

# **Roman Reign Working Dog Handouts**

## **Intro into Drafting, Newfie Draft test, and Weight pull**

**Some short blurbs about getting started by Jennie Chen**  
**Roman Reign Working Dog Equipment [www.rrgsmd.com](http://www.rrgsmd.com)**

Max has a freight/weight siwash from with a cinch and cinch loop added because I want to do weight pulling and carting. However, the freight harnesses is too "wimpy" for real competitive weight pulling. The disadvantages of a freight/weight siwash is that it is a one-piece so you must take the entire thing off to let the dog potty or else hook the spreader bar up to the shoulders of the dog so they can walk around without tripping. On the other hand, being a one-piece is also an advantage as it is easier to untangle and easier to put on.

The carting harnesses usually are more complicated than the freight weight harnesses. There is the neckpiece, bellyband, and 2 traces. You MUST be absolutely certain that the 2 traces are the same length so that the weight is distributed correctly. These two traces either attach to a tree or 2 points on the vehicle. The advantage of the carting harnesses is that you can just unhook the traces without having straps hanging off everywhere.

Some companies even offer a starter pack with a puppy harness and some wheels for getting started. A list of sites is on the links page. There are many more companies that make harnesses so don't limit yourself to the ones I have provided.

There are a 1000 ways to introduce your dog to the shafts. Since most people might not have a cart yet, you can use a pvc pipe or wooden dowel rods.

One is to have someone walk behind the dog hold shafts at the dog's side. This is often difficult and cumbersome.

Another is to have a person walk with a cart next to the dog and bump the dog on the side every 5 steps or so and the person at the dog's head treats. You must make sure that you are bumping the dog at shoulder level and from the shoulder back. Too far forward and the dog will see the shaft and be distracted or intimidated.

You can also place your dog in a heel and using your left hand, hold a shaft or broom (anything really!) next to the dog's side as you walk. Then switch sides. Try whatever works. Anything to get the dog used to something bumping his/her sides. The next step is to incorporate sound into this.

You can have someone walk behind the dog banging a pot or some other loud and startling noise. Or you can attach empty milk jugs to the end of your dowel rod. Don't worry if the dog seems a little spooked at first, after about 2 weeks of doing this, the dog will be ready to get in cart.

Okay, lesson 2 how to get your dog to cue on the steering hand. You don't have to do these lessons in order until we actually get to the part where you teach sharp turns and 360s. In carting, you use hand signals to steer and only one hand. This is because if you do brace, you need 1 hand for each dog. I learned to steer with my left hand because in the heel position, that's where the dog is. Either is fine.

To start, get the dog to cue on your hand all the time. Several times a day, have a handful of treats and let the dog eat the treats slowly. Anytime you treat, treat with that hand. Play games with that hand; always offer toys with the same hand.

When out on a walk, have a handful of treats and allow the dog to eat them when he is in the heel position.

We do this because on the long haul, the dog is supposed to be in a heel position responding to your hand/voice commands.

Begin using hand commands for forward (pull or hike, use whichever command you want), back (back up), sit, down, and stand. I usually do voice combined with hand signals to do turns. So if the dog is coming towards you, use the forward hand signals. Start trying to use hand signals along with voice commands you already know. The back is a little more difficult. Most dogs have a hard time learning it.

After a few weeks, the dog should be cue onto your hand almost all the time. It's actually kind of fun to steer your dog around with hand signals - almost like a remote. Too bad the batteries in my remote go dead sporadically.

### **Ten Tips to Backing by Dori Likevich**

1. Settle on a Technique (fingers to the side, finger over the head, "pushing off")
2. Get a reliable off-cart back (if indoors, use furniture or a narrow hallway for a chute)
3. Ensure your harness is properly fit and cart is functional (air in tires, shafts equal length)
4. Start on a Downhill, with a smooth surface
5. Use **lots of treats** at first (nice "danglely" ones work well) and **praise**
6. Take it slow and in short increments
7. Consider using a second person to help spot the dog
8. Turning? Make a chute (initially just for the dog) or place the cart wheels in ruts
9. Sitting? Use a second person, or loop the haunches, or a gentle foot nudge
10. Be patient and persistent, don't get discouraged as one day the "light will go on"

- C. Maneuvering Course - covers at least 150 yds. No time limit
1. Incorporates circular patterns and broad curves.
  2. Has at least two 90 degree turns.
  3. Has one narrow area blocked by a removable object.
    - a. dog must stop while handler removes object, then move through narrow area
- D. Freight Load
1. 5 pounds for travois
  2. 15 pounds for toboggan or sled
  3. 25 pounds for cart or wagon
- E. Distance Freight Haul
1. Cross country course of at least one mile.
  2. No time limit as long as dog is working.
  3. Dog must cooperate for unhitching.
- F. Intriguing Distraction
1. This distraction may appear any time during a moving exercise, and there may be more than one distraction.
- G. General Comments
1. You cannot touch your dog during exercises except harnessing and hitching.
  2. Talking, praising, multiple commands and signals are permitted for all exercises except:
    - a. one minute stand
    - b. one minute out of sight.
    - c. three minute stay
    - d. recall - one command until dog begins towards you, then encouragement is allowed.
  3. One minute stay can be in any position - stand, sit or down.
  4. Dog cannot upset apparatus.

## BEGINNING DRAFT TRAINING

**CHOOSING A HARNESS.** A harness should be suited to the type activity you intend to do. Some of the most popular types are:

**Siwash Freight:** Allows for maximum pulling power, single attachment point. Has a spreader bar behind the dog's rear legs, which can be inconvenient when not hitched.

**Siwash Cart:** Slightly less pulling power, better control. Requires dual attachment points or a singletree. Has dual traces which must be correctly adjusted to get an even pull.

