

Introduction to Bikejoring

Bikejoring means the sport of a dog pulling the musher on a mountain bike. Just like with the other dog sports, it is a great way for both the dog and yourself to get exercise and spend quality time together. Bikejoring is a great sport also for dogs who are not quite so strong at pulling and slightly smaller breeds, as it is easier for you to help them out by pedalling compared to scootering. It is an easy sport to get started from, as most people already have easy access to a bike. As with scootering you only need one or two dogs, and a bike is easy to transport on a bike rack. It is recommended to start with one dog first, as running two dogs with a bike requires some skill and well trained dogs – the speed will accumulate quickly so it is important to have good control over your dogs and your bike as well. Most Sled Dog Clubs normally have Bikejoring classes at the races and many also organize social events, which are a great way to meet other like-minded dog owners and their dogs.



EQUIPMENT:

To start Bikejoring you will need:

- **A Mountain Bike.** You can also use another type of bike, but City or Road Bikes are not ideal as you will be mainly riding on varying terrain other than pavement. Good brakes are essential. You can get a Bikejoring Arm to attach to the front of the bike to keep the line from falling and tangling into the front wheel - you can buy professionally designed arms or there are some designs you can even make yourself. This is not necessarily needed but it does reduce your chances of getting a tangle if the line suddenly falls loose, which can be quite dangerous especially at a high speed.
- **Harness for your dog/s.** Either a short (shoulder) harness or X-back style (long) harness, both styles allow the dog to pull with his chest and shoulders, without choking the dog and allowing them to run freely. The right fit is very important so get advice and help with the fitting and finding the right style for your dog if you are unsure!
- **A Single Tug Line** for one dog or a **Double Tug Line** for two dogs – also a **Neckline** which connects two dogs together from collar to collar can be handy to stop the dogs from spreading out, and is mandatory in most races in two dog classes.
- **A Bungee** (Shockline) to absorb the shock and reduce the impact of pulling, both for the dog and for yourself. This can be separate or in-built in the tug line.
- **A Helmet** for yourself and any other protection you may need, such as gloves, long trousers and long sleeves.



STARTING OUT:

The most important thing when you are first starting out is that your dog is having fun! Start gently and at first always stop before your dog gets tired to make it a positive experience. Make sure your dog is fit and healthy, and start with short distances increasing them slowly. Monitor your dog during and after exercise, and keep in mind that building fitness and stamina takes time, so don't do too much too soon.

If your dog gets scared of running in front of the bike you can start getting them used to the sensation and noise by getting them used to towing a branch or a small item (for example a milk bottle filled with water) first while leading them, and give them lots of praise and encouragement. A good way to get started bikejoring is to have someone cycling in the front encouraging your dog to follow, and praise them when they pull in the front. Start out on a narrow trail or road which is familiar to your dog, so they will know straight away which way to go. An open area might be confusing for the dog. If possible, consider getting help from a local sled dog club or friends with dogs, as most dogs will love to chase after other dogs.

Try to keep the lines tight at all times and if they loosen up, brake gently. Keep a close eye on your dog especially when you are first starting out, and if he stops to sniff or go to the toilet brake gently and steer away from the dog. Teach your dog to keep the line tight from the start to avoid tangles.

It is good to teach your dog the mushing commands even on your daily walks – you can start repeating the commands to your dog already when they go for walks as a young puppy, so when he/she is older, that part of the training will already be done, which will also make the rest of the training easier. You can use any commands that are easy for you to remember and easy for the dog to tell apart. The basic mushing commands are:

Gee = Go Right

Haw = Go Left

Hike/Pull = Go forward

Whoa! = Stop

On By = Go past (a distraction)

Easy = Go slower

Gee/Haw Over = Move over to the right/left side of the trail

Come Gee/Haw = A command to turn the team around on a U-turn to the right/left

(more advanced training)

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Do not take your dog for a run if it is too hot. Short haired breeds can tolerate slightly higher temperatures, but any breed, especially arctic breeds with double coats (such as Siberian Huskies, Malamutes etc.) can overheat easily if exercised on a warm day – and if it happens once, your dog will be more prone to overheating for the rest of his/her life. Also any breeds with a short muzzle can overheat easily as they cannot cool themselves down as well as longer-muzzled breeds. You should only exercise your dog lightly if the temperature is above 15 degrees – or even less for arctic breeds or in high humidity. Each dog is different so you will have to monitor your dog carefully especially in warmer temperatures. The maximum temperature for races is 12 degrees. Avoid taking your dog out at the warmest time of the day and instead go out early morning or late at night when it is cooler. Remember to have water available for your dog if you do longer runs or on warmer days, and to keep him/her well hydrated before and after the run as well.

Do not exercise a young dog too much. You can cause lifelong problems and injuries if you start running your dog too early, before they have finished growing and their growth plates have closed. As a rule of thumb, for medium breeds approximately 12 months is a reasonably safe age to start running, and 18-24 months for large breeds. You can start with light and short runs approx. 2-3 months earlier to teach commands and how to behave in a harness and line, as long as you keep it short and sweet, and make sure you finish well before your dog is tired. For more advice talk to your vet as they should know your dog's individual needs best.

If you run two or more dogs together, they should ideally be similar size and speed. If one dog is much faster than the other, the slower one may get dragged along, making it a very unpleasant experience for both dogs, and possibly causing injury as well. It can be traumatizing for the dogs and make them reluctant to run. You can take them out together, but you should always adjust your speed to that of the slower dog. Braking your scooter or bike as you go to the speed of your slower dog will give more resistance to the faster dog to pull against (Be prepared to change your brake pads on a regular basis though!). Do not use a neckline if one dog is slower so that he/she is not pulled by the collar by the faster dog, or if you do, keep a very close eye on it and make sure there is no tension on the neckline.

Choose a safe environment for taking your dog for a run. Running on pavement can damage your dog's joints and paws/pads. A grassy or gravel surface which is firm, but soft for your dog's feet is ideal. On harder surfaces you may need booties to protect your dog's feet – but that should ideally only be occasionally and not on a daily basis as it is always better for the dog to run without booties so his feet can

naturally “condition” and breath. Also remember that dogs cool themselves down through their feet. When your dog does wear booties it is important to not leave them on for a long period of time, so they won't rub or prevent circulation on the feet.