



Alaskan Malamute & Siberian Husky Social Club of Queensland Inc.

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Weight Pull Tips

Pre-Season Conditioning

Before commencing weight pull training, it is important to check the physical fitness of your dog for the task. The dog should be at least one year old before any sort of weight pull training (eighteen months for W.D.C. events), and exhibit sound conformation and movement. The Alaskan Malamute's paws should be round and large, well-arched with tightly fitted toes. The pasterns should be strong and straight; the chest moderately broad and deep (ideally to about the elbow). The shoulders should have a moderate layback, and the topline should slope moderately to the hips. The back should be strong and not too long. The rear angulation should also be moderate, allowing the dog to lower himself in-line with the load. Serious competitors also recommend waiting until the dog has been certified free of hip and elbow dysplasia.

Basic obedience work is necessary before conditioning can take place. Official obedience classes are desirable and allow novice owners / handlers to learn with their dogs. The dog should be able to sit, stay, heel, and down-stay. These basic obedience commands are essential to prevent injury to the dog and its handler during training and competition.

To condition the dog for harness work, first allow the dog to become accustomed to wearing a weight pull harness. Take it for a walk with no weight. Praise it for walking well, without trying to slip the harness, and for ignoring distractions along the way.

When the dog is used to the feel of the harness, begin adding weight using a two litre bottle with some gravel or sand in it. The bottle should be attached by a rope to the harness D-ring, and drag about four feet behind the dog. Start with short distances on level, grassed areas using this method. The dog will be curious about the weight and may stop to investigate. Allow him to check it out, and reassure the dog that all is well. Stand or crouch a short distance from the dog, and pat the ground to focus his head down into the correct pulling position. Encourage him to come to you. Begin use of a simple command word such as "Pull!", and repeat this throughout the workout. Use only one command word, and do not deviate from it.

When the dog is comfortable pulling the initial weight, add more. This should be done in approximately five pound increments at two week intervals. Remember to continue to praise your dog and reassure it. Once you reach five pounds of weight, aim to have your dog pull a minimum distance of six (6) metres. Increase weights and distances slowly so that the dog is not overwhelmed or discouraged. Never use a weight your dog cannot pull! Motorbike and car tyres make useful drag weights as the dog's ability level increases. Avoid the use of baits – food or toys – to get the dog to pull, as these are not allowed in competition events. Remember: patience and praise are the keys to getting your dog to perform.

Once the dog is around eighteen months of age, you will need to either invest in, or build your own, weight pull cart (see EQUIPMENT for details). A rope should be attached to the rear of the cart is, so a helper can prevent the cart running into the dog. A cart is easier to pull than a drag weight, so you will need to make sure the dog slows his pace until he learns correct pulling form. You may need to use a leash and walk next to him until this is learned. After the dog is accustomed to the empty cart, weights can be added and gradually increased. Only use weights, which you can handle and stack safely on the cart without danger of toppling e.g. sandbags. Vary between drag weights and cart work while the dog is learning the procedure.

Make sure you also alternate between weight pull training and exercising your dog through walking / running work to increase stamina and lung capacity. Increase weight pull training over other exercise prior to competition events.

Once the dog has mastered the desired weights for his class, you should concentrate on achieving the desired speed. A dog has only sixty seconds to pull a length of five (5) metres in competition events. Above all, remember that patience and maintaining his interest are the keys to success. Don't bore your dog by using the same methods, weights or pulling surfaces all the time, and don't overdo the number of pulls or training sessions per week. Six pulls per session, two to three times a week is generally sufficient. Use your knowledge of your dog to gauge what is most successful for him.

Training

Preparing your dog to compete is very important. The dog needs become familiar and feel comfortable with the equipment used for Weight Pull. Allow the dog to wear the freight harness without weight attached, and walk around with it on. The dog needs to get used to the feel of the harness and learn not to chew it (as some try to do).

When the dog is comfortable wearing the harness, you can start adding small weights. Start with an old drink bottle filled with water or sand, and gradually build up to an old car tyre. The dog may stop and look at what is "following" it, or may be distracted by the noise. Encourage your dog to keep pulling, using treats if need be.

You'll need the following equipment:

- Freight harness (with spreader bar behind dog)
- Collar and Leash
- Rope
- Appropriate weights (e.g. old tyres, sandbags)
- Dog bowl and water

Remember, if the dog appears to be getting stressed, withdraws or plain refuses to pull, take a break. Encourage and reward them for doing well.

Always finish on a high, even if that means helping them across the finish. Dogs remember your reactions to how they perform and will be more acceptable to weight pull if they see you're pleased with them.

Prior to Competitions

Dogs need to be weighed accurately within seven days prior to the competition for Working Dog Certification. A certificate stating the correct weight must be signed by a veterinarian or other qualified person.

Dogs should be checked for general health and mobility. Pads should be tough, and nails strong and neatly trimmed. Any dog displaying stiffness or lameness should not be allowed to compete.

Make sure you have an accurate copy of current vaccination records.

Do not feed the dog prior to the competition. Offer water only.

At the Competition

Arrive at the competition area no later than one hour prior to commencement to allow for administrative procedures e.g. entry form and weight checks etc.

Keep your dog in the holding area at all times when not in the pull chute.

Keep your dog well separated from other competitors on a short lead or staked out when in the holding area.

During pulls, do not touch the dog, harness, cart or load except in the case of a tangle.

Ensure that all persons or dogs capable of influencing the dog are no further forward than the starting line. Violation of this rule can lead to disqualification.

Do not take any food, treat, bait, whips, noisemakers or other aids into the competition area.

Refrain from any unsportsmanlike behaviour including verbal or physical abuse of your dog, other dogs, handlers, officials or spectators. This could lead to disqualification.

Do not feed the dog between pulls. Offer water only.

Post Event Care

Allow the dog to rest before feeding.

Check dog for any strains or injuries. Administer first aid / seek veterinary attention as required.

Praise your dog for his hard work!