**Chest Strap:** Restricts movement of the shoulder and front legs. OK for training or very light loads.

**Tracking Harness:** Not suited for draft work unless equipped with chest strap, then has same restrictions as above.

**CHOOSING AN APPARATUS.** The apparatus should be suited to the type load you intend to move. Some of the popular types are:

**Wagon:** Four wheels give maximum stability for loads that could shift or move. Generally articulated in front, which makes it hard to back up. The wheel size determines performance off road; larger diameter wheels are better for rough terrain, wider wheels are better on soft ground. For best stability, get independent steering in front, not single axle.

**Cart:** Generally has two wheels, load must be centered correctly for optimum performance, and must be stable. The wheel size determines performance off road; larger diameter wheels are better for rough terrain, wider wheels are better for soft ground. Much easier to back up than wagon.

**Travois:** Modern travois are generally made of metal, and are excellent training devices, but cannot carry significant loads. Rear of travois skids along ground, ends are generally turned up to allow backing like a cart.

**Sled or Toboggan:** Wide range of non-wheeled platforms which skid along the ground, generally with no shafts. Cannot back. Usually have too much friction to use effectively unless on ice or snow. Must be careful of even relatively small bumps, rocks, roots, etc.

**No Apparatus:** A load to which you attach traces directly, such as a section of log which will be skidded along the ground. See restrictions of sled or toboggan, above.

**Harnessing:** Putting the harness on the dog. Each type harness is a little bit different, but in general:

Check the harness. Make sure it is an appropriate size for your dog, clean, not knotted or twisted, and is free from burrs and stickers.

Check the dog. Make sure your dog is brushed free of burrs and stickers or other foreign matter in the coat, which could cause sores.

Orient the harness. Make sure you know which side is up, what goes on first, how it fits. Place harness on the dog.

Check the fit. Once you have put the harness on your dog, check that all straps are laying flat, buckles are adjusted correctly.



**Drag Training.** Get your dog used to the feel of weight pulling on the harness. Begin with a milk jug or short 2x4 hooked to the traces, gradually increase weight. Begin on a flat smooth surface.

**Shaft Training.** Get your dog used to the feel of something close to their body. Start with a partner controlling a travois or loose shafts, not hooked to the harness, just following the dog while you are in heel position. Then move to a hitched apparatus with no load. Only go straight or wide open turns!

**Verbalize.** Start getting your dog used to the commands you will use when off lead, even though this class is all on lead. You can use whatever commands you like, but common commands are:

"Forward" or "Hike": Move ahead at a walk.

"Left" or "Gee": Turn to the left.

"Hard Left" or "Gee-Gee" Sharp turn to the left.

"Right" or "Haw": Turn to the right.

"Hard Right" or "Haw-Haw": Sharp turn to the right.

"Stop" or "Whoa": Stop moving and stand where you are.

"Back-up" or "Back": Move straight backwards.

"Slow" or "Easy": Move ahead slowly.

## **SAFETY**

1. **Keep within 18" of your dog's head. If you control the dog's head, you control the body. Where the head goes the body must follow.**
2. **It is common for a dog to feel trapped between shafts and to fear the sound of what is directly behind them. This may cause the dog to instinctively circle around to try to find out what is threatening them. Be prepared to grab your dog's collar, hold his head, and calm him down.**
3. **It is normal for your dog to fear the unknown. His trust in you and your reassurance to him is very important. Normal fear might take the form of the sound of the cart, the approach of another dog, limited movement, bumps, and curbs.**
4. **Harnesses: Proper harnessing is very important. A yoke that is too small or a collar portion of the harness that is too small will cause a dog to become choked. This happens when your dog begins to pull. The V-portion of the harness can ride up on the dog's windpipe. PLACE YOUR FINGER IN THE "V" AND MAKE SURE THAT THE FINGER TOUCHES THE POINT OF THE DOG'S BREASTBONE. A yoke or collar that is too large causes too much pull on your dog's shoulders and this restricts movement. In order to better understand how this feels to your dog, place a belt around your hips and try to walk.**
5. **ALWAYS CHECK THE PADDING ON THE COLLAR OR YOKE OF YOUR DOG'S HARNESS. Chunks of mud, burrs, or other foreign objects can be stuck to the harness padding. This can cause pain and discomfort.**
6. **Check the shaft height. Make sure the shafts are at the point of the dog's shoulders. Allow the dog's head to turn freely over the top of the shafts. If the shaft height is too high, the dog will duck under the shaft and can flip the cart and cause injury.**
7. **The length of the shaft should extend beyond the point of the dog's shoulder and no further than the center of the neck. If the shaft is too short it will poke into the dog's shoulder. If the shaft is too long it will catch on objects when moving in tight areas. If the shaft is too high it will poke the dog in the neck.**
8. **Location of traces on the dog: A singletree that is too small will cause the traces to rub the dog's hindquarters. Traces need to be a least two inches away from the dog's body.**

**Know and understand your equipment. Know how to check your equipment. Know how to fit your dog properly. If you do all of this, YOU and your DOG will cart safely and avoid problems.**



## Recommended Reading For Carting and All Types of Draft Work

1. Newfoundland Draft Work by Consie Powell  
(Consie Powell is a well know carting expert).
2. Don't Shoot The Dog by Karen Pryor  
(Karen Pryor is a renowned animal expert in positive training).

### Basics

When you take your dog for a walk teach him basic carting commands. "Turns", "stands", and "backing up" are a few examples. Try the following:

1. When making a turn give a verbal command "right," "left," or "gee" or "haw."
2. When coming to a stop verbalize the command "stand" or "stop".
3. When you start out verbalize the command "forward" or "pull".
4. If you walk through a narrow spot, i.e., between two cars, between two trees, between a fence and a bench, stop and have your dog back up.

