



# BMDCA Info Series

**Bernese Mountain Dogs & Scent Work**

**2023 #24**

**Introduction** ► One of the newest performance sports is Scent Work / Nose Work. A dog's sense of smell is incredible; it is ten thousand to one hundred thousand times greater than ours. Dogs can distinguish among smells that we can't even detect. Where we smell a combination of odors, such as pumpkin pie spice, a dog will smell cinnamon, clove, and ginger, all as individual smells.

**Where to Start** ► Your dog already knows how to use his nose. We observe our dogs sniffing all the time. They explore their environments with their noses. It is a good way to let them get to know a new place and relax. Allowing this sniffing time benefits their emotional health and well-being. With training you can get your dog's nose to work for you. The dog can be taught to search out specific odors. Because the searches mimic real-life scenarios, training can be done at home or in the community.

**What is Scent Work?** ► It is a sport that mimics the task of working detection dogs to locate a scent and communicate to the handler that the scent has been found. Real-life detection dogs are trained to search for a variety of things—drugs, other contraband, explosives, human remains, currency, living humans (such as for Search and Rescue), and much more. AKC Scent Work takes this amazing working relationship and turns it into a fun game that any dog can play.

**How a Scent Work Trial Works** ► Scent Work trials, as with any AKC sport, are organized and held by AKC-Licensed or Member Clubs. The club is always your first contact regarding specific events. The official announcement of a club's event is a Premium List. It contains all of the relevant information regarding the trial, including date, location, classes offered, and judges, as well as an entry form.

## **AKC Scent Work Program ► The Divisions**

AKC Scent Work is broken down into two divisions: the Odor Search Division, in which the dog is searching for the odor of one or more specific essential oils, and the Handler Discrimination Division, in which the dog is searching for the scent of their handler.

**The Odors** ► The Odor Search Division of AKC Scent Work uses four odors: Birch (*Betula lenta*), Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), Clove (*Eugenia caryophyllata*), and Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*). Novice searches are for Birch only. Advanced searches are for Birch and/or Anise. Excellent searches are for Birch and/or Anise and/or Clove. Master searches are for Birch, and/or Anise, and/or Clove, and/or Cypress.

**The Elements** ► Searches in AKC Scent Work are completed in a variety of environments, known as "Elements." The Elements in AKC Scent Work are:

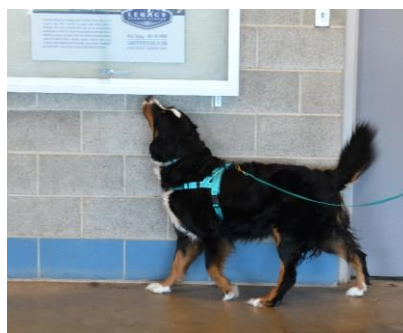
- **Container:** The target odor ("hide") is concealed within a container (such as a cardboard box or briefcase), and the dog must indicate in which container the scent is hidden.
- **Interior:** The target odor is concealed on or in an object in an indoor search area.
- **Exterior:** The target odor is concealed on or in an object in an outdoor search area. This requires the dog to locate the scent despite changing airflow patterns, weather conditions, and natural distractions.
- **Buried:** The target odor is concealed within a small container and then buried in sand and/or under water depending on the difficulty level.

**The Difficulty Levels** ► Each element in the Odor Search Division and the Handler Discrimination Division has four difficulty levels: Novice, Advanced, Excellent, and Master. Dogs begin with the Novice level classes and move up as they earn titles. And, they may progress through the elements at different speeds. For example, a dog may compete in the Novice Interior class and the Advanced Container class. Factors such as the size of the search area, the number of hides, whether the number of hides is known or unknown to the handler, and the maximum height of the hides will change with the difficulty level. (Note: Unlike other AKC sports, the Novice A level is based on the dog's experience and not the handler's, with a few exceptions as noted in the Regulations.

<http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RSW001.pdf> )

**The Detective Class** ► The Detective Class is the highest level competition in AKC Scent Work. It offers an integrated search environment with an unknown number of hides in a variety of elements. The intent of the Detective Class is to emulate as closely as possible the work of a true detection dog. In the Detective Class, the dog is searching for one or more essential oil odors.

