

## THE CARTING CORNER

### COMPETITIVE WEIGHT PULLING WITH BERNERS

Last year, I attended the Kalkaska Winterfest where the local weight pull group was having a two day snow pull. This weight pull was run under International Weight Pull Association rules. After seeing this event, I decided to get my Berner involved and here is our story. I need to stress that my dogs are mature, x-rayed to check for soundness, and practice many other dog sports. I have trained dogs for over 40 years with many titles achieved and enjoy finding new venues for my dogs to try out.

This is how competitive weight pulling works: dogs are first sorted by how much they weigh, dogs up to 20lbs, 20lbs up to 40lbs, and so on. The dogs are weighed in at entry time and cannot eat or have any treats after that. The dogs pull a sled or cart through a chute for a 16 foot distance in 60 seconds. Dogs are called by their handler to come to them or are "driven" from behind (think sled dogs from which this sport derived). After each dog in the weight group pulls or passes additional weight is added at a predetermined amount. The strategy is to not tire your dog before your dog pulls weight at its maximum ability. No dog is allowed to fail and it will be helped out by the sled marshals to complete a pull.

Training for a weight pulling competition requires a freight/weight pull or competition weight pull harness, not a carting harness. For snow-sled pulling, I purchased a child's plastic toboggan from the local hardware store and some hardware to be able to

clip a tug line to connect the harness and toboggan. For wheel-pulling, I have a wagon rated for up to 600 lbs.

To train for the recalls needed to begin the competitive pull, I practiced teaching a pulling recall training recalls while pulling on a loose long line to prevent the dog from getting off a packed snow area and to come straight. You also want to discourage a dog from going straight up in the harness (stress/confusion caused from not understanding the work at first introduction). This long line training is similar to how an obedience recall is trained. We practiced hook ups-hooking the spreader bar to the tug line. Hook-ups may be done by course helpers so it is good to put it on command for the dogs benefit. It is also a good idea to practice putting on the harness as a part of the training so the dog starts to anticipate the work.

To condition the dogs for weight pulling, I first worked for endurance strength with long walks as a training program. My dogs already had regular endurance runs of a mile or more two to three times a week. Training start weight depends on the dog's condition and with allowance taken to determine the weight that the dog can handle easily. We started with long training walks pulling 25 lbs. Remember, each pull is just 16 feet and anytime my dog showed me stress by stopping I helped her out and then did a successful pull

BY JOY COWLES

and finished the training session with a walk with a lightly weighted toboggan. We trained increasing weights over many weeks. I rarely did more than 5 training pulls per training session. For example, we tried 25 lbs first, 40 lbs second, 50 lbs, 65 lbs for early practices. The first sessions would be maybe just 25 lbs and lots of happy rewards.

Finally, we practiced pulling up to 200 lbs (I can't safely stop more than 200 lbs at dog speed so I don't train over that amount and besides it so far seems more than enough). I needed to build up to the start weight of 155 lbs (the weight of that sled used for competition) so that at competition time she could at least pull an empty sled with out any trouble. Weight was increased using 25 lb bags of kitty litter, 40 lb bags of wood pellets and 60 lbs sand tubes.

I also had to train the dog to breakouts a sled whose runners are frozen to the snow pack. In a breakout, the dog needs to pull hard to the right and then to the left in order to free up the runners for the dog to be able to pull the sled. I trained this by teaching the dog to start moving towards me as I moved to the side then back to center then to other side and back to center.

Caution: If a dog won't willingly pull and you have to help with that pull to complete it, well then, the dog has let you know it is uncomfortable, uneasy, and you need to back up your training program. This sport is like tracking in that you cannot force or bribe a dog to work it must want to pull.

In March 2006, Trudy (Wintrye Steadfast and True CGC/TDI NDD) and I participated in our first weight pull. We were disqualified by a handler mistake. But Trudy did a better weight than at home so it was still a good pull. This winter, I started both HunyB (Wintrye So Truly Huny B CGC/TDI NJP\* NAP\*) and Belle (Bashful Belle-Air) in weight pulling. At this year's Kalkaska Winterfest, Belle pulled the empty sled and then sat and looked at all of us...oops, still a baby and not yet ready for this event. HunyB did better. I was lucky to be in novice with her as I still managed to make a handler error that was overlooked because of my novice status. Each time she has pulled a little bit more. I get nice complements from veteran pullers about her style same as I did with her mother Trudy. They (the girls) pull with their heads down and power with their shoulders and once they commit to the pull they just walk right to the finish line. Trudy showed this same style on the hill portion of her NDD test. My goal is to earn an IWPA working dog degree with her. To do this she has to pull five times her body weight on snow four times in two consecutive years. She got close in her first pulls (255 day one; 305 on day two) so I think it is a reasonable expectation.

For more information check out [www.iwpa.net](http://www.iwpa.net) or [www.pulldoggies.com](http://www.pulldoggies.com)



## WEST SIDE DRAFT CLINIC

### EVENT REPORT

This years West Side Draft Clinic was held on April 21st in Ada, Michigan. It was a glorious, sunny, spring day and more than a dozen teams gathered to work their dogs and learn about drafting. Draft clinics are an opportunistic time for novices to learn the skills necessary to begin drafting with their dog. But they are also equally important to the ongoing development of draft enthusiasts and their dogs. Participants varied from puppy owners just entering into the sport to senior dogs brushing up on their skills. It was wonderful to see so many teams eager to learn about the sport of drafting. And, although I was exhausted by the end of the day, as I know all the

volunteers were, it was time well spent in the company of good friends and oh so many very good working dogs.

As chairperson of the West Side Draft Clinic I can't thank those enough that made this event possible. I could not have asked for a better team of volunteers to pull the event together. They are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, welcoming and patient with newcomers and

generous with their time. Everyone - Gary and Nancy, Annette, Mary, Brent, Andrea, Paul, - thank you so much for making this event possible.

- Denise Vickers, WSDC Event Chair

## 8th Annual BMDCA Draft Test

Sponsored by *The Heart of Michigan BMD Club*

Saturday October 6th, 2007

at the Fort Custer Recreation Area, Augusta, Michigan



PUT YOUR ♥ INTO IT!

Judges

Jim Durrance

And

Fred Helmbold

Entries Close

September 19th, 2007

Premium available online at: [www.hmbmdc.org](http://www.hmbmdc.org)

For more information contact: Test Chair, Denise Vickers, [denisev@williamsandbeck.com](mailto:denisev@williamsandbeck.com) or (616)696-9324

Test Secretary, Andrea Mata, [AmPmDosMata@aol.com](mailto:AmPmDosMata@aol.com) or (989)773-1393