



The Wolf's Den Kennel

The Howler

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If it weren't for those among us who are continuously trying to build a better mousetrap, we'd have little choice but to endure the presence of a cat.

Mike Santos

The Race Trail

The Kuskokwim 300:

- It looked like the stage was set to see who had what going into this year's Iditarod. Everyone was there. All the past Iditarod champs, Swenson, King, Buser, Swingley, and Seavey. As well as many mushers who have recently been knocking on "Iditarod Champion's" door, Baker, Iten and Brooks.
- Temperatures between -30 and -50 with a little breeze Bethel style and the race gets postponed three days. Swenson decides he can't stay away from his kennel's responsibilities any longer and departs before the race gets under way. Swingley needs to get back home in order

to partake in the Wyoming Stage Stop and leaves the scene before things heat up.

- In the end, Jeff King claims his 8th K-300 win by getting back to Bethel 1 minute and 35 seconds sooner than Mitch Seavey.

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The Copper Basin 300:

- Lance Mackey posts the third fastest time in CB-300 and claims the title.
- Interesting, Hans Gatt who owns the second fastest CB-300 finish time, literally flies to the races halfway point and subsequently scratches. Strategy: a planned training run, or blunder: a miscalculation of speed and energy. "Look at me go! Uh... home."

The Yukon Quest:

- If this year's bizarre sequence of events become customary, the fine folks who organize the event might consider changing the races' name from, "The Quest," to, "The Odyssey." Black Hawk helicopters rescuing teams from American summit and an out and back trail, which had teams finishing at the races mid-point, Dawson.
- Historical note, Frank Turner passes the Quest torch to his son Saul.
- Go Lance Go. Every one said he couldn't win a Gatt quest. Well Hans Gatt was back to regain his reign of the Quest Crown, but all he could do was watch Lance's team rip up some really long runs.



Iditarod:

- Pomp and Circumstance, whatever that means, and the spectacle which is 4th avenue Anchorage on the first Saturday in March. A little bit Mardi Gras and a little bit NASCAR, Fans, Flags, Banners, Autographs, Sponsors, Dog Trucks, Sun Glasses, Insiders, Outsiders, Media, Volunteers, Snow Fencing, Handlers, Souvenirs, Friends, Veterinarians, Cameras, Arm Bands, Hotdogs, Hats, Helicopters, Personalities, Idita-riders, and an over abundance of Energy and Excitement that only 83 mushers and 1,328 sled dogs can create.

How Iditarod 34 went down.

- Bjonar, takes team Norway on a detour early in the race, practically eliminating a shot at victory.
- Swingley and King let fans know early on that they have the right stuff.
- Jonrowe hangs right in there with the big boys looking better then she ever has. Leaving everyone asking, could there still be a DeeDee win coming? The state of Alaska would literally erupt.
- After the "Pass," King goes long and takes his 24 early, Swingley stops only long enough to give us all a history lesson, and Gebhardt has everyone wondering where to hell is he going.
- Gebhardt does his rendition of the energizer bunny, and just keeps on going. Leaving Iditarod techies scrambling to figure out a way to mark an X in the 8 box before putting an X in the 24 box.

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- The Kotzebue crowd gets optimistic that the wind, which was whipping on the Yukon, would slow up the front runners and that Ed Iten, (5th) and John Baker, (7th) would steal the coast.
- Swingley,(2nd) slips on the ice, as King, (1st) roars into the wind for the win. Gebhardt, (3rd) sneaks in between Swingley and Jonrowe, (4th).
- Bjornar Anderson's, (6th) suspected big push never really materializes, but he does pick off a few spots on his way to Nome.
- Mackey's (10th) eight Quest champions finish three spots behind last years 7th place finish, but they get him to Nome eight hours faster.
- Jason Baron, (8th) has everyone wondering how long he'll be the second fastest Montanan.
- Seavey, (9th) flew under the radar for his 5th top 10 finish but never made a serious bid for the Dodge.

Kobuk 440

- A lot of long runs combined with every type of weather imaginable, and the 2006 Kobuk 440 turned into a shorter version of the Yukon Quest.
- Coincidence that Quest champ Lance Mackey wins? I think not.
- Fortunately for me, I got an all expenses paid vacation to Kotzebue and was able to participate. Sort of like one of those cruise ship deals, but a whole lot more fun.
- I was running a team from Jeff King's kennel consisting of six Iditarod Champs as well as six yearlings. How cool is that!

