

# K9 Nose Work® in Canada

Donna Toews

**A new canine sport is being discovered by dogs across the US and Canada.**

Most important, this activity is FUN!

The dogs are happy to apply their natural abilities to hunt and handlers are thrilled to be part of the excitement. All dogs and humans can do this sport: senior, young, infirm, reactive, "untrainable". All dogs are worked individually, no dog-sport experience is necessary, and it's likely the "greenest" sport since we use cardboard boxes and the world as our arena.

In the sport side of K9 Nose Work®, the teams (dog and handler = a team) are instructed through a process of ritual to work together to find odor. There is a ritual of changing into specific working gear, waiting at a start line, defining the activity with a signal (verbal and/or physical), and rewarding the dog when the nose touches the source of the odor. The ritual helps develop effective communication in the team.

It has been said that a dog's first solid sense is the sense of smell because a pup must find the teat in order to survive and does so by locating the odor. And that the last sense to extinguish is the sense of smell... defined by the last breath... and in between birth and death, a dog scents and discriminates millions of odors in its lifetime. Discovering which odors pay!

If we take this information into account, it would confirm that there is really nothing we can teach our dogs about odor!

K9 Nose Work® co-founder, Ron Gaunt was invited by Ona Steffensen of K9 Connections to give the first seminar in Canada in February 2011. It was a day of adventure and discovery. Through the use of cardboard boxes, the working teams were shown how to engage their dogs in hunting for food rewards. It did not take long for the dogs to willingly participate... after all, no one can teach them how to use their noses.

In the sport, teams progress to work on identifying three specific, chemically-unique essential oils: birch, anise and clove. The dog is first trained on the odor of birch. The essential oil is dropped onto cotton swabs and the swabs are put in metal containers or "hides" and put out for the dog to find. Dogs are rewarded when they complete successful searches.

Teams find the "hides" in four elements: containers, interiors, exteriors and vehicles. Each element presents different challenges and the first rule of K9 Nose Work® is canine safety in the search environment. Handlers are responsible to check out all areas before running their dogs. Handlers may work their dogs off-leash in interior searches if they choose but other searches are done on-lead for safety.

As each dog becomes "odor obedient" they can take an Odor Recognition Test where the team must inspect a room containing approximately 24 boxes (all the same size and colour!) and indicate which box contains the odor. ... in a time under three minutes. Once they have proven themselves in that event, they can go to trial. The trial levels are specific to the odors... NWI tests the dog's hunting ability on birch, NWII on birch and anise and NWIII on birch, anise and clove. With each level, there is increased difficulty for the teams... added distractions, higher placement of hides and varying time limits.

## **K9NW changes relationships.**

Whether a handler decides to test their training in a trial, it really doesn't matter to the dog. Dogs, who participate in finding odor... change. Reactive dogs ignore things to hunt. Senior dogs engage in life again... deaf dogs working without verbal direction and blind dogs working independently. Dogs in carts due to spine degeneration eagerly and successfully win at the game. Frustrated dogs lose destructive behaviour to focus on the search. Shy dogs reach a level of confidence that nothing else could reach.

There are huge changes in the human part of the team too... frustrated handlers who said their dogs are dumb, see their dogs in a whole new light. Handlers who were giving their dogs "one last chance" do a 180° turn and embrace this activity as a life-saver. Handlers who "control" their dogs, step back and let the dogs take the lead.

This is something that we can do for the life of the dog and while we may take holidays in training, the dog never unscrews his nose for a holiday. He practices with each breath and is therefore, the master!



## K9 Nose Work® in Canada (Continued)

For more information about K9 Nose Work® sport visit: [www.nacsw.net](http://www.nacsw.net)

For future seminars contact Ona Steffensen directly at [k9ona@shaw.ca](mailto:k9ona@shaw.ca), or visit K9 Connections at [www.brookswoodshepherds.com/k9\\_connections.htm](http://www.brookswoodshepherds.com/k9_connections.htm)

Ona Steffensen and her German Shepherd Mylie will be aiming for K9 Nose Work® titles next year, and are presently taking classes with Donna Toews.

Donna Toews (CPDT-KA, ANWI) participates in the sport by teaching it locally, travelling to the US for lessons every week, volunteering at events, competing and proceeding with certification with the founders. She is the first Canadian K9 Nose Work® instructor to title a dog.

For class locations and times, visit: [www.reflectionpetservices.com](http://www.reflectionpetservices.com)

*Clubs, please notify the Editor  
of show info and results.*

## Reminder

**This is the last issue for Business Cards if not renewed,  
for the Gazette and the GSDCC Website.**

**This is the last issue for those who have not renewed  
their memberships to the GSDCC.**

**A renewal form was included in your Sept/Oct issue.**