

Last March, Klatt and his team competed in the Irondog Triathlon at Diamond Lake, near Crater Lake. The race totalled 105 miles, and included a 10-mile sprint and a 22 mile freighter race, with the dogs carrying an additional 350 pounds on the sled, in addition to Klatt's weight.

Klatt and his team came in second on the grueling course. The second-place prize was \$900. Obviously, Klatt doesn't do it for the money. He considers himself lucky if he can break even with the travel expenses, the dog food and the vet bills.

"It's a hobby, not a business," he says.

It's hard to pin him down on just how many dogs he is

feeding or what the dog food bills are, but eventually Klatt lets on that he has 17 dogs at home. He owns 10 of them. A few of them he leases, a few he just takes care of and some are retirees. He feeds them generic high-protein dog food, the kind you can get at the supermarket, and he supplements that with meat scraps.

Other racers may pay thousands of dollars for a dog. Some have fancy color-coordinated dog harnesses. But Klatt takes the low-budget approach; his dogs are cheap, and he makes his own harnesses — "I don't care what color they are, as long as they fit the dog."

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"I needed another dog like I needed a hole in the head," he says. But Klatt took the dog in

and it took him a year to work with the dog before the dog would do any work. But after that, the dog pulled with all his heart for the dog. At one race, Klatt stopped the team and put the dog on the sled because it had worked itself into a state of exhaustion. "His tongue was hanging down on the snow," he says.

Klatt takes his responsibility for the dogs seriously. "To that animal you're God" he says. "You're responsible for his health, welfare and mental attitude."

Klatt has won two best-conditioned team awards. He heard that he had won the awards because his dogs were in good physical condition and because he had a reputation for having a good rapport with them.

You have to like doing it, he says. It's six to eight races of glory, and after that it's dealing with them for the rest of the year.

At home, the dogs are staked out on 6-foot chains; each has its own wooden house to shelter from the sun and rain. When it snows, the dogs like to be outside in the snow where they curl up in a ball.

In the summer, Klatt will occasionally hook them up to a cart and take them for a run, but only if it rains. "I don't want them getting dust in their lungs," he says.

Work as a heavy equipment operator has been sporadic in recent years for Klatt. With finances as tight as they are, he's had to cut back on the racing, and he thinks he might try to ease out of the sport. If he's going to stay, he'd like to have a sponsor like some of the other racers with much less experience have managed to get.

But Klatt says he would have to believe in a product before he'd make a pitch for it. "They couldn't buy me. I'm as independent as a hog on ice."

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