

Types Of Mushing In Alaska

Sprint Racing

Mushers of all ages participate in sprint races every year throughout Alaska. The main feature distinguishing sprint races from other types of racing is the shorter run lengths and super light sleds. Since sprint races rarely run longer than 30 miles, there is no need for a musher to carry any gear with them. Some sprints, like the Open North American and Fur Rondy World Championship, allow a musher to run as many dogs as they like. Kids races, on the other hand, allow kids as young as 4 years old to race one dog around a track.

Sprint racing dogs are bred specifically to run fast - and that is about it. They often have shorter hair than their longer distance counterparts, to prevent overheating on warmer days. Important qualities of long distance dogs, such as having good feet or a large appetite, aren't as important for sprint dogs, since they don't run for more than a few hours each day.

Mid-Distance Racing

Mid distance races share more in common with long distance racing than sprint races. Running 50+ miles per day, mid distance races are usually shorter than 300 miles in total length. Nearly all mid-distance races require the musher to camp out on the trail or at checkpoints, caring for their teams just like Iditarod mushers must on the trail to Nome. Some longer distance races, like the Iditarod and Yukon Quest, require that mushers complete several mid-distance races before leaving the starting line. This requirement helps to ensure that each team is qualified. Mid distance races are also used by mushers to tune their teams up

for Iditarod or Quest, simulating race conditions for a shorter period of time (2-4 days in length). Some popular mid-distance races include the Copper Basin 300, Knik 200, Tustumena 200 and the Kuskokwim 300.

Stage Racing

Stage races have grown in popularity in recent years. Run like the Tour de France, a major bike race in Europe, teams race during the day and rest at night, often traveling by night on the road system to reach a new starting line for the next day. Unlike the other forms of racing mentioned above, teams often have a group of dogs they can choose each day's team from, allowing for some dogs to get a rest day. Stage races have up to 14 single day races, taking up to two weeks to complete. The distance of one day's run can vary from 10 - 100 miles.

Long Distance Racing

Long distance racing is the most well known form of sled dog racing in Alaska. Races such as the Iditarod or Yukon Quest, each over 1,000 miles, take multiple days for teams to complete, with teams running and resting during both the days and nights. Each race has a few mandatory layovers, requiring mushers to stop for a given amount of time, but all mushers take additional breaks during the race. Once a team leaves the starting line the clock continues until they finish, so even while resting the clock is ticking away. Mushers get very little sleep on long distance races, because most rest time is spent caring for the dogs and preparing them to run. Distance race trails traverse rugged terrain, including mountain ranges, coastal flats and river valleys.

Recreational Mushing

Not all mushers use dog teams to race in Alaska. Some mushers keep dog teams to travel into remote sections of Alaska, just for fun. One area where recreational mushers often visit is Denali National Park. Since the park is closed to all

motorized vehicles in the winter, a dog team provides the fastest and easiest way to access the region.

Skijoring

Skijoring is very different from mushing, mainly because a dog sled isn't used. When skijoring, the person being pulled by the dogs rides on cross-country skis. The 'musher' is tied to the team by a waist belt, and the line between the dogs and the person is long enough to allow the person to ski. Most skijorers only use one or two dogs, because, without a brake, it is difficult to slow down!