

Seeker's CT

by Tom Hacholski

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The drawing for tracks at the Denver Foothills Tracking Association's 29th VST Test took place at 5:30 AM at the Denver West Office Park. It was cool then but several hours later it would get hot. Of course, I drew the seventh and last track. In my mind I was already defeated. I don't like the long wait to run and the last track is the warmest of the day. Over the years at the various tracking tests in Houston, where the majority of tracking tests are held in Texas, I continually have drawn the later tracks. This has been a source of merriment to the tracking community who know how much I hate it. Then, while watching the second track, one of the exhibitors Nancy Hamilton, commented "You know, no one has ever passed at this site" – a much unneeded source of discouragement. Nancy and her Clumber went on to run the fourth track and became the first team to pass at Denver West Office Park.

Finally, our turn came. We were dropped off around the curve of Cole Blvd. on the west side of Interstate 70. Normally Cole is fairly less traveled on a Sunday morning, but because a marathon was being held on Colfax Street on the east side of I-70, traffic was diverted to Cole. With fear for our lives, we got out of the van and proceeded to the start flag. The flag was about ten feet to the right of a chain link fence. Normally Seeker's starts are pretty straightforward; he checks out the article and the immediate ground and proceeds down the leg. Not this time – he searched and searched, and was particularly fond of the high grass along the fence line. Finally he was off down the leg in a southerly path and after about 70 yards, he broke off and indicated that he wanted to take an open turn to the right to go across the parking lot. To my immediate right was a cement pad with two ornamental concrete picnic tables and benches. I just "knew" they laid the track between the tables. I told myself not to over think this and just let the dog do his thing. Seeker did go around one of the tables but came back to his original open turn path. He followed that path around the cement pad and curved back to the grass berm that was on the backside of the pad. He picked up the scent and off we went to the west for about 65 yards. He then turned back left and went across a small drive to the west side of the office building's landscaped area. About halfway along the building he indicated the first intermediate article. Whew! Good to get it and build his confidence. Off he went down the leg to the edge of the grass and a sidewalk that ran down the south side of the building. He sniffed and sniffed at this confluence of grass and concrete what seemed to be forever. Immediately in front of us was the asphalt parking lot. He went out into the lot but didn't commit, and went to the right to check out a three-step brick staircase that led out to Cole Blvd (can't go there I thought – Tom stop thinking!) Then he came back to the same spot in the grass, checked it out and turned left along the sidewalk. Down we went for about 20 yards. He then turned into the parking lot but worked his way back to the same spot in the grass. Finally he moved forward into the parking lot and after 65 yards made a loop to the right swinging back to make what was a left turn another 35 yards to the second intermediate article. Whew! Again glad we made it past the grass/concrete to asphalt transition and what turned out to be the "moment of truth" turn.

Seeker restarted and continued down the asphalt and came to what had to be a left or right turn.

This is where I began to think again. The asphalt drive between the medians in the parking lot had partially been repaved. While observing one of the earlier tracks we noticed that several of the lots were coned off for repaving and striping. In fact, a work crew was in one of the lots. These lots could not be utilized for tracks so I assumed that the areas of the parking lots that were newly paved would be avoided. To the left was old pavement – to the right was new pavement. Seeker turned to the left. OK, I thought, but we're going back to the north towards our original start. I've seen VST tracks laid in a box pattern before, not too often, but was there enough room to complete the 600 plus required yards? No matter; after about ten yards Seeker said NO and turned back to the right. He paralleled the chain link fence again that separated the office complex from I-70 down below and emerged onto the grass that was on the east side on the next office building. He veered to the right going over a sidewalk and onto the grass on the north side of the building. In retrospect the wind had been at our back and I assume the scent had pooled up against the building. About this time a woman had come from the west side of the building and was walking down the sidewalk we had crossed. She didn't pay any attention to us nor did Seeker pay any attention to her. About the time she was even with our position, he turned back around to the left and went back to the grassy area paralleling the fence. He continued under a weeping willow branch (I ducked under) to see more grass and a huge fountain in an open center court area. He got to the fountain's concrete pad and turned right to go down into a grassy bowl. About six feet in he corrected to a forty-five degree angle. We went about thirty yards and there it was about thirty yards ahead – the FINAL article!! I could hardly contain myself – just don't let go of the rope. Within seconds he sat at the article and the cheers went up from behind – the judges (Allison Platt and Jerry Lewis), tracklayer (Karen Lewis), best friend and tracking training partner (Jon Bishop) who had been taking pictures, and from directly in front across Cole Blvd where the gallery was standing at the headquarters pavilion. I raised my arms and bent down to hug my dog. It was the best!!