### Harness and Hitching

Always check both dog and harness prior to harnessing. Make sure the harness is free of foreign objects, burrs, mud, small sticks etc. that may injure your dog.

After harnessing, check the girth strap for proper adjustment. It should be snug, not too loose or too tight. If you have a freight style siwash, you have a spreader bar and when the spreader bar is unhooked it should hang just above the hock. When hitched the spreader bar should be below the tail and straight behind the hip.

Practice putting the harness on and taking it off the dog. Place the harness on and praise your dog so he understands that it nice to have it on. Remove the harness and play, so your dog understands he has done something good.

After hooking up to whatever apparatus you are going to use, make sure the girth loops are located at shoulder height and the shafts do not interfere with the dog's movement. Check the brakes (the object behind the girth loops which prevent the apparatus from moving forward and into your dog). There should be only limited movement.

Check the traces (the straps running down the side of your dog to the point of pull). The traces should be snug. If the traces are too loose undue stress may be placed on your dog and can cause injury and/or discomfort and fear (caused from unrestrained movement). It is very important to have a proper fit on the harness and hook-up to apparatus. Always double check everything.

### Harnessed and Hitched

Practice pulling at a normal and slow pace as well as stopping. No sharp turns, crossing creeks or weight in cart at this point. Practice on relatively flat ground, straight pulls and very broad turns. Use constant praise. Make sure you are close to your dog's head at all times. Your dog's safety is paramount in the training process. When a dog becomes frightened his first instinct is to run, turn or lunge in one direction or another. Another dog running up can scare your dog due to the restriction of the cart, shafts and harness. You must be at your dog's head to stop him from turning the apparatus over and breaking a leg, rib, etc. Your dog must learn that you will protect him at all times. Having a good bond between yourself and your dog is a must.

### Pulling

Teach your dog to move on his own first. Pull or forward. You can do this by placing a treat about one foot in front of your dog. Say "forward" or "pull". As soon as the dog moves, praise him. Don't place the treat too far in front or the dog may have a tendency to run for the treat.

### Turns

Make a broad circle to the right, gradually spiraling inward until the circle is approximately 10 feet in diameter (telling the dog "right"). When your dog is comfortable with the right turn process, teach left turns in the same manner. After the dog is comfortable turning in a 10 foot circle to the right and left, move on to Figure 8's with two 10 foot circles. You will note that at this point your dog's front feet will be starting to cross over. At this point you will need to teach your dog to do 90 degree turns.

### 90 Degree Turns

Place your dog in a stand. Move away from your dog about three feet and stand even with his right shoulder. Hold a treat out with one hand, leash in the other and say "tight right" or "tight gee". Keep tension on the leash at first pulling him steadily to you. Give him the treat and lots of praise when he gets to you. Repeat this over and over until he does this without being pulled and is comfortable and has no problem with balance. Practice left turns in the same manner.

Now teach your dog to do a complete circle in the same manner.

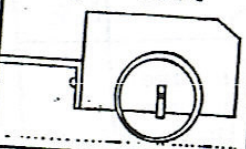
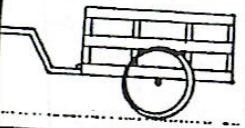
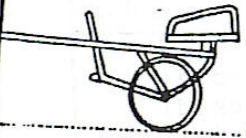
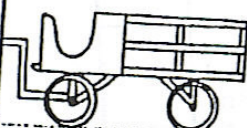
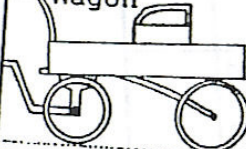
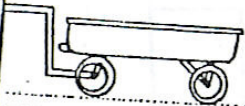


### Backing Up

Backing up is NOT a natural act for a dog, so have patience. Place your dog between two objects close enough that it is impossible to be able to do anything but walk forward or backward. Give him the command to back, gently force him or entice him backwards and as soon as he begins to move praise him. At first only make him move a foot or so. Once he does this without hesitation then lengthen the distance.

There are as many ways of teaching these maneuvers as there are dogs. You know your dog better than anyone. As long as you keep safety in mind, don't be afraid to use other methods or a combination of methods in training. Take your time and progress at your dog's pace and not at yours.

# DRAFT APPARATUS


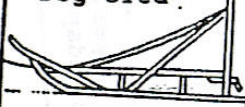


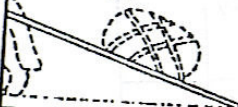

AVAIL- ABILITY	BASIC TYPE OF APPARATUS	SURFACE ON WHICH APPARATUS WORKS BEST	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	USE WITH MULTIPLE DOGS
homemade	Simple Box- style Cart 	asphalt, hard surfaces	can be built from inexpensive mat- erials; easy to maneuver and often lightweight	balanced load imperative	yes, with adaptations
homemade or purchase	Utility Cart 	asphalt, hard surfaces	can be built from inexpensive mat- erials or pur- chased readymade; easy to maneuver; lightweight	does not carry passengers well; balanced load imperative	yes, with adaptations
purchase	Sulky Cart 	asphalt, hard surfaces	easier to balance when carrying passengers than other types of carts; easy to maneuver; light- weight	designed mostly for passengers; balanced load imperative	yes, with adaptations
homemade	Simple Utility Wagon 	asphalt, hard surfaces	solid, steady and low to the ground; space for people and load; can be homemade	needs more maneuvering space than a cart; large and bulky to transport	yes
homemade	'Sulky-style' Wagon 	asphalt, hard surfaces	has springs for very smooth ride; space for people and load; can be homemade	needs more maneuvering space than a cart; large and bulky to transport	yes
purchase	Converted Child's Wagon 	asphalt, hard surfaces	conversion of wagon is fairly easy; lightweight and fairly inex- pensive. More por- table than other types of wagons.	Needs more maneuvering space than a cart; small wheels make this wagon less efficient than other wagons	yes

printed from:

