



## K-9 vehicle searches

K-9 vehicle search techniques involve dogs searching and following airflow to detect target odors.

The handlers should start the search at a specific point on the vehicle, I like the front passenger tire, and then guide the dog to search the vehicle, paying attention to areas where air will pass through and get caught, such as gaps, wheel wells, and vents. Typically the interior of the vehicle is not searched unless the dog is training for work outside of traditional scent work (narcotics, explosives, weapons, currency, biological weapons, etc).

When your dog alerts on the vehicle, do not assume the odor is where the alert occurred but rather the point the air trail stopped or was captured and the concentration is high enough the dog is trying to determine if it is the point of source. This behavior is often questioned by the handler because the dog does not appear to be as committed as they typically are when odor is contained in something such as an accessible box.

Don't be in a rush to move in and signal "alert" but rather, give your dog a few moments to problem solve and sort it out. Step back and let them work the problem, DO NOT CROWD THEM, ASK THEM IF THEY HAVE FOUND IT, DIRECT THE SEARCH, OR USE YOUR HANDS TO GET THEM TO INVESTIGATE THE AREA FURTHER UNLESS THEY APPEAR TO BE FRUSTRATED.

If the search is taking a long time and the dog does not seem to be able to commit to a source area then it may become necessary to help them out by taking them directly to the source and allowing them to alert and get rewarded.

This is where you want clear criteria, clean body language, good handling skills, and lots of patience. ROUTINE, ROUTINE, ROUTINE! Remember, the scent picture on a vehicle is much different than a hide in a room. Today's vehicles are manufactured to be aerodynamic and lightweight. They allow for wind to move through to reduce wind resistance and the plastic composition of many newer vehicles are more porous than metal. The plastic also is more responsive to changing environmental temperatures and the plastic will adjust to a rise or fall in ambient temperature faster than metal will.

The size, height, color, time of day, and type of vehicle will also affect how it moves and captures odor. A search on a four door sedan will be greatly different than the search on a large truck even if all the surrounding conditions are the same and the vehicle is parked in the same spot. No two searches will ever be the same on a vehicle. And a multi-vehicle search will also allow the source to move through all the vehicles in the search area given the right wind conditions. A dog may appear to be close to source when searching all the multiple vehicles in a search only to circle back to the first vehicle checked as the odor moved and was trapped in all three. ALWAYS CHECK THE WIND BEFORE AND DURING A SEARCH!

### Search Safety

Where your search is set up, safety should always be a consideration. Before any search a quick scan of the search area will eliminate the possibility of injury (fall, impalement, electrical shock, contact with toxic substances, sharp objects/edges, or contact with hot areas of the car).

When it comes to vehicle search safety make sure that:

- The vehicle is not running and engine and exhaust pipe are cool
- The vehicle is cool (this mostly applies to the undercarriage after driving and paint surfaces on very hot days)
- If the vehicle is parked on asphalt that the temperature is not too hot for your dogs paws
- The vehicle should not be located near a major road or moderate to heavy traffic
- The vehicle should not have any broken metal trim protruding or broken glass/plastic accessible to the dog
- Take a look underneath the vehicle to make sure it is not leaking dangerous or toxic fluids (mainly antifreeze)

### Structuring Your Search Pattern

A few simple criteria will help your dog master vehicles in no time. Consistency is the key to your dog's understanding of this search element. Remember our dogs love patterns and predictability. Use that to your advantage by starting your search off with some familiarity.

When starting a dog on vehicle searches, hide placement is important. If you place the hides lower on the car (bumper, wheel, wheel well) then the dog will not feel the need to jump on the vehicle to gain closer access to the source. This simple detail will save the paint on your car!

- Always start at the same point on the vehicle, I prefer the front passenger tire
- Work in the same direction each time (counter clockwise is the most popular)
- Searches should be done on leash to keep your dog focused and near the vehicle
  - Dogs may be tempted to search out and away from the vehicle if the wind is pulling odor away and catching on nearby objects (plants, building, garbage cans, etc)
- Scent gear (such as a particular harness) can cue your dog that they are going to be doing nose work
- Use your hand to guide the dog and magnet your dog along the vehicle when they are new to this element, but do not touch the vehicle
- Make early searches easy, remember the car up until now has had a very different meaning
- Avoid placing hides very far under the car as we don't want the dog crawling under the car and you won't find hides there in a trial
- Keep the pace going and have a big party when they are done!

