

ASSA Beginner's Guide



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GETTING STARTED

Before you start dry-land sledding, you need the right gear. At your local club's beginner days you will have plenty of opportunities to view and test the distinct types of equipment available before you buy your own. Make sure you talk to as many people as possible and ask questions about what equipment works for them and why. Below is a list of the items you will need to get started.

Beginners checklist

Racing harness for your dog/s



Gangline (for 1 or 2 dogs)



Neckline (if running 2 dogs)



Mountain Bike or Scooter (for running up to 2 dogs)



Antenna



Cutters

(Capable of cutting through ganglines, tuglines, or harnesses)



Lights (for scooter and/or helmet)



Canicross belt (if you like running)



Stake-out line or crate



Helmet



Enclosed footwear



Wet weather gear



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> ALWAYS ASK PERMISSION BEFORE PATTING ANY DOGS

> NEVER FREE RUN YOUR DOGS AT SLEDDING EVENTS

Mushing Etiquette

- 1 Always ask permission before patting any dogs and especially when approaching other dogs with your dog(s). Many dogs are very excitable when out running in harness. Many are in their family group packs and therefore may not accept strange dogs approaching them.
- 2 If you have children, who are most welcome to our events, please make sure they are supervised at all times. Do not allow your children to approach dogs alone and/or without asking, not all dogs are used to children and an excited dog can easily knock a child over.
- 3 Stake your dog(s) away from others so that all dogs have adequate space to move and not encroach on each other. Dogs should be staked out well away from race tracks and not be able to reach the tracks when on their lines. Stakes and lines must be well secured and not too long, a short line is all that is needed. It is best to use a metal line to prevent dogs from chewing through.
- 4 If you are training on private land seek permission first. Some clubs have been granted permission to hold events in certain areas. Check with a committee member to see where they have been granted access to train. There are limited areas to run our dogs in some States and failure to gain permission from landowners beforehand can result in loss of permission to run.
- 5 Adequate lighting at night for safety is a must. A light is necessary on your scooter or rig and/or your helmet for trail visibility. A headlight is essential if you need to stop and work with your dogs. Be visible from both front and back, wearing clothing with reflective material is recommended.
- 6 Always keep your dogs under control. Take extra handlers if you have lots of dogs. Your dog's behavior and safety are your responsibility. Have ID tags on all your dogs in the event of an escape. Check all your equipment before leaving home for signs of wear and tear for the safety of you, your team and other mushers.

Sledding terms and definitions

Below are some terms you might hear when starting out in the sport of dog sledding.

Musher:	This term originates from the french word marche meaning march. This term was used to describe all those heading north to the Gold Rush regardless of how they got there, but has stuck with the individuals foolish enough to put their fate into the paws of insanely energetic dogs in order to get from place to place with a maximum of fuss.
Neckline:	A small cord that connects adjacent running dogs' collars to help prevent them from drifting apart during a run. Refer to the Equipment section for more on this.
No/Whoa:	Used to try and slow the dogs down, most dogs choose to ignore this command and keep running if they can get away with it.
Race Marshal (RM):	The Chief Judge, i.e. the person who shall have supreme authority at an event. The Race Marshal is the only official who can decide upon a disqualification.
Stakeout:	A cable that can be staked to the ground, allowing the dogs to be clipped to various anchor points along its length. If you have more than one dog, this little device can be invaluable making it possible to keep them organised and tangle free while not running.
Starting Chute:	A specified stretch of the trail from the starting line, minimum of 30 metres long and 4 metres wide, where help is allowed.
Driver:	A person who drives a dog team entered in a race.
Gangline:	Slightly elasticated cord that runs from the front of the sled / scooter and connects to the dogs' harnesses. Refer to the Equipment section for more information on this.
Gee:	An instruction for the dogs to turn Right. Other people actually use the word Right as the command, this is a personal choice.
Handler:	A person who assists in the handling of dogs when preparing for or directly after a race. These people are essential as it can be very difficult to handle a sled or scooter while attempting to get all dogs organised and even facing the right direction.
Haw:	An instruction for the dogs to turn Left. Other people actually use the word Left as the command, this is a personal choice.
Heat:	One of a series of races, the winners of a heat take part in another race heat against those who completed the other heats.
Hike/Hike Up:	Called to the dogs to go or run faster.

Track Signals



Red:

The red sign is the turning signal. When you see a red signal, it means you need to take the next turn. If it is on the left side of the track you need to take the next left turn. If it is on the right side of the track you take the next



Blue:

The blue sign is the straight on signal. When you see this, it means you are going in the correct direction, so keep going straight. This signal can be on either side of the track.



Yellow:

This is the caution sign. This means beware as the track may be particularly bumpy or slippery or steep. Basically take care, there may even be a double yellow sign, which means be especially careful.

