

MASSENA DASH FOR CASH  
WATCHING A SLED DOG RACE

Sled dog races in the North Country have been traditionally of the shorter or "sprint" races, a distance usually of 4-15 miles. In conjunction with sprint races there are often weight pulls and ski-jouring events. There are mid distance races, usually 30 – 150 miles and long distance races 200 miles to the 1160 mile Iditarod.

Sprint races are typically: 4 dogs – 4 miles, 6 dogs – 6 miles, 8 dogs – 8 miles and sometimes unlimited teams 16 to 22 dogs that race 15 to 25 mile races. At the Massena Dash there will be 4, 6 and 8 dog races and ski-jouring.

Spectators can watch the race at the start – finish line near Hawkins Point Visitor Center, and along Robinson Bay Road east of the Hawkins Point Road Intersection.

The start of the race is always a hectic and confusing sight. There might be up to 200 dogs waiting to take off at one or two minute intervals and all eager to get started. A quote from one of the veteran mushers when asked what the most difficult part of sled dog racing is replied, "We (my dogs and I) can handle anything nature gives us on the trail, but no the man made confusion in the holding area and getting the dogs from the truck to the starting line."

In mid-distance and distance sled races there are check points. The dogs will arrive and the mushers/handlers will water and feed the dogs. You may witness the musher or handler putting ointment or booties on the dog's paws. This is to protect the dog from crusted snow or icy conditions.

A dog team may be watered or snacked along the trail. Energy must be replenished as the dogs will lose a large amount of water and may become dehydrated resulting in a poor performance. The dogs burn about 80 calories per mile and often times travel over 100 miles per day.

A musher may change lead dogs. The lead position is a stressful spot on the team and to ease the leaders tension the musher may go to a back up from the team. Remember, dogs may not be replaced during the race. If for any reason a dog must be taken out of the race, the dog would be carried to the next checkpoint on the sled. The dog would be left with the Veterinarian. The team continues the race without the dropped dog.

The race is a timed event. In sprint races the team typically travels 15 to 22 miles per hour. In mid-distance and distance races the team travels night and day. The speed will vary greatly based on trail conditions, typically 6 to 12 mph. The teams normally are running on the trail 12 to 16 hours per day. They will rest at checkpoints or camp on the trail. The distance between checkpoints is typically 30 to 90 mile; however, in the Yukon Quest checkpoints are as much as 300 miles apart.

Call of the Wild Kennel  
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## SLED DOG VOCABULARY

Toboggan Sled	Wood/plastic construction. Can carry greater weight used in the longer races and is ideal for deep snow conditions.
Basket Sled	All wood construction with wooden slats to hold dog bag.
Snub Line	Safety line used on the trail when the sled is stopped. Used when the snow hook will not adequately hold the team.
Snow Hook	Used as a parking brake to secure a team while the musher is off the sled.
Cooker	To melt snow and cook food for dogs and musher.
Dog Booties	Protective covering generally made of battling or Polar fleece. Used when the musher feels the snow conditions may be harmful to the dog's feet.
Dog Snacks	Treats fed to dogs during the race, usually at checkpoints, although they are sometimes fed to dogs on the trail.
Sleeping Bag	To keep musher warm.
Night Light	Used in traveling after dark.
Ax	To cut firewood and hole in ice for water.
Snowshoes	Used by musher to travel in deep snow. Construction allows for weight distribution to prevent sinking in the snow.
Check Point	A village camp or tent set-up in wilderness where the race support is located. The race staff includes the Race Marshall, Veterarians, and Checkers. The musher can leave dogs removed from the team at checkpoints.
Musher	Person driving the sled team.
Handler	Persons assisting the musher during training. The handler can assist the musher at checkpoints with the team care.
Leaders	The dog or dogs running in front. They are responsible for keeping the team moving forward and for listening to the commands of the musher.
Point Dogs	The dogs directly behind the leaders. They may be back-up leaders which the musher may switch to at some time during the race.
Wheel Dogs	Dogs closest to the sled. They usually are the biggest and strongest pair to pull hard when the going gets tough.
Team Dogs	All the remaining dogs.
Check Point	Typically, a village camp or tent set-up in wilderness where the race support is located. The staff includes the Race Marshall, Veterarians, and Checkers. The musher can leave dogs removed from the team at checkpoints.
Dry-Land Race	A race on bare ground where the dogs pull a wheeled cart.
Kennel	The home of the sled dogs and musher. Each dog has it own house and area in the dog yard. Most kennels are visitor friendly and offer sled dog rides year around with (sleds) or without (wheeled rigs).

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