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The
**VIRGINIA
MARYLAND**

DOG

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The Mission Continues For Nick White

Fit as a Fiddle

Bath Time is
Health Time



"Hope" is seeking her forever home through The Middleburg Humane Foundation (details on Page 46)

(rounding up rover)



Calling All Pooches, Pups and Their Humans:

Do You Want to be a Search Dog?

By *Anne Wills*

Photo Courtesy Anne Wills

The role of a search-and-rescue (SAR) dog is one of the most important components in locating a missing child or pet. A human being's abilities to see, hear and smell cannot compare to the keen senses of a SAR dog. A dog has a built-in talent to hunt and follow footsteps relentlessly until it has found its target. A dog can catch the slightest odor of the missing on the lightest of breezes and then zero in for a rescue.

All of this work requires the fine tuning of a dog's natural traits, as well as teaching his owner and handler how to read their dog and make decisions in the field to help get the dog to its target. A SAR dog and his handler are a team. There cannot be a successful team unless each player pulls their weight.

Dogs Finding Dogs' K9 SAR for Missing Pets is a non-profit charity that has reunited more than 4000 pets since its inception in 2008. With 18 search teams covering most of the East Coast, and pets going missing everyday, the SAR dogs are working constantly.

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This work can be physically demanding. Humans have to trust SAR dogs 100 percent, and follow them where they are leading the humans. This means that an occasional slide down a hill, a trip over a log, or a slip in the water may occur. Humans have their humility tested everyday. Finding that missing pet or person is the greatest reward: seeing the reunion. The work humans put into their dog has saved a life. And that's why people work so long and hard: Compassion for people and pets and the desire to help.

To train a team, people can expect to dedicate about a year and a half before being allowed to work alone on a case. The SAR dog must learn the game the way people need him to play it. And, yes, to the SAR dog it is a game. A simple reward of their favorite toy when finding the end of a scent trail is all that they work for. Some SAR dogs, like a hound breed, are not toy-motivated. The hunt itself is the reward. with a rejoice of large praise from his handler at the end.

What makes a good SAR dog? A SAR dog needs to have a huge hunt drive. People can test this by throwing the dog's favorite toy into a large grassy area and then seeing how long he will search for it. He may come back to the owner, as if to say "give me a hint," but when urged to look again, he will continue until his toy is found. Most dogs without this quality usually will give up and get bored when the search gets tough.

Another trait to look for is if the dog is happy to follow a scent. Test for this trait by having his favorite human walk slowly through grassy areas and hide behind a tree. Drop a few treats in the footsteps along the way. Then have another family member take the dog to the starting point and tell him to go find Daddy or Mommy. If the dog follows the trail,

his tail is wagging, and he is full of pep, there is a candidate for training.

A SAR dog must be friendly to people and animals. Good obedience is an absolute must.

Search-and-rescue challenges the physical body of a dog, and it allows him to use his mind and solve problems. For trainers, it can be amazing to watch dogs analyze an area, stop, think about what he is sensing—and then zero in on his target. They become almost human-like during these procedures.

For the dog who has shyness or is a little afraid, giving him a job to do helps tremendously with his confidence. Several of the Dogs Finding Dogs SAR dogs were very scared when they first started. By working and learning to trust by being out in the environment, these dogs learned to enjoy their job, they became very friendly and the scary big world no longer bothered them.

Basically, any breed of dog could qualify to be a SAR dog. If owners feel like their dogs may have what it takes to be a life saver and they are willing to put the time into training, they should get in touch with a search-and-rescue organization. The biggest honor for a search dog is to save just one life. 🌟

For more information:

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