TRAINING YOUR SLEDDOG

Regular training is the key to success in sleddog racing or any dog sport. It also means that you and your team of dogs will be well prepared to have loads of fun together!

You can train your sleddogs every day, even if the weather isn't cool enough or you don't have time to go out on your scooter or rig. Building up the fitness of your dog is crucial in the sport of sledding, but just as important is command training, which can be done during warmer weather and in everyday situations.

Practicing your commands regularly will make your runs on the track much easier and your times will be faster! If your dogs are able to understand directional commands and pass cleanly every time, you won't have to slow down and more fun will be had by all.

There are many ways to teach sledding commands to your dogs, but the easiest is during on-lead walks. Pick routes that have quite a few turns and say the commands when you change direction. This will start getting your dogs used to "Gee, Haw, Left or Right" and they will associate the change in direction with each command.

You can also speed up or slow down during your walk, while using the "Hike" or "Woah" command. If you are on a walk with more than one person, you can also use it as an opportunity to practice passing, which is very important. Call out the "Trail" command, and as you overtake the other walker, signal the dog to "On-By", which means leave the other dog alone and keep going.

Dogs also need to be safely kept in trailers, cars, crates or tethered at sled events. Tethers should be made of material that your dog cannot chew; chain or steel cable is ideal. The tethers are called stake out lines and should also be short so that your dog doesn't get tangled or injured. If your dog isn't used to being confined by any of these methods, you can also practice this at home.

You can set up your stake out line in your own backyard and sit out with your dog, giving them treats to make it more fun for them, or you can crate train them indoors. This will make the experience much easier for your dog at their first sled event because they will be used to their crate or stake out line.

Every dog is different when it comes to how much physical exercise they need to do to keep fit, the same as people. But free-running (if your dog has a good recall or the area is fully fenced) and swimming are two excellent forms of exercise to keep your dog fit during the off-season as well as between sled training runs. Make sure between each session of exercise, you give your dog rest days so that their bodies have time to recover.

It is safest to keep sled training sessions to one track run per day, per dog (but not every day of the week, rest days are important).

Start with small distances (500m – 1km) and work your way up over time. Larger teams of dogs can do longer distances, but the general rule in races is 2km of distance per dog. The more you exercise your dog, the more you will learn what distances they are comfortable with without over doing it.

If you do notice any items that require attention and you are not confident to carry out the work yourself then feel free to ask for assistance or seek the services of a professional.

> **REGULAR TRAINING IS
THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN
SLED DOG RACING OR
ANY DOG SPORT.**





SHOUT 'TRAIL' LOUDLY



GIVE WAY TO THE PASSER



ALLOW THE PASSER
SUFFICIENT TIME TO
GET BY CLEANLY

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Preventing Passing Pitfalls

The passer must shout TRAIL loudly so that the person being passed can hear i.e. "Trail Left" meaning you will pass on the left. Teams passing each other on the trail are an integral part of sled dog racing. Passing rules have been put in place in the interests of safety and fairness.

There are two teams involved in passing - the passer and the person being passed. The passer has started his race at least 30 seconds after the person being passed, is travelling at a faster speed and therefore has right of way.

The person being passed must give way to the passer, by moving his dogs and scooter to one side of the trail so as not to block the passing team. The person being passed should also slow down if needed to allow the passer to get by quickly.

The passer must shout TRAIL loudly so that the person being passed can hear – remember he is facing away from the passer. The passer must shout TRAIL well before he is close to the person being passed, to give the person being passed sufficient time to get off his scooter and hold his dogs off the trail if he wishes to do so.

If the person being passed cannot verbally keep his dogs on the side of the trail he should do so physically by moving his scooter into the bushes to pull his dogs over, moving his scooter between his dogs and the other team or getting off the scooter to hold his dogs.

The person being passed should allow the passer to get away cleanly. The person being passed may need to slow down a little to do this, if the passer's dogs momentarily lose momentum or confidence after the pass.

The person being passed may not overtake the passer until at least 30 seconds or 200 meters after being overtaken [60 seconds or 400 meters for 3 & 4 dog teams], to allow the passer sufficient time to get by cleanly. Exception: if the passer has had to stop to untangle, repair equipment or has gone the wrong way the person who was passed may overtake the passer before the allowed time.

The last 500 meters of the race are known as No Man's Land [this is usually marked by a witch's hat on the side of the trail] In No Man's Land the person being passed does not have to give way but he must not block his competitors and in the interests of fairness and safety should use common sense and courtesy.

RACE CLASSES

Below is a guide to the classes generally run at ASSA races. Please note that classes may be cancelled if there are less than 3 competitors in the class or they may be combined with another class and are determined by weather conditions (temperatures and humidity). Distances are a guide only and may be changed if temperatures are on the higher end of the scale.

