

their dogs than of their kids! Please try to restrict your negative comments to phone calls and private messages. Regardless of your intention, it is so easy for things to be misunderstood and cause hard feelings that can take years to repair. —*Jodi Quesnell*; idawiregwps@isp.com; *German Wirehaired Pointer Club of America website*: gwpc.com

Chesapeake Bay Retrievers

Guest columnist Doreen Palmer has owned, trained, and shown Chesapeakes for 35 years.

The AKC National Tracking Invitational

The AKC National Tracking Invitational! This is the Holy Grail for tracking enthusiasts around the United States. A dog must be a Champion Tracker (CT) to be invited. A CT is attained after the dog has earned all three tracking titles (TD, TDX, and VST). Since 1995 around 300 dogs have earned a CT. Ten tracks are offered at each of the Invitationals, which have been held every other year since 2003. Tracks at the Invitational are modified TDX/VST tracks. A dog follows the track of the tracklayer as closely as possible, indicating dropped articles along the way. The tracks are 600 to 800 yards long and aged two to four hours.

The passing rate at the Invitational is low—which is why it was such an incredible thrill to not only be invited to the Invitational, but to pass with one of the most remarkable dogs I've ever had the honor to track with, Zephyr—CT Eastern Waters' Sea Zephyr, VCD3, RE MX, MXJ, NF, CGC, WD.

I started tracking in Juneau, Alaska, in 1993 and was hooked. I am totally in awe when following a tracking dog. It is amazing that they can follow one particular scent among all the others.

When I started tracking, my mentor told me that tracking with a Cheshire was like being behind a Mack truck. He was right! Having mentored many breeds, I have yet to find one that tracks like a Cheshire.

Our first dogs, Ch. Chesachobee's Taku Winds, VCD3, MX, MXJ, and Eastern Waters' Hornpipe, VCD3, MX, AXJ, were unbelievable trackers, never missing a footprint. It was fortunate I had those two to "warm up" on, because if they were Mack trucks, then Zephyr is a monster truck!

Zephyr started tracking at 8 weeks old. Since then he's been wild about tracking. All our dogs start by working a short track every day for a week. Then we switch to once a week, working up to full tracks, extending time or length or working on bits and pieces. We track in all weather, day or night, and we track everywhere there is enough space to lay a track.

Zephyr earned his TD at a year old, at the 2006 Ohio national; his TDX a year later, at the 2007 Colorado national; and his VST/CT, at not quite 5 years old, in Maryland in 2010.

Competing at the Invitational was an incredible thrill. When asked about our track, I have to reply that I'm not sure of the details. I was so busy concentrating on staying on my feet—Zephyr ran his track in nine minutes—that I really didn't see much of it. I do know that it was 630 yards long, aged 2½ hours, and went through woods, hayfields, pine trees, and across a bridge.

Everyone at the Invitational was wonderful, from the AKC staff to the volunteers, competitors, and spectators.

One of the most memorable things was learning that our tracklayer knew Millie Buchholz, longtime Cheshire breeder, tracking mentor, and friend. Millie has been gone awhile, but I know she was cheering us on.

The experience at the Invitational was the thrill of a lifetime. —D.P.

Thank you, Doreen. —*Nat Horn*; Kcboy0@yahoo.com; *American Chesapeake Club website*: amchessieclub.org

Curly-Coated Retrievers Backing Up!

In obedience, being able to enter the optional titling classes now offered by the AKC has been interesting. I have

used these classes as stepping-stones into the next higher level. However, my plan for entering my Curly in her next obedience trial will be to take a step or two *backward*.

I am doing this as my bitch has been out of training for five months as of writing this column. She recently had a litter of eight puppies, and before breeding her we had been traveling quite a bit.

When training Curlies, one needs to keep it fun. She is not yet ready to enter the Utility ring, nor is she ready yet for the graduate Open class. However, I want to return to obedience as soon as possible. We are going to step back to the Beginner Novice class and hope to make this a positive experience.

I realize that some people may not agree with this plan, but I want a happy attitude, and I like the little bit of rally steps in the class. I know that the two of us can have fun, and the stress level will not be there. Then on to Graduate Open!

While on the subject of the optional titling class, please learn by my mistake. I went into the Graduate Novice class before entering the Open level. My big mistake was that foolishly, I did not teach both ways over the broad jump.

In Graduate Novice, one is allowed to stand on the opposite end of the broad jump, facing the dog, and call the dog over toward you and have him finish. When going into the Open class level, however, the handler must stand to the side of the broad jump, and as the dog jumps over it the handler turns to receive the dog, who then finishes. My big challenge in Open was that after she jumped over the broad jump, I had to try a lot of different methods to get her to come around to the side, as I had only trained her to go over directly toward me at the opposite end.

She did earn her CDX title recently, but not without entering quite a few trials. —*Ann Shinkle*; amshinkle@aol.com; *Curly-Coated Retriever Club of America website*: ccra.org