Newfoundland Draft Work (2nd ed) by Consie Powell



# COMPARISON CHART

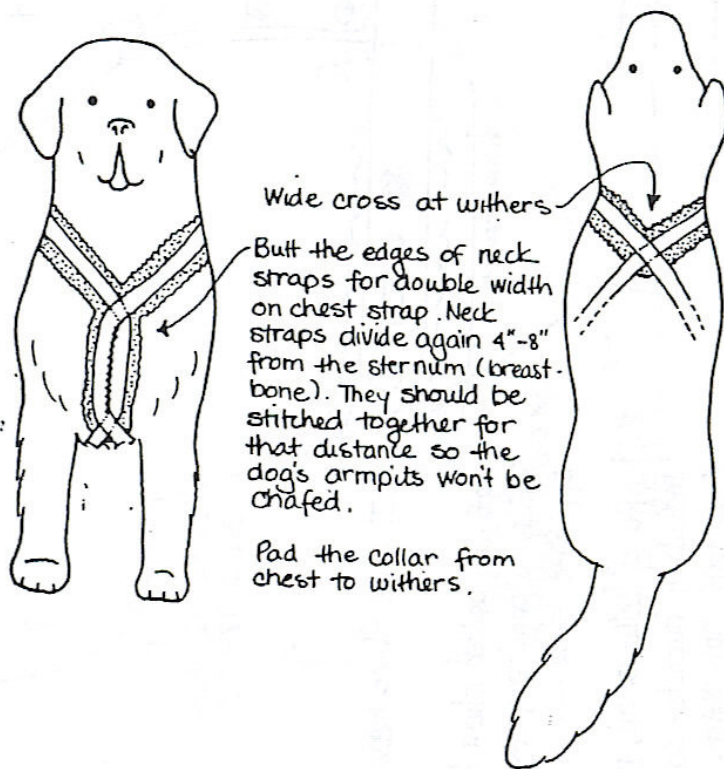
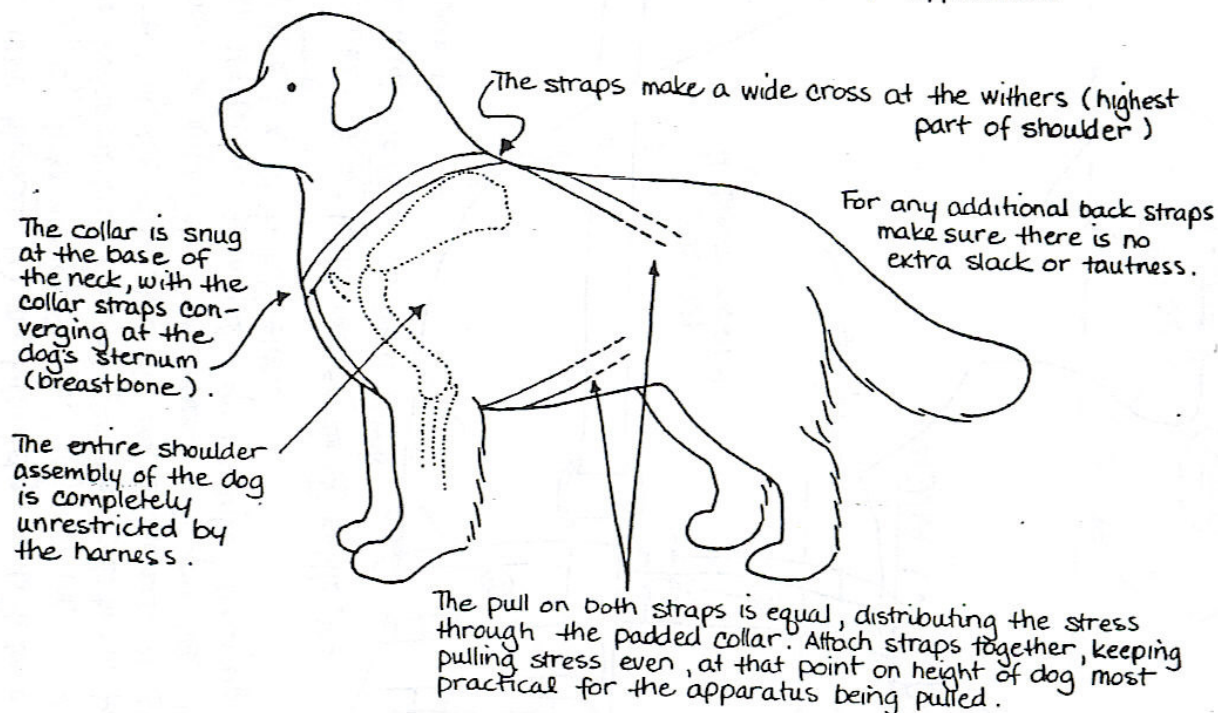
AVAIL- ABILITY	BASIC TYPE OF APPARATUS	SURFACE ON WHICH APPARATUS WORKS BEST	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	USE WITH MULTIPLE DOGS
purchase	Child's Sled 	packed snow, rough ice	relatively inex- pensive; easily accessible; good for play	cannot be used off packed sur- face or in deep snow; minimal control and load carriage	yes
purchase	Standard Racing Dog Sled 	packed snow, rough ice	minimal drag on packed surface; can be steered; has brake; hand- ler can ride	cannot be used efficiently off packed surfaces or in deep snow	yes
purchase	Standard Toboggan 	packed snow, rough ice, also works on loose snow	easily access- able; can go on more loosely packed snow than sleds; follows snowshoe trails	presents more drag on packed snow than sleds; has no steer or brake mechanism	yes
purchase	Pulk 	packed snow, rough ice, also works on loose snow	rugged, light- weight, versatile can also be hailed by person on skis or snow- shoes; use with or without shafts	presents more drag on packed snow than sleds; without shafts has no steer or brake mechanism	yes
homemade	Makeshift Indian-style Travois 	trails and forested areas (non- snow seasons)	occasionally use- ful in short-term hauling situation makeshift mater- ials usually accessible; inex- pensive	inefficient and stressful to dog in extended use; presents signifi- cant drag; not designed to haul people	no
homemade	Modern Aluminum Travois 	trails and forested areas (non- snow seasons)	hauls load in areas wheeled apparatus cannot go; minimal flex of load trans- mitted to dog; can be homemade	presents drag but less than Indian- style travois; not designed to haul people	no

Reprinted from: Newfoundland Dredge Works Ltd.



