

Getting your Gear in Gear!

By Carmen Rasmussen of Alpine Outfitters

It's that time of year again!!!! This is the time that we dig through our garages, dog boxes, kennels and storage sheds to find the carting/sledding gear that we hurriedly stowed away in March!! I have to do this chore in August, ONLY because we use our personal equipment to show folks what gear is used in sledding when our 4H club gives an annual demo at the County Fair. But, most folks are dusting off their harnesses and ganglines right about now, when the weather turns and cool frosty mornings bring up images of fall training! As you are digging through the gear, there are several things that you should be looking for in order to maximize your safety and preparation for the upcoming season.

This is simply an informal list of those items.

HARNESSES – Check and replace tug loops as these tend to show the most wear over time. Check harness webbing for wear and check the fit of the harnesses (dogs get bigger and thinner and harnesses can shrink also). Make sure the harnesses are clean. Wash harnesses in cold water and use only a mild detergent like dish soap or Woolite – and NO DRYING in the dryer or even in the direct sun as shrinking will result.

GANGLINES – Check rope and cable for fraying and stress wear. Also, check snaps to be sure they close properly. Check your snow hook line, snub line rope and quick release as well as that bungee! In our kennel, we replace racing ganglines/bungies every year and then we rotate last year's racing line into this year's training line, which results in a line actually lasting us 2 years. Carting/ATV training (especially if you add mud as a factor) is very hard on ganglines, and 2 years is a reasonable life expectancy for a gangline.

SLED – Check the wood for damage and cracks. Re-varnish if you haven't done this in a while. Buy new QCR plastic if needed (use the old QCR for training though!!) Check your tow bridle to be sure the rope is not fraying. Check all rawhide/nylon/bike wrap for wear and damage. Check the brake and replace tines if they are worn.

CART – Use spray paint to cover any areas lacking paint or starting to rust. Check wheels and wheel bearings and replace if necessary. If you don't have a safety line from your gangline to the cart (that bypasses the bungee and connection hardware) then make one!

TRUCK – Do the repairs and maintenance that you've been putting off! It's no fun to wish that timing belt had been replaced when you are somewhere in Nowhereville, Oregon with 30 dogs on board! Check your dog drop system as well – check those snaps and the chain or cable for rust/wear.

OTHER GEAR – Be sure you have enough booties in case of injury or rough terrain that you might come upon. Make sure you update/refill your first aid kit (for humans and dogs). Check your kennel tie out chains and replace snaps with Swedish Snaps one by one (they are expensive, so budget a couple every year). Try out new supplements/water bait early, so you can see if it will work for your dogs later when they are under stress.

NEW GEAR? – Order early – this is the time when most sled dog outfitters are the busiest, so plan that into your order timeline. Check your outfitters' website/catalog to see what new or custom products are out there – chances are there is something you might need or want. If you don't see what you want, ask your outfitter to get it for you if possible.

Hopefully this list gives you some reminders of what to check as you prepare to start training! Be sure to remember that the most important equipment is a well prepared and safe dog driver! And have FUN!

Carmen Rasmussen is a current CSDC board member and races in the 4 dog sprint class. Carmen won the 2003 Pacific Northwest Championship in this event. That Carmen beat me by 0.66 points! deb