Dogs can only be run in one class per race, with the exception of Canicross, Pee Wee and Mini Pee Wee (e.g. a dog can run in the 2 Dog Open Class and Pee Wee but it cannot run in 2 Dog Open Class and Veteran).

Class	Age	Distance	Details
Mini Pee Wee	Children 3-6	0.5km approx.	A class for young children and an adult. Mini mushers ride with an adult on a short track using 1 dog
Pee Wee	Children 7-10	0.5km approx.	A class for older children. Peeweeps can elect to ride solo or with an adult using 1 dog
Junior	Children 10-16	2km approx.	A class for teenagers involving 1 dog and musher. Children at this age may also choose to run in the Pee Wee Class
Novice	16 and over	2km approx.	A class for beginners or mushers who have competed in 2 or less previous sanctioned races, involves 1 dog
1 & 2 Dog Touring	16 and over	2km approx.	Two non-competitive scooter classes
Veteran	DOGS over 7	2km approx.	An elective touring class for dogs 7 years old or older
Bikejoring	16 and over	3km approx.	Competitive class for a musher and 1 or 2 dogs using a mountain bike instead of a scooter
Canicross	10 and over	2.5km approx.	A class without a rig or scooter. Joggers run with their dogs in a harness using a walking belt
1 Dog Open	16 and over	3km approx.	Competitive class for a musher and 1 dog
2 Dog Open	16 and over	4km approx.	Competitive class for a musher and 2 dogs
3 Dog Open	16 and over	5km approx.	Competitive class for running 3 dogs on a rig
4 Dog Open	16 and over	5km + approx.	Competitive class for running 4 dogs on a rig
6 Dog Open	16 and over	5km + approx.	Competitive class for running 6 dogs on a rig



TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR OPEN CLASSES YOU MUST HAVE COMPLETED A MINIMUM OF THREE NOVICE/ TOURING CLASS RACES

DOG HEALTH AND WELLBEING



> **IT IS IMPORTANT DOGS ARE HEALTHY AND REMAIN HEALTHY THROUGH RACING AND TRAINING SEASON**

Author: Nicola Adderson
Qualified vet nurse (Cert IV)

Our sleddog sport is a lot of fun for both owner/musher and dog. To us mushers, the most important thing above everything else is our teammate and best friend – our dog/s. It is important they are healthy and remain healthy through the racing and training season. It is important they are not running sore; some dogs hide their soreness well as it is in their nature, so it is up to us to make sure their joints and muscles are up to scratch.

Sometimes a visit to the vet or a qualified animal physiotherapist is what may be needed. Running a dog with hip dysplasia or other joint diseases is not recommended as pulling puts a lot of pressure on their joints and this can cause your dog to be very sore and their joints will degenerate a lot faster. Making sure your harnesses are correctly fitted is important and making sure you have the right harness for your dog's body type is important too.

Every dog is different, but making sure they are on a complete and balanced diet is important for your dog's health too. Speak to your vet, vet nurse, pet care specialist or a QUALIFIED pet nutritionist for advice is the way to go.

There are a few health issues to keep in mind when racing and training, these are a few:

Overheating - signs, treatment, and prevention

This is extremely dangerous and can kill your dog. While dogs have a small number of sweat glands (mainly in the paw pads), their main way of releasing heat is through panting. Panting helps bring hot blood directly to the surface of the skin, allowing for the blood to cool before running back to the heart.

This is why running with muzzles is not allowed. Humidity (water vapour in the air) is a huge danger as perspiration does not evaporate as well, making it a lot harder for dogs to cool themselves down. It is so important to make sure you do not run your dog's when it is too humid.

Recommendations that temperatures are below 15 degrees and below 75% humidity, if you still feel this is too warm then don't run. General information and things to be aware of when sledding them. Overheating can cause brain, liver and/ or kidney damage and death, so if your dog does overheat (even slightly) it is extremely important they get a blood test done to check the state of their liver and kidneys. They will cook from the inside out so when you see signs take it seriously, as it is dangerous. If your dog does overheat then they really should take the rest of the year off to allow their organs to repair and regular blood tests are recommended. If your dog is wearing booties take them off as soon as you have finished your run as this traps all the heat in.

> **REMEMBER THIS IS YOUR BEST FRIEND AND YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR LOOKING AFTER THEM. DON'T TAKE ANY RISKS AS IT ISN'T WORTH IT**

It is important in training to stop your dogs during a run to check they are coping well and are showing NO symptoms of getting too hot. Very experienced mushers who know their dogs extremely well may push them a bit harder, but for starting out it is extremely important to look after your dogs and get to know their limits. Overheating can happen very quickly and seeing the signs early can save your dog's life.