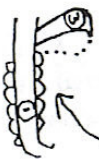
# THE PROPERLY FITTED SIWASH HARNESS

1" wide webbing (or other material) works best  
A ring or rope loop may be attached at end of harness for attaching to traces for draft apparatus.

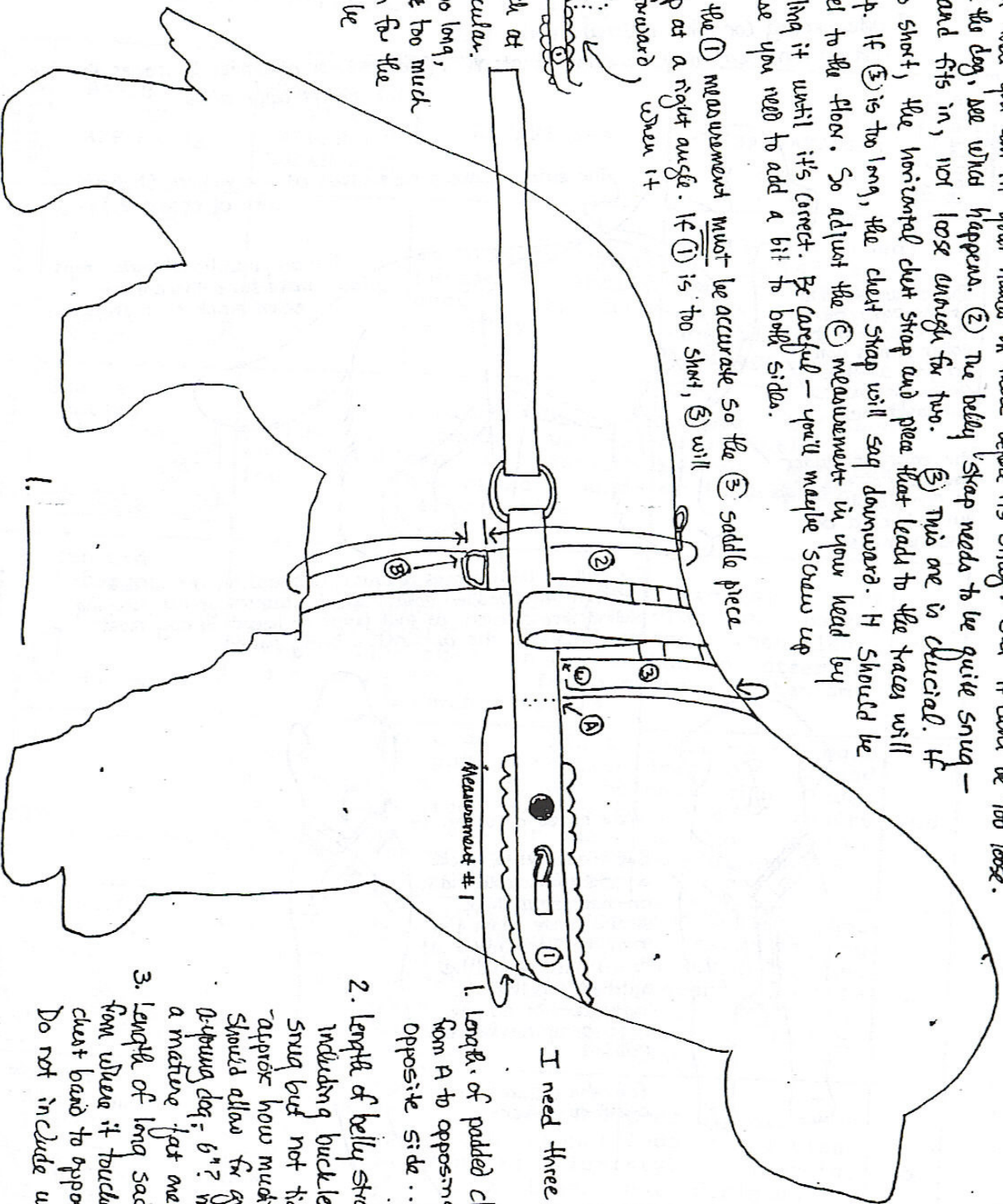


enough that you can fit your hands in there before it's snug. But it can't be too loose. Walk the dog, see what happens. ② The belly strap needs to be quite snug - one hand fits in, not loose enough for two. ③ This one is crucial. If it's too short, the horizontal chest strap and piece that leads to the traces will hike up. If ③ is too long, the chest strap will sag downward. It should be parallel to the floor. So adjust the ③ measurement in your head by eyeballing it until it's correct. Be careful - you'll maybe screw up because you need to add a bit to both sides.

Also: the ① measurement must be accurate so the ③ saddle piece joins up at a right angle. If ① is too short, ③ will slant forward when it



must attach at a perpendicular. If ① is too long, there'll be too much chest room for the harness to be efficient.