**The Qualifying Performance** ► In AKC Scent Work, handler-dog teams are judged on a qualify/non-qualify basis. The dog must use its nose to search out the hidden odors, and then



For more information, please visit our website at [www.bmdca.org](http://www.bmdca.org).

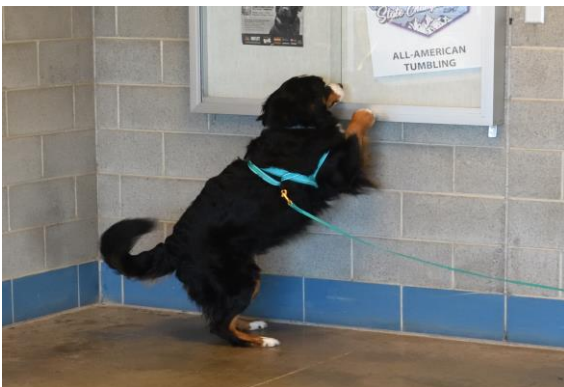
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alert their handlers when the odors are detected. Dogs may bark, point with their nose or body, sit, lie down, or use any other behavior to communicate the location of the odor. The dog is the star of the Scent Work trial. The handler remains mostly passive, guiding the dog's search only when necessary and letting the judge know when the dog has found the scent.

In order to earn a qualifying leg, the handler-dog team must find and call all hides in a search area within the time allowed for the class without committing any non-qualifying faults. Faults may include dropping food, disrupting the environment, alerting in the wrong location, and more. Teams that qualify are then ranked based on the fewest number of faults and then on time. Those placing first through fourth are awarded ribbons.



Because the alert may take a variety of forms and scent work is not as physically challenging as most of the other sports it can be done by most dogs, from small to large, young to old, able-bodied and those with disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, and even amputees. Handlers with physical challenges can also participate because trials take place in environments that are accessible to differently-abled people. In enclosed/safe areas, dogs may sometimes be allowed to search off leash. Otherwise the dogs are run on a collar or harness on a long line allowing the dog to move freely away from the handler. Although this sport is not physically demanding it is mentally so, keeping older dogs engaged and using their minds, and puppies challenged to use their mental capabilities even before their bodies are up to the physical challenges of other sports.



Due to the limited physical challenges, scent work can be started with very young puppies. To introduce a puppy to odor, one needs only put the Q-tip with the odor in a vessel on the floor/ground, let the puppy's curiosity lead it to sniff, and then reward for any sniffing of the vessel. Add small steps, increasing the challenge, such as moving the vessel farther away and eventually up, under, or on objects as the puppy progresses, both inside your own home and outside. Starting a puppy's learning process early makes it easier for the puppy to learn as it grows and matures. Scent work is a fun and stress-free game

for the puppy, allowing it to engage in what is a natural instinct, to be successful.

Practices can require containers/boxes and containers for burying with sand and/or water, but these can be placed in a garage, patio, driveway, or other space around the home. Odor bottles and vessels are small and portable so a fun quick practice session can be done anytime and anywhere, inside or outside the house or motorhome, a park, or in any place an odor vessel can be hidden.



**Scent Work References** ► The AKC provides Getting Started information on its website at <https://www.akc.org/sports/akc-scent-work/getting-started/>. There are many books, videos, and online classes to help you get your dog started in Scent Work. If you need the discipline of a class environment or a little more expertise, local Scent Work clubs and many dog training facilities offer training in Scent Work or "Nose Work," as it is sometimes known.

There is an AKC Facebook Group that many find helpful: *Friends of AKC Scent Work*.

**Other organizations that offer Scent Work** ►

The National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW™)

<https://www.nacsw.net/>

United States Canine Scent Sports

<http://www.uscaninescentsports.com/>

**Suppliers of Scent kits, odor, tins, tubes, and other supplies** ►

<http://www.paws4fun.net/>

<https://www.iidog.com>

<https://k9news.com/>

<http://www.allgooddogs.biz/products>

<http://leerburg.com>

<https://www.rayallen.com/>