

SCOOTERING TO SKIJORING

BY KIM TINKER

Last weekend was probably one of my last scooter runs for the season. About 2 inches of snow was covering the road. It made for an exciting, slippery run but the time has come to dust the skis off.

Jumping from scootering to skijoring will be an easy transition for your dog as everything pretty much stays the same. Your dog is still in harness and working about 10ft in front of you and all the commands transfer over.

For you, depending on your past skiing experience, there is definitely a learning curve. First you have to decide on whether you are going to use classic or skate skis (no metal edges please, they can cut your dog). Classic skiing is the more traditional form of cross country skiing. Your legs are moving forward and backward with a gliding motion (much like what a nordic track does). The skis have a textured base to give you more traction and stability on the snow. They come in both waxless and waxable bases.

Skate skis take a little more time to master. The motion is more like roller blading. The skis are more narrow and have smooth bases like a down hill ski. Bye, Bye traction but hello speed. Without a textured base, your dog has a much easier time pulling you. Skate skiing also allows you to work more with your dog. When I switched to skate skis, my dog kept looking back to make sure I was actually there because there is so much less resistance.

Skate skis require waxing for a smooth ride. I also recommend buying a ski that has a little stiffness to it. High end skate skis were meant for racing (without dogs) and tend to be soft flexing skis. With the power that a dog adds, a little stiffer flexing ski hold up better to the forces that can be applied.

Once you have made the choice, I highly recommend taking some lessons. It's really important to have the basics of classic or skate skiing down before you add the power of your dog.

Whatever method of skiing you've decided on, getting moving with your dog goes back to some basics. This is where that "line out and wait" training is critical. It can be very difficult to click into your skis, get your gloves on, etc. If your dog keeps pulling you over. Skijoring doesn't have the benefit of snow hooks or snub lines so practice having your dog stand with the tow rope tight and waiting until you give the command to move forward. As you get ready to have the dog move, keep your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent and have a slight flexion at the waist. If the tow line is tight between you and the dog there will be less of a jerk at your waist as the dog takes off. If the tow rope is slack, the jerk can be hard enough to pull you over and you will be doing a face plant in the snow.

Once you're moving, you and your dog will be working as a team. Depending on your dog's speed, you will need to adjust your speed so the tow rope stays tight between you. If the tow rope is slack, it is easy to ski over it and get tangled. You also don't want to be running into the back of your dog with your skis.

It can be helpful to skijor with other teams who are more seasoned as your dog will learn by example.

With time and practice, you and your dog will become a fine working machine and you will enjoy many miles on the trail.

Resources:

XC skating (technique and exercises) 30min video Produced by Nordic Equipment. Inc. Park City, Utah

Skijor with your dog: Mari Hoe-Raitto and Carol Kaynor; OK Publishing, Fairbanks, Alaska.