I need three measure

1. Length of padded chest bar from A to opposing point opposite side...

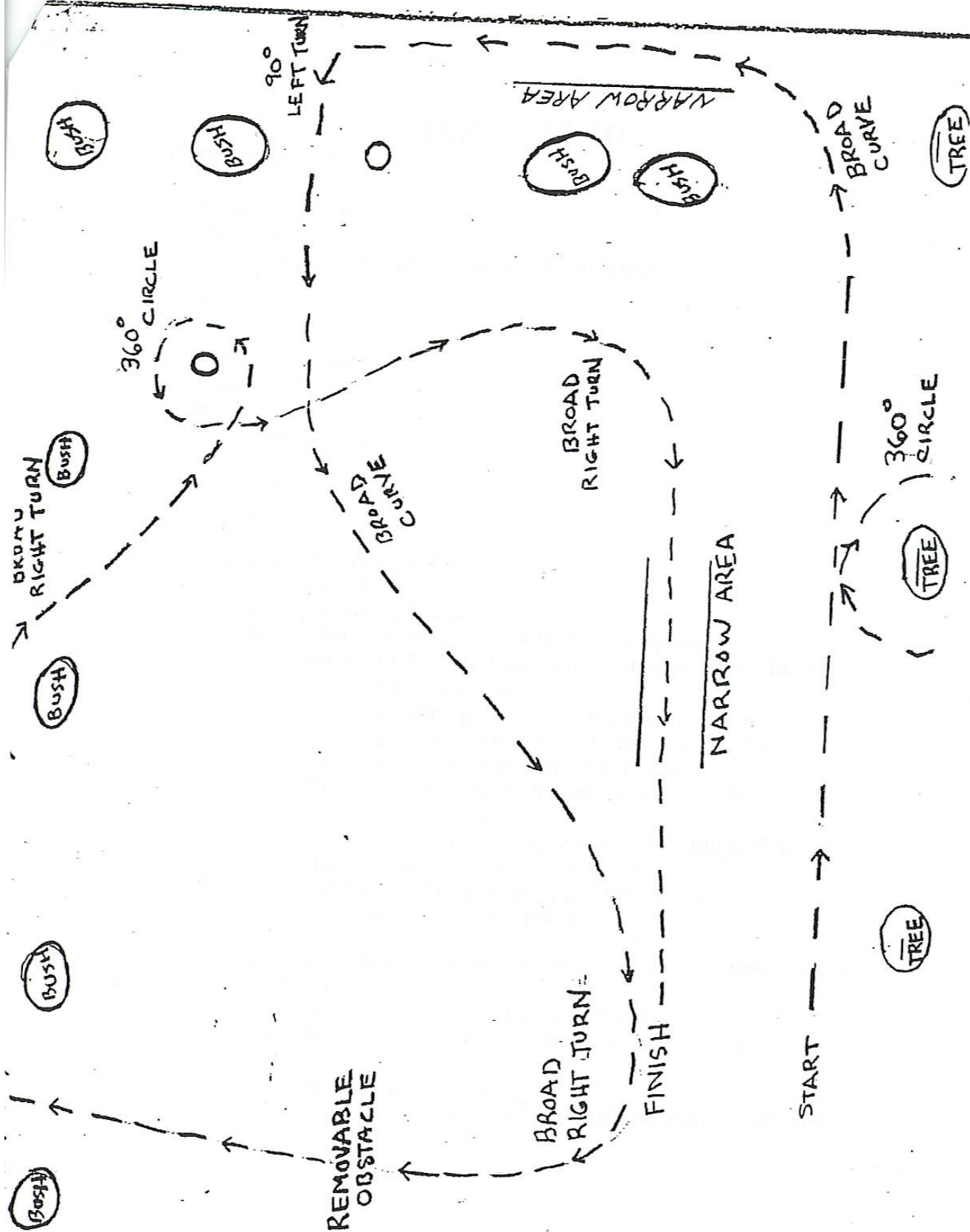
2. Length of belly strap, not including buckle - so it snug but not tight. I'll "approx how much extra should allow for growth (growing dog: 6"? much less a mature (past one)).

3. Length of long saddle piece from where it touches edge chest band to opposing point. Do not include underlay

45.00 custom harness - nine inches / 21

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

Be sure to include name to a





## A Basic Introduction to Weight Pulling

### History

Canine weight pulling can trace its history back to the days of Alaska's goldrush. It's there that miners, trappers, and others would bet money to see who had the strongest dog. Most of us are familiar with the dog, Buck, from Jack London's "Call of the Wild". Buck was asked to pull a heavily loaded sled that was frozen to the ground a certain distance, while spectators bet on whether or not he could do it. Buck worked the sled from side to side until it broke free. He successfully pulled the heavy sled to his handler.

Canine weight pulling has changed dramatically since the goldrush days. Now events are sanctioned through various organizations throughout the United States and Canada. All breeds of dogs compete, and their safety is of the upmost concern for all involved.

The popularity of weight pulling is increasing. It is a sport that the average person and dog can compete in. Most events are also very family oriented making it easy for everyone to enjoy whether you are young or old.

### The Objective

The objective of weight pulling is to see who has the strongest dog and best trained dog in an organized, safe, and professional competition. The dogs are first divided into classes based upon their weight so that they can compete with other dogs of comparable size. Dogs are then asked to pull a loaded sled or cart the distance of 16 feet within 60 seconds. The weights start off light, and with each round more weight is added. The dogs that cannot pull the weight are eliminated from competition. The dog that pulls the most weight wins the class. If two or more dogs pull the same amount of weight, then the winner is determined by time.

The exact rules of weight pulling will vary depending upon the organization that is hosting the pull. Most weight pull rules are based upon the same guidelines, but there are differences. When competing at a weight pull, be aware of the rules that you are competing under. Also keep in mind that some organizations are breed specific while others allow all breeds, including mixes, to compete.

