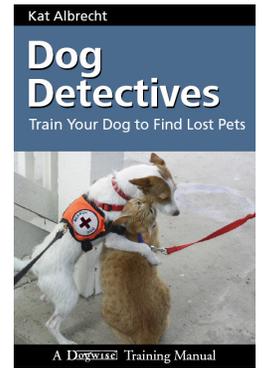# Dogwise™ Publishing

An excerpt from

Dog Detectives. Train Your Dog to Find Lost Pets
Chapter 3—Selecting a Dog for MAR Work

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One of the most critical decisions you'll make in your professional career as a pet detective is selecting a dog to train for MAR work. I'm often asked, "What breed is the best breed to train to look for missing pets?" Many people who ask this question know that I have trained and worked Bloodhounds, and assume that I'd automatically recommend the Bloodhound, but as you will see, many breeds can excel at this work.

When selecting a dog for any type of work, it is always important to consider what they were originally bred to do. It is easier to work with a dog with the right natural instinct than it is to train that instinct into a dog. If you want a dog to follow a scent trail and hunt, a dog bred to hunt will be easier to train than a dog bred to sit on a lap or pull a sled. While there should be some consideration regarding the breed of dog, the dog's drive or willingness to work should be the primary consideration.

Breed Suitability
Area Searches
Hunting dogs, such as the English Pointer, Weimaraner, or German Shorthaired Pointer, which are bred to freeze and point, can be ideal breeds to train for area search work. My personal experience using Weimaraners is that when they suddenly discover a hidden cat, they either freeze in place or give off rapid tail wiggles, an alert that is very easy to read. Don't assume that all Weimaraners or all pointing breeds will behave like this. You must evaluate an individual dog's temperament and drive, and make a selection based on how she behaves, not on breed alone.

Small breeds offer certain advantages when searching for cats. Terriers or small spaniels have an advantage over larger breeds because they can crawl underneath houses, decks, and porches. I've

had good luck using terriers (e.g., Jack Russell, Cairn) as cat detection dogs because of their small size and their instinct to focus on critters. Flat-faced breeds or dogs with short muzzles—a condition known as "brachycephalic"—should be avoided. This includes breeds the Pug, Pekingese, and Bulldog, which have difficulty breathing due to the lack of a snout. Recruiting these breeds for scent work, especially in warmer weather, is probably not a wise move.

Some breeds simply do not lend themselves to area search work. If you plan to search for missing cats, for example, there are breeds you should avoid. While a Greyhound or Saluki might have a keen interest in cats, I hesitate to recommend one of these breeds for fear that their instinct to chase small prey—the purpose for which they were originally bred—might cause them to take off in hot pursuit of the cat. Obviously, the goal is to locate and protect a missing pet, not chase him down and capture or injure him!

Trailing
My personal preference for breeds to use in trailing work includes hounds, such as Bloodhounds, and hunting breeds, such as Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers. German Shepherds and Border Collies have proven themselves in various forms of search work and should also be considered. If the terrain you will be searching includes ticks, foxtails and stickers, or extreme heat, consider a short-coated breed. On the other hand, if you will be searching in cold climates, consider a thick-coated breed. Never rule out a mixed-breed dog as long as her drive and temperament are conducive to MAR work. A perfect example of a great mixed-breed trailing dog is Sonja, an Akita mix, that I trained. Sonja was rescued from a life of guard-dog duty (she was permanently tied to a tree in a backyard

and starved for attention) and has done a fantastic job in her initial training.

Trailing work is not appropriate for many breeds, such as Chihuahuas, Chows, or Shih Tzus. A trailing dog must cover great distances, especially if you are tracking a dog missing in the wilderness. Small breeds, lap dogs, and dogs of massive size (e.g., Great Dane, St. Bernard) make poor trailing candidates due to the physical demands of the work.

Breed preference is exactly that—a preference. I've seen a Golden Retriever named Kea who could out-track any Bloodhound. The reason this particular dog was so successful was a combination of her love for people, an extremely high level of drive, and a knowledgeable handler who learned how to both train and trust her dog. (The story of Kea and how she found my Bloodhound, A.J., is mentioned in the Introduction.) One of the misconceptions about MAR dogs is the assumption that a certain breed can perform the task at hand simply because it was bred for the work. Do not make the mistake of believing that just because you have selected a hound, your dog will automatically trail or just because you selected a pointer, your dog will automatically point.

The Importance of Drive

While selecting an appropriate breed (or mixed breed) is important, the dog must exhibit the proper drive to seek out the type of pet for which you are searching. For cat detection work, the dog should have an intense drive for cats. Dogs who love to play with cats, perhaps even chase them (without hurting them) and who give a dramatic physical response when they first detect the scent of a cat are good candidates. For trailing work, you want a dog who *loves* to play with other dogs and who goes crazy when another dog runs away and hides. For dual-purpose work you want a dog that combines both drives, exhibits a desire to play with and/or chase both cats and other dogs.

Kat Albrecht, author of *Lost Pet Chronicles,* is a former police Bloodhound handler, search-and-rescue manager, and police officer-turned-pet detective. Since 1989 she and her search dogs have successfully located criminals, physical evidence, missing persons, and missing pets for both police agencies and private clients. Kat has been featured in Reader's Digest and Ladies Home Journal as well as programs on Animal Planet. She is the founder of Missing Pet Partnership, a non-profit that manages the first-ever pet detective academy. Kat lives in Clovis, California with her three dogs and three cats.