

Bikejoring

ABOUT

Bikejoring is a dog mushing activity related to skijoring, canicross, and dog scootering. It is a recreation or sport where a harnessed dog or team of dogs attached to a towline, pull and run ahead of a cyclist. Bikejoring is a non snow season (*dryland*) activity. Bikejoring is a dryland mushing activity that probably developed from skijoring and dogsled racing. Bikejoring is also sometimes used to train racing sled-dogs out of season.



Although any breed (or non-breed) of dog can be used, American Pit Bulls, Siberian Huskies, Samoyeds, Malamutes, Alaskan Huskies, Sled Hounds and Pointers are probably the most popular breeds for bikejoring. However, any type of dog that can be taught to pull, run, and to accept a few lead dog commands can be used to bikejor.

Although often practiced as a dog exercising recreation, in some parts of the World, dog sporting organizations and *mushers* (people who train dogs to pull - mushing) provide bikejor and dog-scooter racing classes at their competitive dryland sled-dog rallies and events. These competitive bikejor classes often run alongside other classes for canicross and dryland rig racing. In most cases, the competitors are started off separately on a timer, to avoid tangles and collisions.

The dog or dogs are fitted with harnesses suitable for pulling and running in, such as x-back harnesses. The harnesses are normally attached to a gang line (if more than one dog is being used), and a bungee towline, which clips to the front of the bicycle. Many bikejorers use bayonets, antennas, or plastic pipes to suspend the towline above the front wheel, and to prevent it from tangling between the wheel and forks. Bikejoring can be fun but has its dangers. The dogs may be distracted by wild-life, etc. Be extremely alert to all trail hazards!



Bikejoring usually takes place cross country on soft trails. The dogs should not be run far over paved surfaces, as this could damage their paws or limbs. Most bikejor competitions have strict rules over the age and fitness of the dogs, and provide watering spots. The bikejorer also has to take care of their own safety by wearing protective equipment and by keeping the bicycle in good working order. It is important that the towline is not held or attached to the handlebars.

EQUIPMENT:

- sled harness



- bungee towline



- bike (with good brakes, appropriate tires, sport shock absorbers and comfortable seat)
- water for the dog
- cycling helmet
- cycling gloves
- and depending on the conditions, cycling glasses, protective dog boots, reflective dog vest etc.

The Dog's Harness

The preferred harness for your dog is the X-back harness which is the standard for most sled dog sports. Avoid pet store walking harnesses that ring the chest perpendicular to the spine of your dog. These type of harnesses can restrict chest expansion and inhibit breathing. They also can severely encroach on the leg room that your dog needs to run. Harnesses that have webbing too close to your dogs fore legs can cause chafing and discomfort for your dog. Other harnesses that purport to be designed for skijoring are not as comfortable for the dog as the typical X-back. The X-back wraps the dog's body and allows the dog to pull with the whole body. Harnesses can be also ordered with padding on the neck and chest.

The Towline

You should not use a leash for a towline. A leash will be too short and will also be too jerky when a dog is pulling. The line needs to have a bungee section incorporated into the core of the line to smooth out the yo yo motion of the skier and rider. The bungee is a form of suspension that makes it comfortable for the dog and the driver.

The line should be at least 2.75 m long when stretched. You need the extra length beyond the length of a leash so that you have more reaction time in case your dog stops to poop or mark. Without the extra length, you might be in danger of running into your dog. If you have very fast dogs then you should consider an even longer line. The end of the line that attaches to the dog's harness should have a small brass swivel snap. The end of the line that attaches to your wheeled rig or skijor belt should have a loop.

Always attach the line to the front and center of your rig. Do not attach the line to the grips of your bike. This is a common mistake that will make you fight for control of your bike with your dog. When the line is attached at the center at either the stem or the head tube, then your hands are free to use your brakes and control your steering. Do not use your skijor belt as an attachment when bikejoring. A line attached to your body will get you dragged in case of an accident. If the line is attached to the bike, then the bike may get scuffed and dragged for a short distance before the dogs will stop. Human bodies are much more expensive and painful to repair than a bike.

TRAINING

Dogs have the body and innate drive to run and chase down prey. It is the dog musher's joyful job to harness that dog energy. People who claim you need to force a dog to work are mistaken. "You can't push a rope." Dogs work eagerly and willingly for the driver. Humans typically do not enjoy running, but for a dog, the act of running is a hard-wired primal urge.

To train the dog to lead you must encourage your dog to get in front of you and pull. If your dog is trained to heel then you may have to overcome the inhibitions that you have trained into your dog. Most dogs when dressed in a harness will differentiate the objective after a while. When your dog gets out in front of you then praise him. Praise him when he begins to pull. Reward good behavior with lots of praise. I prefer the positive reinforcement method of training. Dogs respond well to a happy driver.

Don't mind when your dog does not pull very hard at first. Pulling is work and a dog has to build up strength. If your dog is already athletic then the extra work of pulling will still take time because there are different muscle groups involved. Endurance does not come with a breed. Endurance comes from miles on the trail. Start out with low mileage and work slowly up from there. Be careful that you don't run your dogs too far. You must know their limits and stay within them. Your dogs must trust you to always take care. A group of humans may be able to go much further on bikes on any day so you must always remember to put the dog's welfare first. Always bring extra water for your dogs or follow a trail along a creek or river that the dogs can use to cool off.

Always insist on tight lines. If the line is not taut then stop the lesson for a few moments or the day.

A dog does not know your language so somehow you have to convey the idea in a language your dog can understand. This may take months of kind patience. You can reel in the line and correct a dog by gently nudging him in the right direction. Younger dogs need a little gentle scolding when they goof off and mark or chase varmints. Be consistent and insist that the dog stay on the trail and keep the line out. When your dog is finally trained to lead then you will go quietly down the trail with very few corrections and commands. Young dogs take a little bit of nagging to help them get with the program.

Before you start, your dog should already know the basic obedience commands, sit, stay, no and come. Beyond that, a dog should also know a few basic commands so that you can all go safely down the trail. Every musher usually develops his own distinctive way of communication with his dog, but the basic terms which the dog has to fully understand are: turning left and right, speeding up, slowing down and stopping.

Always be gentle and try to make every outing fun for you and the dog. Dogs pick up on your mood quickly. Never train in a bad mood and never get harsh with your dog except when aggression towards other dogs is detected.

DANGERS

Avoid running on pavement. It is bad for dogs as it impacts their bones and joints in an unfavorable way. Heat from pavement can also burn dogs' paws and do irreparable damage to their feet. Falling on pavement is a definite hazard for the bike rider, too.

Cars and other vehicles can create distractions and obstacles for bikejoring. Only bikejor in appropriate areas relatively free from distraction and traffic.

Wildlife can appear out of nowhere and dogs can give chase.

Passing other dogs or leaving at the same time as other dog teams can present some logistic problems as well as interaction problems with dogs. To avoid this, let one team go ahead and get some way out, then let another team go.

If you plan a longer trail, do not forget to take a First Aid Kit with you, as well as basic repair tools for the bike. Accidents happen!

Always hold handlebars with both of your hands!

During the ride use only a hind brake, using a front one will cause you to flip over in a moment!