### The Dogs

In general, weight pulling is open to any dog regardless of its breed, size, sex, or age. Popular "pulling" breeds are Alaskan Malamutes, Mastiffs, American Bulldogs, and Pitbulls, but there have been other breeds such as Jack Russells, poodles, shepherds, and retrievers. Even the average mutt from the local animal shelter is welcome at some of the competitions. Don't let size fool you either. Sometimes smaller dogs can pound for pound, out pull the largest of the dogs.

Regardless of the breed, the most important factor is the dog's health. Working dogs should have sound hips, bones, and joints. They should be up to date on vaccines and free of parasites. They shouldn't have any type of debilitating diseases like heart disease, liver problems, or kidney problems. A thorough vet visit is in order if you plan on working your dog. This visit will help to ensure that your dog is healthy and ready to work.

The dog's age is another important factor. Most organizations will allow you to compete in pro classes when the dog is between 1 year old and 12 years old. Again, this will vary between organizations. Puppies can begin a specialized training program as young as 8 weeks. And yes, you can teach an old dog new tricks. Mature dogs can be trained to weight pull also.



## The Dogs (cont.)

The general temperament of your dog is going to be a factor also. Weight pulling is not only a physical sport, but a mental sport as well. Dogs that are shy or easily spooked by people and noises will be harder to train and compete with. Dogs that are aggressive will be more interested in wasting energy on picking fights vs. working. Most organizations will not allow human aggressive dogs to compete. This is not to say that if your dog is shy or aggressive, that it won't pull for you. It just means that you will have to work harder at training your dog.

## Harnesses

The harness is the most important piece of equipment that you will need for weight pulling. There are 2 types of harnesses that are acceptable for weight pulling. They are the freighting harness and the weight pulling harness. Both harnesses are designed to take the weight off the dog's hind quarters and place it on the chest and shoulders of the dog when pulling a heavy load. The harness is well padded with faux fur or fleece to prevent chafing and the nylon from cutting into the dog when in use.

The freighting harness came before weight pulling was an organized sport. It is primarily used for hauling heavy weights long distance by way of dog sled. The freight harness is usually made of 1" wide nylon webbing with padding on the neck and breast plate. It also has a spreader bar (wooden dowel) placed behind the dog's back legs close to the point of hookup. The spreader bar on a freight harness is usually closer to the dogs backend, and the ring used for hookup is generally smaller. It is designed this way so that the dog doesn't become tangled in the harness when running on a sled team. Freight harnesses are acceptable for weight pulling since it is designed to haul heavy loads.

The weight pulling harness is similar to the freight harness. Generally, this harness is made of up to 2" wide nylon webbing and is padded around the neck, breast, and along the sides to the spreader bar. The spreader bar is usually larger on a weight pulling harness and is not placed so close to the dog's backend. This way less pressure is placed on the dog's hind quarters and is given more room to work a very heavy load. Weight pulling harnesses can also extend farther out the backend, usually not more than 24" at the point of hookup. The ring used for hookup is also larger.

***Never use a walking, sledding, or any other harness that does not have a spreader bar for weight pulling!  
You can cause injury to your dog by placing unnecessary strain on the back!***

Harness fit is another important factor. Dogs should have a properly fitted harness for training and competition. A properly fitted harness will allow the dog to perform at its highest potential and ensure the safety of the dog. Harnesses should fit snug around the neck. A loose or tight fitting harness will restrict your dog's movements or press on his windpipe. The harness should also be long enough for the dog to comfortably work in it, but not so loose that the dog gets tangled. The fit of the harness should be checked regularly. It should be adjusted accordingly when needed. Watch your dog while training and note any adjustments that need to be made. Remember, your dog cannot tell you how the harness fits by talking to you. You must watch his movements to determine what a comfortable fit is for your dog. If you are unsure of the fit of the harness, by all means ask someone who is experienced in weight pulling to check it for you.

Another point to keep in mind with the a harness is your dog's age. Puppies and young dogs are going to need more than one harness as they grow. Generally, dogs are not full grown until they are at least 1 year old, and will take an additional year to fill out. Larger breeds can take up to 3 years before they are full grown.



## Harnessing

Let your dog smell the harness first. Slowly place the head through the neck hole, pushing it down into place. Work the collars and leashes through the neck hole so that they rest between the dog's head and harness. The harness should rest comfortably at the base of the dog's neck with one cross section resting on the top of his breast bone and the other cross section resting on his shoulder blades.

The breast plate should be resting against your dog's breast. Pick your dog's front legs up one at a time. Pull the leg between the breast plate and the first side strap. Once both front legs are in place, finish extending the harness out the back of your dog. If you did this correctly, the harness will come from the breast plate under your dog, behind the front legs, and run along side your dog.

Go slow the first few times you harness your dog. Give lots of praise! Most dogs will look at you like you are insane the first few times you harness him. But look out once he gets the idea of what the harness is all about!



*This is how your dog should look when properly harnessed.*

## Basic Training

Start the dog off by just letting the harness on for short periods of time. Let the dog walk around with the harness on so that he can get used to the feel of it. Take him for walks sporting his new "duds" or even play fetch in it. Show him that the harness is a fun thing to wear. The idea of this is to accustom the dog to the harness, and making it a positive experience.

Once your dog is used to the harness, place small drag weights behind him. Drag weights can be defined as anything that can be safely and easily dragged behind the dog that will give resistance and will not roll or bump into the dog. Great beginner drag weights are light chains. They give some resistance, but not too much to deter the dog. They also don't roll into the dog, and they make lots of noise for the dog to get used to. Have your dog drag the weight around. Again, make it a game and by all means make it fun! If your dog seems scared, talk him through it. Be reassuring with your dog. The idea is to build up his confidence.