The Wolf's Den Merchandise has arrived! Help support our dog team!



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- Good to see Martin Buser back on track after a season that never really materialized.
- Mitch Seavey was there breaking in a young team.
- Paul Gebhardt is still going. Some one please tell Paul that the mushing season is over, otherwise he might just keep on going.
- One of the highlights of the Kobuk for me was watching Martin Buser and Jeff King, who were parked side by side, prepare to leave Ambler. I kept thinking to my self is this live or is this Memorex.



Mike crossing the finish line in Kotzebue

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The MATT Sled

Caitlin wanted a Gatt sled and I wanted to start building sleds, and so we both got what we wanted. I had been going around calling it a Gatt knock off, until Kari Skogen and here daughter Lisbet Norris stopped by on there way home from Fairbanks. We were sitting around having coffee and talking about the sled when Lisbet stated that she hoped we would call it something clever like the MATT sled. I thought the name was perfect and quite frankly couldn't think of a better name so here it is the very first MATT sled.



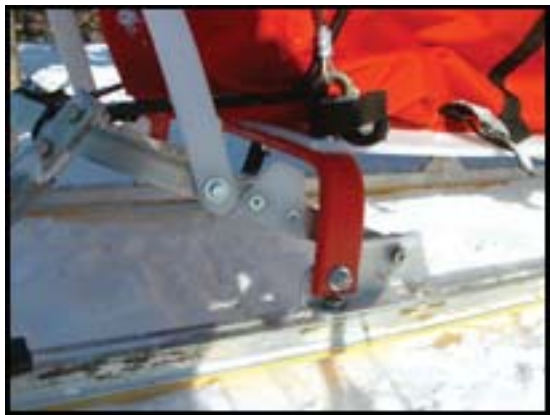
Although I was bound by contractual obligation to replicate the Gatt sled as true to form as possible, I just couldn't help myself when it came to a few minor modifications. First, I hinged all of the crosspieces in order to increase flexibility.

I also used a thicker plastic for the bed and did away with all of the aluminum framing which was necessary to beef up the



thinner plastic on the original. However the neatest feature of this sled is that I used a single piece of UHMW as a rear stanchion. The flexible characteristics of UHMW allows the runners to be spread apart from one another, much like a traditional sprint sled.

My next venture into sled building I plan to



perfect the trail dragger. I'm aiming for a sled that will outsteer any of the hot new sprint sleds, from a sitting position with the load capacity for long distance racing. Can anyone say carbon fiber? We'll keep you posted as to our progress into sled building.

Alaska Range Creations



Beautiful hand-knit hats made from handspun shed dogfur and Alaskan wool. Trimmed with fur and lined with polar fleece. A quality hat worth the warmth. Worn on the Iditarod trail by racers and volunteers, yet fancy enough for around town.

-Brenda

akdogfur@mtaonline.net

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Iditarod Insider

Three cheers for the ITC. For the first time ever Iditarod fans could follow the race online with video updates. No more waiting months for the video/DVD to come out. The content consisted mostly of trailside reports during the race, but also included the entire ceremonial start, the finish, and the mushers' banquet in Nome.

Although the Video/DVD is still a must for the Iditarod fan the benefit of Iditarod Insider is the limitless amount of coverage the ITC can post. Coverage that wouldn't fit into the hour-long video/DVD format, but is equally if not more so valuable and entertaining, and as with all Internet media the ability to watch what you want when you want to can't be beat.

It was a thrill to be able to watch teams leave checkpoints as opposed to simply receiving a time of departure, and having the ability to watch any or all of the teams finish was almost as good as being in Nome.

Let's remember that for the majority of mushers, the challenge of just getting to Nome is what Iditarod is all about. How valuable of a resource is Iditarod Insider to their friends and families? This year Bryan Bearss a friend and co-worker of mine was an Iditarod rookie and it was awesome to be able to share in his struggles and triumphs as he accomplished a long-term goal and fulfilled a lifetime dream.

