Read Words in Context

Racers on Four Paws

Every March, teams of sled dogs compete in a special race called the Iditarod [i-dit-er-ohd]. They pull a sled over more than a thousand miles of ice and snow across Alaska from Anchorage to Nome. The fastest team wins.

Winning depends on having a good team of dogs. Most drivers prefer huskies, since this breed of dog has a lot of energy. A race as hard as the Iditarod would exhaust weaker dogs.

The dogs and their human drivers train all year. They need to maintain good health and fitness so that they're ready for this difficult race.

The dog at the head of the team is the lead dog. During the race, drivers assume that their lead dog will follow their commands right away. If the lead dog hesitates, the other dogs will be confused. They might become upset or annoyed.

Drivers are careful not to endanger the dogs. They look for dangerous patches of ice. They watch the team for signs of trouble. Limping or a drooping head may indicate that a dog is injured or sick. The driver must not neglect a dog that needs help.

There are several rest stops along the way. At a rest stop, the driver will release the dogs from their harnesses. The driver and dogs seize the opportunity to eat and rest. The resting time relieves the lead dog from its job for a while.

After this rest, the team gets back to the race and advances over the icy trail. The first teams may reach the finish line in about ten days.

Dog-sled racing fascinates many people. They become fans of one driver and team and are there every year to cheer them on!