Your training sessions should be about 15 minutes 3-4 times a week. You should always pull on dirt or grass. Never pull on asphalt or concrete. This will tear your dog's paws up.

When he is confidently pulling the light weights, add some slightly heavier weights to it. Use weights from a weight set, small tires, inner tubes filled with sand, or whatever you have around the house. The idea is to provide resistance for training and conditioning. Never use anything that will roll into the dog. You can spook your dog losing all the confidence that you worked hard to build, or worse yet injure your dog.



### Basic Training (cont.)

Always remember to be patient when training your dog. The first few experiences in harness for the dog are the most critical. A bad experience for the dog can ruin his enthusiasm permanently. If a dog reacts poorly to his first time in harness, then take the process more slowly. Again, you want to build his confidence and have him understand that wearing the harness is a positive event. Keep training sessions short and positive. Never end them on a bad note. Give lots and lots of praise!!!!

No dog that is under a year old is ready for heavy weights. Their muscular and skeletal systems are still immature. Placing heavy weights on them at a young age can injure the dog. The larger breed dogs probably shouldn't be pulling heavy weights until they are at least 2 years old since their bodies take longer to develop.

Never ask your dog to pull more than what he can physically pull. This is very discouraging to your dog, and again, could injure your dog. If you raise the weight too fast, you will destroy the confidence gained in previous training. Carefully study your dog to understand his capabilities. You must know when your dog is doing his best, and not to expect more than his best. Dogs can be forced to pull in many ways, but a forced dog will never give his heart to the sport the way a dog will that loves what he does. The handler must truly love and appreciate his dogs to earn their trust and respect. Everything the handler does for his dog determines what the dog will do for him.

As your dog becomes more confident, you will find that you need a better training schedule. Talk to different people to see what their training methods are like. There are so many training methods out there that it would be impossible for me to list them all. Remember, each dog is an individual and needs to be trained accordingly. Just because someone has a similar dog to yours, trains it a certain way, and wins at weight pulling, doesn't necessarily mean that if you use their training methods you will have similar results.

### The Novice Class

Novice pulls are a great way to expose you and your dog to weight pulling. Enter some novice pulls when you can. Most novice classes allow dogs under a year to pull. The weights are kept light so as not to strain the dog, and rules are flexible for the novice handler. Don't be surprised that your dog might not do well in the weight pull chute even though he was doing well at home. Most dogs will suffer from "stage fright" when they are placed in the chute for the first time. It's a totally new experience for them to have people, and lots of them, watching them weight pull. So don't be disappointed if you don't do well the first time out. And don't worry about making a fool of yourself either. Remember, even the most seasoned veteran of weight pulling was at one time a novice.

### Nutrition

Now that your dog is a "working" dog, you need to analyze what you feed your dog. The average pet food that you buy at the local supermarket is not going to give your dog the nutrition that he needs. Feeding your dog the average supermarket food is equal to you eating fast food. There are a large assortment of higher quality dog foods available. Take into consideration what kind of stress your dog will be under, living conditions (inside vs. outside), breed, and age then choose a food accordingly. Generally, you want a food that lists a meat first in the ingredients, something with high protein and fat, and something that is highly digestible. Talk to your vet and/or other competitors to see what they recommend.

### The Cruelty Issue

The question is often asked whether weight pulling is cruel to dogs. The answer is no, weight pulling is not cruel to dogs. Weight pulling rules are designed and enforced with the dog's safety in mind. At competitions, the dogs health, safety, and well-being are first, last, and foremost on the handler's mind.

The majority of the dogs are considered to be athletes with the owner/handler as the coach. Weight pull dogs are among the best trained, fed, and conditioned canine athletes in the world. They are comparable to any professional or Olympic athlete when it comes to their care and conditioning. The successful handler will spend many hours of training and conditioning their dogs. In addition, the dogs generally are provided with the highest quality premium dog food and the best veterinary care available.

Unlike human athletes, the dogs seem to know their limit. Most of the time, when a dog gets to its maximum weight it will stand, sit, lay down, and sometimes bark. As you watch you will see that it is the dog, not the handler, that decides when the weight is too heavy. Most dogs, as well as their handlers, know their limits. You will see at this point that the dog will be assisted with the final pull. We always want the dog to feel as though they have accomplished a successful pull.

As you watch the event, keep in mind that these dogs are trained and physically and mentally conditioned for this type of competition. They are not just brought in from the backyard and expected to perform. They are however, still "the family pet". You will also notice that these dogs do enjoy what they are doing. As the handler's pull the harnesses out, watch how the dogs react. Most dogs get so excited they try jumping into the harness.

*It may be a dog's life, but if you look into the eyes of these canine athletes  
you'll see that they wouldn't have it any other way.*



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### Weight Pulling Clubs and Organizations

International Weight Pulling Association: [www.iwpa.com](http://www.iwpa.com)

Alaskan Malamute Club of America: [www.alaskanmalamute.org](http://www.alaskanmalamute.org)

United Kennel Club: [www.ukcdogs.com](http://www.ukcdogs.com)

Saint Bernard Club of America: [www.saintbernardclub.org](http://www.saintbernardclub.org)

American Dog Breeders Association: [www.adba.cc](http://www.adba.cc)

American Bulldog Association: [www.american-bulldog.com](http://www.american-bulldog.com)

Working American Bulldog Association: [www.haba.homestead.com](http://www.haba.homestead.com)

Greater Swiss Mt. Dog Club of America: [www.gsmdca.org](http://www.gsmdca.org)

[Dogpower.com](http://Dogpower.com)

International Working American Bulldog

American Pulling Alliance

### Equipment Dealers

Alaskan Dream Dog Equipment Company  
51 South St.  
Port Clinton, PA 19549  
610-562-5347  
[Alaskandreammalls@aol.com](mailto:Alaskandreammalls@aol.com)

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