Although the Insider has already received some criticism, for slow downloads, the small viewing window, and the startup price, I personally think it was an incredible success considering it was their first attempt at bringing the race all that much closer to its fans and the general public. An event that has historically been an incredible challenge to cover has just taken a huge step towards live coverage.

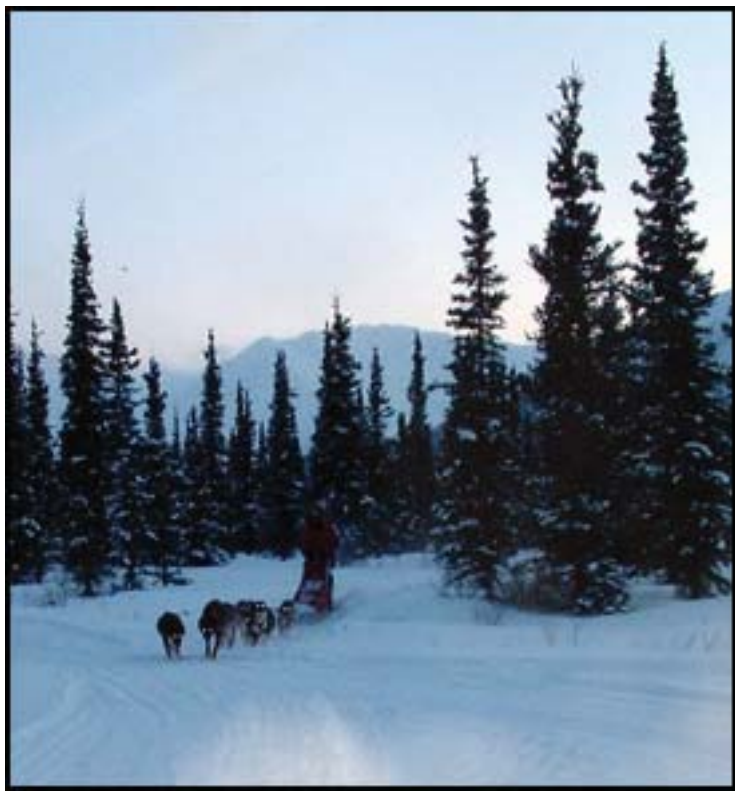
I was totally hooked as I hope all of you were. If

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you didn't get in on Iditarod Insider it's not to late. For \$19.95 you can still check out this past years race, and remember a subscription to Iditarod Insider is good for the entire year. The excruciatingly long summer months have just gotten a little shorter as we can all go back to relive the excitement of Iditarod 2006 as we anticipate 2007.

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Here at The Wolf's Den

This past winter has been very busy for us, and what we've been doing has overshadowed our commitment to writing. So, here is my attempt to fill in the blanks since the last Howler.

I've stayed on with Jeff King all winter and it's been a real thrill to be a part of an Iditarod Championship. Although I wasn't on the runner's, Jeff has made me, as well as the rest of his staff, feel like we really were a part of this team's success.

I guess it could be called double dipping, as we have also put a considerable amount of time and energy into our start up team. Getting our dogs on the trail at least five times a week. They are beginning to look rather polished for such a young gang.

November gave us a nice blanket of snow and a good taste of forty below temperatures, but December was ridiculously mild and it actually rained. I'm beginning to wonder if there exists a place outside of the legendary Camelot where it is forbidden to rain during the winter. Not exactly what I wanted for Christmas. Coincidentally Santa's workshop doesn't have a complaint department, I checked.

Of course to our North and South there is more snow but we are currently truck-less, which has prompted me to come to the conclusion that a new truck is no longer a want but rather a necessity. I'm convinced that a new truck will insure that we will be blessed with snow for at least five years, which of course is how long we will have to live with the monthly payments.

Not to worry, The Wolf's Den prides itself on it's reputation for getting our dogs on the trail no matter what. Stealing a page from the Shriner's circus playbook, we loaded twelve dogs and all of our equipment into Caitlin's Subaru Outback Sport. Yes, it's the smallest of the Outback series.

What a brilliant move. We have just created the most economical dog transport on the planet. Not to mention the added benefit of easily being able to weave through the tangle of all the other ridiculously big, over powered, awkward dog trucks and dog trailers haphazardly parked at the trailhead. We were able to park out of the way yet

directly opposite the trail. Cool!

