not sure if we had finished and maybe had found an extraneous article. I started to put the article in my backpack to continue when apparently the judges and tracklayer conferred that this was placement for the final article. At that point, I heard applause and realized that we had in fact, passed.

As all of you know, these are titles that we all work very hard for. We put our dogs through a lot. In this case however, since Jack got to sleep 40 hours in the vehicle and I had to sit up and drive, I think he got the better end of the deal. I want to thank all of you who have supported Jack and I over the last few years in training, showing, and giving us advice. It's now time to move on to "Lang" to try and duplicate the effort.

Jeff Shaver

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