

A nose for trouble

Collin Singer argues that a dog can be the best form of defence against freight crime

The multi-million pound trade in human trafficking has a determined enemy: it has four legs, a tail and one of the most sensitive instruments on the planet – a nose.

A dog's nose is our best weapon against the dealers in human misery who pack desperate illegal immigrants into cargoes on trucks and then charge these poor people extortionate amounts of money.

Human trafficking is second only to the illegal drugs trade in the amount of cash it makes for criminals. A dog's sense of smell is a vital component in the fight to prevent drugs getting into the country too.

We don't know exactly how a dog's nose works – but many believe that a dog can build up a 'scent picture' of the world around it. What we do know is that a dog's nose is an extremely powerful tool. It is so much more receptive to the array of scents in the air that it's an order of magnitude better than our own puny sense of smell.

A trained dog's nose can find an illegal immigrant hiding in the freight loaded onto a truck as surely as it will zoom in on a suspicious package in a stadium or railway station, or root out a drug pusher's cache hurriedly hidden in a raided house.

This is **Wagtail UK's** speciality: harnessing that incredible sense to train our dogs to detect the subtle traces of scent in the air – whether they come from drugs, humans or explosives.

Our ability to do that means that the dogs we train are working around the world. They are sniffing out illegal immigrants on cold, clammy mornings in Calais; checking for explosives on hot, dusty roadsides in Iraq and Afghanistan or in the hallowed Long Room at Lord's cricket ground; or searching noisy nightclubs for drugs.

This expertise has brought us the sweet smell of success. We have been shortlisted for a *Supplier Value for Money Award* from the **UK Home Office** after sniffing out illegal immigrants on trucks bound for the UK.

The nomination is for our work with **UK Border Agency** officers at Calais

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and other ports in Northern France.

Wagtail UK's staff and dogs search freight and ensure that the UK's border security is maintained.

At the Channel ports, our handlers and dogs work alongside the Border Agency's own personnel.

Body detection dogs have been very successful in preventing illegal immigrants getting into the UK – and anything that halts that trade has to be positive.

In one amazing case, featured in the UK national press recently, a German shorthaired pointer trained by Wagtail alerted UK Border Agency staff and French Police to the presence of 18 illegal immigrants hiding in a tanker of gluten powder headed for Wrexham.



Collin Singer is the Managing Director of Wagtail UK. He served in the Royal Air Force as a dog handler for 24 years before founding Wagtail UK in 2003. The company is one of the UK's leading providers of specialist detection dogs and employs more than 20 full time staff globally.

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The pointer, Lola, was an unwanted pet donated to Wagtail. Somehow she picked up a scent from the sealed tanker and then let the authorities know that the 'clandestines' were in there.

Our staff are mainly recruited from a military background, using experience gained in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans and Northern Ireland.

Wagtail has an ongoing project to train explosive detection dogs for use at airports or other areas of concern such as seaports and rail terminals.

We have clients in mainland Europe, Africa, the Middle East, North America and the Far East. While specific clients can't be named due to customer confidentiality, we have recently provided search dog teams at a number of high-profile locations in London, as well as helping to secure sporting events, international airshows, seminars, conferences and exhibitions. We even

provide a service for visits by royals and other VIPs.

This is the glamorous end of the business. At the other extreme, some of our explosive detection dogs are in daily service in some of the world's most hostile and high risk environments.

Officially approval

We are approved by the UK **Ministry of Defence** to deliver search dog handler courses and we were the first private company to provide detection dogs at the construction site of the 2012 London Olympic Games.

We offer full project management, consultancy, part- or fully-trained dogs, operational dog teams and handler training.

We also specialise in training dogs and handlers for the detection of drugs, firearms, cash, tobacco, illegal foodstuffs, cadavers or human remains, animal scats, and accelerants for fire investigation

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purposes.

Our dogs undergo three months of training before they are deployed in the fight against persons trying to enter the UK illegally.

They are suitable for training from about 12 months old but they have to be the right sort of dogs with the right character.

The training is very tough as the dogs have to work in all types of weather

conditions and are subject to a number of distractions while searching.

It is based on a reward system. We use the dog’s natural ability to hunt and detect the scent required.

It’s a game for the dog. When the dog finds the scent he is rewarded with a toy. Put simply, if the dogs didn’t enjoy what they are doing they wouldn’t bother.

We get our dogs from a number of different sources including members of the public, working dog breeders and rescue centres but what we are really looking for are active, lively dogs with determination and staying power.

They are the kind of dogs that are probably a bit of a handful as a pet because they are never still and are into everything – but that’s just what we’re after.

I believe that our nomination for the Home Office award demonstrates official recognition that we are in the front line in helping to protect the UK’s borders. It also proves that, even in today’s high-tech society, dogs remain the most reliable and consistent method of detecting a scent – whether it be for locating a person hiding in vehicle, an illegal substance such as drugs, or firearms or explosives.

