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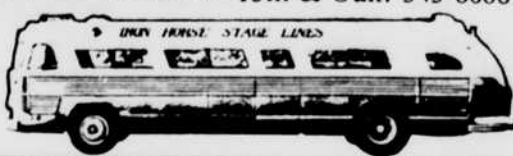
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Out of Bounds

Mush! Mush!

A man, his sled dogs and fresh-fallen snow.

"Haw, haw, haw, Crick, haw a little, Crickett," the man croons to his lead dog on an eight-mile training run on unploughed Forest Service roads in the Cascades. The dog drifts over to the right; gee means right, haw means left.

"Atta kid, atta kid." The backs of 12 dogs arch up and down in a stream of grey and black and white. Heavy, wet snowflakes fly in their faces. Big snow-covered ponderosa pines slide by.

The dogs are trotting. The man whistles at them with the low, quick whistles a cowboy would use on a round-up, and the dogs break into a bounding lope. After a while he calls them to a halt. They crane their heads around and look at him good-naturedly. The sound of 12 panting dogs fills the silence. The snowstorm has drained the color out of the landscape and the only color is the pink tongues hanging far out of their mouths. The dogs are tired. After a moment, he whistles them on again and they enthusiastically bound ahead.

Alaska, Minnesota, Michigan. Sled dog racers are born and raised in those bastions of snow. But dogsled champion Jerry Klatt of Sisters — a small town near Bend — learned to dogsled in Southern California, jogging behind his first husky in the streets of Riverside at night.

Klatt had read about dogsledding in books. Twenty-one years ago, his girlfriend's piano-tuner sold him a husky puppy, Russia, and he harnessed her, hooked her up to 10 feet of rope and taught her the commands a lead sled dog needs to know.

"She was the only dog I had, so she had to be the lead dog," he says, chuckling.

A friend of his who ran an AKC Siberian husky kennel in Riverside gave him some tips on training. The friend also inspired Klatt with a night ride in a stripped down car frame pulled by 16 sled dogs. "Oh, it was wild," Klatt remembers.

However, Russia wasn't his only dog for long. Tonka came from the dog-pound "and just happened to be a husky."

He hooked the two dogs up to a line attached to a bicycle frame. "I was going to pedal, but as soon as I said 'go' there was no pedalling, they went!" he says.

Klatt worked for a humane society in Riverside for 14 months. It left him with a soft spot in his heart the size of a football field for dogs that were to be put to sleep. Nino was one of those dogs.

Nino had been the mascot for the Riverside High School football team — the Huskies — before Klatt adopted him. "Once he got loose you couldn't catch him. He'd been tackled by football players, so he was really



Photo by Laurie Schwartz

Besides having won a number of dogsledding championships, Jerry Klatt of Sisters, Oregon also has received two best-conditioned team awards. Klatt and his team race six to eight times a year.

good at evasive action," Klatt says. "But I liked him, he was a good boy. He went on to become my leader."

Klatt has always liked animals. His parents bought a small ranch in Riverside when he was a teen-ager. He liked working with the stock and learned about training horses.

Unlike people, animals are consistent, he says. "If an animal is mean and ornery, he's mean and ornery all the time."

One summer Klatt and his wife took a vacation and went to Sisters. They liked it so much they stayed there, bought a small ranch, some cattle and horses. Klatt got a job with the Forest Service as a heavy equipment operator, and the slow construction season left him with time to devote to running the dogs — on real snow.

The dogs have to like to run. That's one of the requirements, he says. He believes in interval training and started using it long before there was a name for it. Start with the right dogs, breed them right, feed them right, train them right and, if you're lucky, you go to races and you win, Klatt says.

In the 20-odd years Klatt has been involved in the sport, he has racked up some impressive wins: Western Canadian-

American championship, Oregon Championship, California Championship, Pacific Coast Championship. He has raced against the top racers in the world.

Klatt has raced everywhere from Montana, to Colorado, to California. He loads his dogs into a 1-ton pickup, each dog in its own cubicle in a home-built camper built onto the back of the pickup. There's a long narrow space for Klatt to sleep, too.

You have to like doing it, he says. The days of glory come only about eight to 16 days out of the year. The races are divided into classifications of three-dog, five-dog and seven-dog teams, and an open class where the number of dogs on the team is left up to the driver. Klatt prefers the open class races and usually runs 12 dogs.

The typical race in the open class is anywhere from eight to 30 miles, although longer races are now becoming popular. The starts are staggered. The dog races are on a machine-groomed track 6 to 8 feet wide, and sometimes there's a little trouble when one team passes another.

"One time a dog started to go for for my dog, and I slapped him in the face with a mitten," Klatt says.

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