

Sledding excites a dog's interest



Dog sled teams vary from three to any number of dogs the driver can handle. A fast three dog team can make a four mile run is approximately 23 minutes. The more dogs, the faster the run.

The dogs could hardly be controlled in their anxiety to begin the run. Several people strained to hold them back.

As the countdown began the excitement of the team became intense. Two, then one. A piercing scream from the driver sent them flying down the snow covered trail. The sled was air born as it glided easily behind the team over moguls and around corners.

Dog sleds are still an essential means of transportation for families living the cold arctic regions of Canada, Alaska and Siberia. But sleds and dog teams are being seen much further south recently as dog sled racing is becoming a popular sport.

Competition in these races is increasing as more people are raising dogs for sled competition, more spectators are attending the races and more money is being generated as prize money.

Dog teams in the cold north country consist of heavy coated dogs with fighting abilities for survival and strength. Speed and strength are the qualities necessary for racing in the warmer climates. Dogs aren't

expected to brave the below zero night winds nor face the predators on the tundra.

Teams often do consist of the traditional Alaskan Malamute and Siberian Huskies but they are also made up of Labradors and sparsely haired Whippets. Any dog that can pull a sled, fast, has the quality necessary for dog sled competition.

The lead dog of the team must have additional qualities. He is chosen for his speed, endurance and intelligence. He takes commands from the driver, called the musher, and the other dogs follow his lead.

Competition dog sled teams consist of three to seven dogs. An open class allows as many dogs as the musher can handle.

A team of five dogs can pull a load of 250 pounds comfortably 20 to 40 miles per day. The sled they pull ranges from 6 to 13 feet in length and 12 to 24 inches in width. The runners are wooden or metal. Fiberglass runners can be seen as they become more popular.

The runs vary with the number of dogs in the team. Four miles is an average run for a team of three dogs. This run takes approximately 23

minutes. A larger team will be given a longer run.

The dogs are kept lean and exercised often during both winter and summer. Both speed and their ability to pull loads are concentrated on. The ability of the driver is continuously refined.

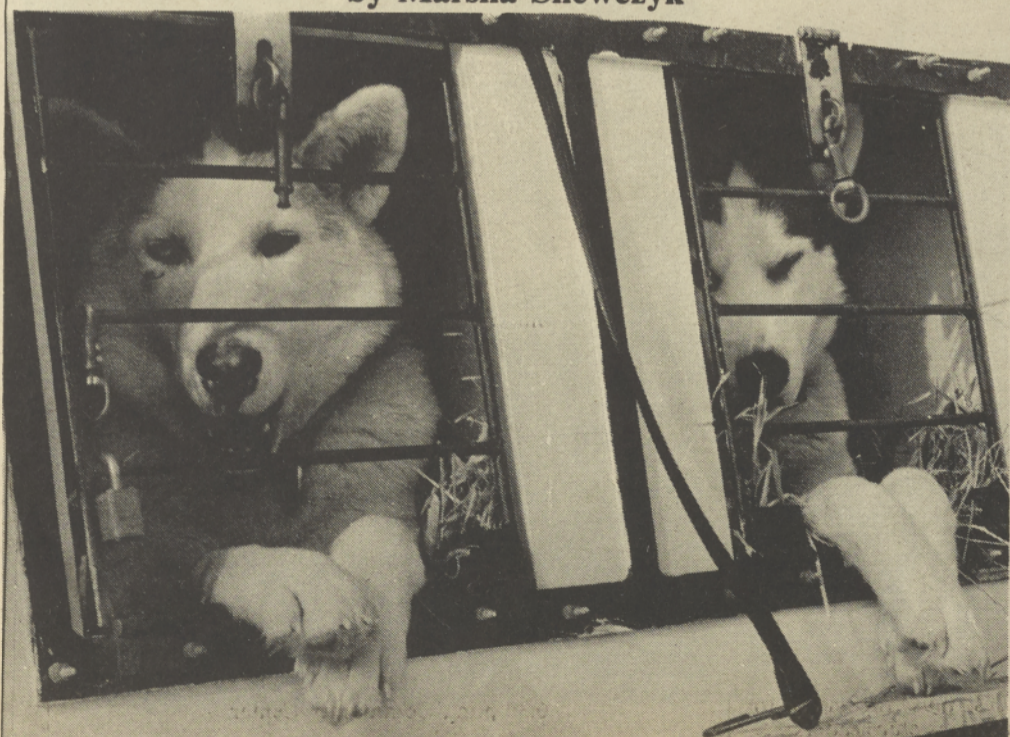
Like all dogs sled dogs have some peculiarities. At times a lead dog will decide he doesn't want to run. When the starting whistle blows he may just turn around and go in the opposite direction.

Another idiosyncrasy involves, again, the dog's disinterest in running. A dog may stop along the trail just to gaze over the bank. Every dog following will also stop and look over the bank in the same spot. These are only two of the problems mushers have to deal with.

Other than their once in a while quirks sled dogs express excitement at the prospect of a race. They apparently enjoy the run as much as the mushers do. Even after completing a run it isn't long before, they are rested, their excitement mounts and they're ready to do it again.



With his anxiety showing this sled dog is ready to start the race now.



Sled dogs are generally transported in individual pens. Their excitement for the race does not become obvious until released.



During a race there is no time to stop for a drink of water. Afterwards, however there is water to be found everywhere, in the form of snow.

**Spilyay Tymoo Text and Photos
by Marsha Shewczyk**