Vehicle Searches by Organization

ORGANIZATION	LEVELS OFFERED	NOTES
NACSW	NW1, NW2, NW3	
AKC	NONE	Offer buried/water in its place
UKC	NOVICE, ADVANCED, SUPERIOR, MASTER, ELITE	
CPE	LVL1, LVL2, LVL3, LVL4 CH, LVL EX	

## UKC Summary

**Table 4: Requirements for the Vehicles Class for Each Level**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level CH (5)	Level EX (C)
<b>Number of Vehicles Required</b>	Two (2) in a row; 6 ft apart	(2 to 3); 4 ft apart	(3 to 4); 3 ft apart	(4 to 5); no minimum distance	Five (5) vehicles; no minimum distance
<b>Odor</b>	Birch	Birch or Anise	Birch, Anise, or Clove	Birch, Anise, Clove, or Cypress	Birch, Anise, Clove, Cypress, or Vetiver One (1) or more hides may contain two (2) odors in the scent vessel
<b>Number of Hides</b>	1	Two (2) with one (1) hide per vehicle	Three (3). May put two (2) hides per vehicle	Four (4). May put two (2) hides per vehicle	(1 to 5) (Unknown to competitor). May put two (2) hides per vehicle
<b>Distractions</b>	None	One (1)	Two (2) on the ground Minimum of 3 ft between distractor and any hide	(1 to 3) on the ground or on a vehicle. Minimum of 2 ft between distractor and any hide	(1 to 4) on the ground or on the vehicle. Minimum of 1 ft between distractor and any hide
<b>Distraction Type</b>	None	Non-food	Non-food	Mix of food and non-food	Mix of food and non-food
<b>Maximum Hide Height</b>	12 in	24 in	36 in	36 in	36 in
<b>Wrong Calls Allowed</b>	One (1)	One (1)	None	None	None
<b>Time Allowed</b>	90 seconds to 3 minutes, 30 second warning	(2 to 3) minutes, 30 second warning	(3 to 4) minutes 30 second warning	(4 to 5) minutes, 30 second warning	(4 to 6) minutes; NO WARNING GIVEN
<b>Required Handler Call(s)</b>	Alert	Alert, Finish	Alert, Finish	Alert, Finish	Alert, Finish

## CPE Summary

### B15.16 Vehicles.

**B15.16.1 Definition of a Vehicle.** A vehicle is defined as an item typically with at least one (1) wheel that is used as transportation to carry people or goods. Vehicles may include but are not limited to, full sized automobiles, pickup trucks, vans, SUVs, farm tractors, trailers, Recreational Vehicles (RV) etc. In place of a full-sized vehicle, two (2) smaller sized vehicles may be used i.e., snow mobiles, All Terrain Vehicles (ATV), golf carts, lawn tractors, etc. OR three (3) smaller vehicles such as pedal cars, tricycles, Cozy Coupes, bicycles that have been stabilized, dollies, coolers on wheels etc. Judges may never use any vehicle smaller than a full-sized skateboard such as Tonka Trucks, Hot Wheels, etc. Vehicles may NOT contain dogs or humans when used in a search. Two (2) full sized vehicles are recommended for level 1.

**B15.16.2 Unique Circumstances for Extra Large Vehicles.** If using larger vehicles such as construction equipment, garbage trucks, Class A or C RVs, etc. one (1) large vehicle may be used in place of two (2) regular sized vehicles. The Judge may place three (3) hides on one (1) of these extra-large vehicles, however the Judge must always have at least two (2) vehicles for a search. Hides must be placed a minimum of 8 ft apart. Larger sized vehicles may NOT be used for level 1 or level 2 searches.

**B15.16.3 Vehicle Search Scent Container Placement.** The Scent containers may not be placed inside the vehicle. Level 1 The Scent container must be placed in either the front or rear bumper of an automobile or as close to that area as possible if using other types of vehicles. Level 2 Two (2) hides are not allowed on one (1) vehicle. The odor can be placed anywhere up to 30 inches high on the outside of the vehicle and up to 6 inches under the car. Level 3 A maximum of two (2) hides are allowed on (1) vehicle but not

closer than 8 ft apart. The odor can be placed anywhere up to 42 inches on the outside of the vehicle and up to 6 inches under the car EXCEPT when using personal automobiles, odors cannot be placed higher than 2 ft on these vehicles. Exceptions are larger vehicles, see definition of a vehicle in

B15.15.1. Levels 5 and C A maximum of two (2) hides are allowed on one (1) vehicle but not closer than 6 ft apart. The odor can be placed anywhere up to up to 54 inches for Level 5 and 60 inches for Level C high on the outside of the vehicle and up to 6 inches under the car EXCEPT when using personal automobiles, odor cannot be placed higher than 2 ft on these vehicles. Exceptions are larger vehicles, see definition of a vehicle in

B15.15.1. B15.16.4 Vehicle Setup. Level 1 Vehicles must be in a row and no closer than 6 ft apart. Level 2 Vehicles may not be any closer than 4 ft from another vehicle. Level 3 Vehicles may not be closer than 3 ft from another vehicle. Levels 5 and C Vehicles may not be closer than 2 ft from another vehicle.

#### NACSW Summary

There may be up to five vehicles in the vehicle search, depending on the title level. Any type of vehicle may be used (car, motorcycle, truck, trailer, semi, etc.). Only the exterior of the vehicle is searched. The search is typically conducted on leash, but any length leash may be used. Handlers may be assessed a fault if their dog excessively paws or damages the vehicle at the judge's discretion or if the safety of the dog is compromised, for example if the dog disappears from view under the car. The handler will never need to open a vehicle door for their dog to locate the hide. There are no limits to the number of hides that may be on each vehicle.