These are some of the symptoms:

- Dry gums
- Deep, rapid breathing (as if trying to gasp for air)
- Warm to touch
- Thick saliva
- Bright red or blue gums/ tongue
- Wobbliness
- Disorientation and/ or stumbling
- Red flushed skin around ears, muzzle, and belly
- Diarrhoea and/ or vomiting
- Collapse and / or convulsions/ seizures
- Some dogs do not want to drink

If one of these is happening stop your dog immediately.

If your dog overheats the main thing is to cool your dog down. If you have a rectal thermometer it is a good idea to check their temp. A dog's normal temperature is around 37.8 -38.7 degrees. Offer your dog some water, but do not let them guzzle it. Small amounts is good. Slow gentle walking is also good. A cold, wet towel around the neck, between hind legs, belly and under armpits will help. Do not wrap a cold towel around paws as this will trap the heat. Do not force water down your dog's throat as it may end up in their lungs. You can also wet the tongue with a towel. If you decide to put ice on your dog then gently use it around paw pads. If there is a vet or vet nurse around call them straight away and depending on the severity head to a vet ASAP. If the vet/vet nurse has fluids and is capable of placing an IV catheter, then this would be the best thing for your dog.

Remember this is your best friend and you are responsible for looking after them. Don't take any risks as it isn't worth it.



Bloat/ GDV (Gastric Dilation and Volvulus)

I cannot stress how dangerous this is. If you believe your dog has bloat then time is what is going to save them. Get to a vet ASAP as this is an emergency and they can die within a few hours, this is your one and only treatment. To Prevent GDV make sure you know your dog's history is always good. It is important if you are going to run your dog/s to do it one hour before a meal and 2 hours after (I personally leave it a little longer), do not let your dog have a drink just before a run.

Any diet changes are to be made gradually. Deep chested dogs are more prone to GDV and an elevated feed bowl won't hurt. Speak to your vet further if you are worried about GDV. Also, making sure your dog does not gulp water down after a run is very important. Think as if you were going for a run what you would do. This leads me to the next category:

Muscle Soreness

Just as we can pull muscles and tendons so can they, so it is always a good idea to stretch our dogs. DO NOT do this when their muscles are still cold so walking/ or massaging your dog first is always good too before stretching. Walking them after a run is recommended too as this helps cool them down and help loosen their muscles. A check-up at your local vet/ qualified physio is recommended every now and again to make sure they not sore anywhere. Making sure you have a good diet for your dog with some good oils is great for your dog's joints.

BASIC EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

Media



> IT'S IMPORTANT TO CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT BEFORE THE START OF EACH RACE SEASON THEN AGAIN BEFORE EACH RACE.

Harnesses: Check that your tugs are secure, all stitching is complete and that there is no fraying in your harness webbing. Before the start of each season check that your harness is still the correct size for your dog and allow enough time to get a new one should you require.

Ganglines: Check that your lines are not frayed anywhere and pay attention to where your line attaches to your scooter, look for any rub marks or anything of concern. Also, check clips that connect to the harness tug are in good working order & they do not stick, you do not want them opening or sticking during a race. Scooter/ Rig: To make maintenance on easier, it is recommended that you clean it after training, you don't have to polish it but a quick hose down to remove mud and muck will make it easier to carry out a visual inspection and save you a few dollars with wear and tear on your ride.

Tyre Pressure: People like to run different pressures depending on the set up of their rides, the track conditions, and personal preference. This has been discussed on club Facebook pages many times, so if you're not sure please ask (as a general rule 30 -35 PSI). It is important though to check your tire pressures before leaving home so you aren't turning up to a race and realising that you have flat tires. It is also advisable to carry a few spare tubes in your spares kit as it is possible to get a puncture out on the track.

Brakes: It is compulsory for all scooters and rigs to have a front and rear brake that are correctly adjusted and in working order, some race marshals will check this. There are a few different types of brakes that are used on scooters and rigs but they all have brake pads which need to be checked for wear, replace pads as necessary. On all cable operated brakes, check the condition of the cables paying attention to fraying, kinks, and ease of movement. For those that have hydraulic brakes, if your brake levers have become spongy it may be time to replace your brake fluid and bleed your brakes. If you are not familiar with how to do this then this is a job for the professionals so take your ride to your local bike shop.

Frame: Carry out a visual inspection of your frame on a regular basis, you are looking for any visible cracking or thinning of metal. There have been rare cases of frames snapping so it is important to check over your frame. Suspension: If you are running suspension on your scooter or rig, check that there is no fork oil leaking out the top of your fork seals and that your suspension is not bottoming out, this may be a sign that more fork oil or maintenance is required. Finally, carry out a nut and bolt check making sure that nothing has come loose.

Helmet: The most important thing is to make sure your helmet fits correctly and is secured. It must meet AZ/NZS Helmet Standards. We have had instances of people falling and helmets being split in half, had these people not been wearing a helmet the outcome may have been very grim. If you have an accident and hit your head, your helmet should be replaced immediately!



committee.assa@gmail.com

www.assa.dog

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