



Just Nosin' Around

by Deb Roseman

It goes without saying that the canine nose is so much more powerful than the human nose, that scientists can't even quantify the comparison. Human beings depend on sight to interpret the world. But dogs? They rely on their sense of smell.



It is this sheer olfactory ability of dogs that has made them an indispensable tool for various jobs that rely on the sense of smell. There are way too many applications to list here, but here are a few examples. Search & Rescue dogs are trained to use their sense of smell to locate a lost individual or human remains through several methods including air-scenting, tracking, trailing, and combinations of the three. Disease Detecting and Medical Alert dogs are trained to use their sense of smell to detect cancer, predict an oncoming seizure, and alert diabetics of low blood sugar levels just to name a few. Substance Detection dogs are trained to use their sense of smell for the detection of illegal substances.

It is no surprise that these true working activities have been molded into competitive sports for just about any dog and owner to enjoy together. One of the newest canine sports to hit the scene is Nosework which is modeled after real world substance detection.

I have to admit, when I first started to hear about Nosework, I thought it was silly. I resisted participating for a long time. Even when it did start to intrigue me a little bit I still refrained for fear of being ridiculed. But one day curiosity got the best of me and I decided to sneak off and sign up my Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Bonnie, for a beginners class. Bonnie and I had already been participating in several canine sports like Obedience, Agility, and Tracking, and we were successful at lower levels, but her over-exuberance was getting in the way. We both were getting frustrated. I needed something else. I needed something that was mentally challenging yet still engaging for the dog and fun for me too.

NOWORK



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Bonnie and I attended our first class where the dogs were encouraged to find food in a box. I struggled to keep an open mind. It wasn't until I got home that night and sat down to watch some TV that I realized change was already happening. My energizer bunny of a dog who rarely knew how to "turn off" was collapsed at my side on the couch fast asleep.

As the weeks went by, I got more and more excited about going to class and so did Bonnie. I just had to mention the word "smell" to her and her whole face would light up. She'd eagerly prance as I took out her harness and loaded her in the car.

As our classes progressed, we transferred the hunt for food in a box to the hunt for essential oil scents.

Specifically birch, anise and clove. Then we transferred the hunt from boxes to various environments. Interiors of buildings, exterior locations like pavilions at parks, vehicles, and various kinds of containers. Bonnie learned how to source the odor in all of these locations, and I learned how to read what she was telling me when she found it. We were both engaged, we were both having fun, and at the end of the day I had a dog snuggling and snoring next to me on the couch. What more could I ask for?



That was a silly question. Of course there was more! Being of a competitive nature and loving the challenge of testing skills, I did not forget for a second that Nosework is a titling sport! And so began our new journey into the world of competitive nosework.



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While we have several nosework titles under our belts, and are working towards more advanced titles now, competing in nosework isn't about the titles for us. It's about the experience. It's about the joy of working with my dog in an activity that I can see she truly enjoys, that we love to do together and can be successful at.

Through competing, I've of course met many new people and made new friends. But more importantly, I have learned how accommodating the sport of nosework is for the dogs. I've seen big dogs, little dogs, young dogs, old dogs, and disabled dogs. I've even seen dogs with behavioral issues. The sport of nosework is accommodating for ALL of these dogs, some of which would never be welcome elsewhere. The sport of nosework is giving all of these dogs a chance to use their brains and their bodies and to thrive in an activity that they love with their owners.

Now, what's so silly about that?!





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