It was also a lot of fun watching the expression on the face of Ramy Brooks' handler as we got the sled off the roof and stretched out our gangline. He couldn't see the dogs in the back of the car, due to the frosted windows that all the panting created, and I'm sure he thought we were quite crazy. Perhaps he thought we were optimistically hoping that someone with dogs would let us borrow some.

His jaw hit the ground as we took pair after pair of pre-harnessed dogs from the back of the car and hooked them to the gangline. Away we went. Upon our return he said that if he didn't see it he wouldn't have believed it.

One thing I've learned or noticed here in Alaska has nothing to do with sled dogs, but rather with caribou. Caribou have quite a peculiar response to dog teams. They seem to be either severely nearsighted or a little slow with determining when it would be in their best interest to flee.

When a dog team approaches a band of caribou they usually just stand there as if they can't decide

whether or not the pack of approaching dogs is a threat or not. Once within spitting distance they seem utterly surprised, almost shocked, as if the realization of the fact that indeed they are the prey species in this relationship has just crossed their minds. Yet for some remarkably unclear reason leaping straight up into the air, kangaroo like, takes precedence over fleeing. Thankfully they eventually do flee, but only for about fifty yards.

When they stop, everything about their demeanor expresses the sentiment of, "Whew, we made it." Then one of the more quizzical ones looks over its shoulder and realizes that the threat is once again right on their heels. "Oh Crap," seems to be what they're thinking as once again they leap then flee. This sequence of events can go on for quite a distance, before they vacate a trail.

I was recently asked at a neighborhood gathering what it was we were seeking sponsorship for. Well I guess that I've committed a serious error in assuming that our goals of fielding an Iditarod team were obvious. We plan to run Iditarod



possibly as early as 2008. However we have plenty of racing to do between now and then and would like to race in a few high profile races possibly as early as next year. Races like the Knik 200, the Kuskowim 300 or the Copper Basin 300. Caitlin would like to try the GinGin 120, and I'd certainly like another shot at the Kobuk 440, with my own team.

All of this of course will require a considerable amount of money, which hopefully we will be able to raise between now and then. Currently our operating costs, dog food, equipment, stud fees and the purchasing of dogs, are just about all that we can afford. In order for us to race we will need to raise money in order to cover entry fees, race specific equipment, traveling expenses, (which for some races require airfare,) etc.

Perhaps we've been a little reluctant to make a commitment to enter a specific race on a specific date. Primarily because we are confident that we know what it takes to compete at the level necessary to run many of the a fore mentioned races, and we are determined not to enter a race without being prepared. Because of the small number of dogs we have and their young ages we are currently unprepared, and it is a constant struggle to curb our ambitions and eagerness in order to do what is right for our dogs.

However, being prepared has many meanings. While the credit for completing the Kobuk 440 is entirely, and absolutely attributed to the fact that I had an incredible dog team, it did allow me the opportunity to assess my abilities to handle the rigors of long distance mushing. The Kobuk was the longest race I've run, and it's been awhile since I last competed in anything remotely similar. I'm pleased to report that I felt great throughout the entire race, and although 440 miles is a little less than half of the Iditarod, I'm certain that after a 24-hour break I could have done the race over.

As for the dogs we do have, Inca and Indiana are as good as any two dogs I've seen. Hook has realized that both his parents are outstanding leaders, and has decided that he ought to fulfill his legacy. Even though Icarus is a big boy, it doesn't seem possible to fit the amount of heart he has into

his canine body. Kermit, out of Tinkle's last litter, is probably the coolest dog I've ever been around. He's only seven months, but he just gets it.

Our Summer Lineup

Kanga X Yuksi

Pairing produced three of this year's Iditarod champs, including the Golden Harness award winner.

Oh yeah, and Tinkle's (runner up 2004) parents too.

Tinkle X Pysen (E. Ellis)

The fastest tough dog meets the toughest fast dog. Brilliant or blunder, we'll find out.

Better hold on.

Alberta X Yuksi

Worked great the last time.

No good reason to mess with something that works.

Until the next time, I hope you're having as much fun with your dogs as we are with ours.

The Howler

Mike Santos and Caitlin Brady

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