

Four weeks until race countdown

BY DICK MACKEY, '81 Race Manager

For the ninth year in a row, the big moment for veterans and certainly for the rookies when a driver's breath comes in difficult gasps is just around the corner. Nerves are shattered, the command to go, and some fifty-nine mushers start out on what has been correctly billed as "The last great race on earth." The first few seconds from the starting line and the last few miles coming into Nome have to be one of the highest times in a person's life.

Between those two periods mushers will undoubtedly find a range of attitude from high to the lowest of low! One of the lows, if the race were to start today, would be the trail conditions. At a time when the running of the Rondy and other sprint races are in doubt in the Anchorage area, word that the Iditarod will be held regardless of conditions, creates raised eyebrows at best. Iditarod veterans smile and shrug with the usual comment, "bout time we had a tough year like old times." The rookie gulps, remembering similar training runs, while the general public wonders how the hell can the Iditarod make it when none else can. First of all, the ninth running of the Iditarod will begin at Mulcahy Park in Anchorage, March 7, at 10:00 a.m. Depending on snow conditions, the start will be an actual run to Eagle River, the first checkpoint, or a ceremonial start followed by a parade to Eagle River. From that point the dogs will be trucked to Settlers Bay in Wasilla. There the race will get underway, regardless of weather conditions, at 2:00 p.m.

How do we manage to start off on a snowless trail? There are a great many differences between the sprint racing teams most

people in the Anchorage area are used to watching and the Iditarod teams. Seldom are the Iditarod-trained dogs used to running on groomed trails; rather they often are purposely run through the toughest of trail conditions to prepare them for just such surface conditions, the likes of which are often encountered throughout on the trail to Nome.

Our type of dogs are very familiar with wearing booties when deemed necessary to protect their pads from the rough ground or cutting ice, which would stop other teams trained for pure speed. These precautions, along with the fact that long-distance teams are much slower paced, support the opinion of the veterinarians, race officials, and the race committee that we may proceed without undue concern for the safety of the dogs.

The drivers might be another story but for the very nature of the event. Large, heavily laden sleds even the odds considerably on a rough trail. Add a handler riding the first few miles to assist with the controlling of the team plus the additional weight, and the entire event becomes a safe, sane event in spite of the present conditions.

First and foremost is the concern for the well-being of our dogs.

One wonders if the drivers should be informed that but twenty miles out the trail it is just fine, or let everyone just think about it and stay on their toes that much longer? Anyway, the weather man always covers himself with a 50-50 prediction for snow, so why really be that concerned? Here's an invitation for all to come and see the start of another great adventure, Iditarod 1981.

THE JUNIORS!

BY ANNE PATCH

In order to enter the Iditarod Trail Race from Anchorage to Nome, a musher must be 18 years old. We have had several 18-year-olds enter—anxious for the adventure and the challenge of the 1049 mile test of endurance.

With the help of interested parents and supporters, a Junior Iditarod organization was formed in 1978, and a 120 mile race for mushers 14-17 years old was put together. These young mushers train hard and gain invaluable knowledge about distance dog driving and dog care. They are the Iditaroders of tomorrow!

This year the Junior Iditarod race will begin on February 28 from Settlers Bay Resort (Wasilla). The young mushers and their teams of 7-10 dogs run 60 miles out the Iditarod Trail to Rabbit Lake where they are required to take a mandatory 12-hour layover before returning the 60 miles to the finish.

Run as closely as possible to the Iditarod Trail race rules, the junior mushers are required to have their dogs and sleds checked prior to the race. Certain mandatory equipment is required, and the 12-hour layover corresponds to the 24-hour rest required in Iditarod rules.

Gary Baumgartner, McGrath, (Iditarod musher Ernie Baumgartner's son) came home victorious in 1980 and will return in 1981 to defend his title. Each year the field grows as more and more youngsters become interested in this great Alaskan sport.

Trophies are awarded for first through fifth place finishers and this year there's more! Alaska Airlines will take the winner and one parent to Nome for the finish of the 1049 mile Iditarod Trail Race and the awards ceremony. The winner will also receive a five-foot basket sled handcrafted by Al Marple. Alaska Magazine will present second-place winner

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with a \$150 gift certificate. Other prizes for the finishers will come from Rae's Harness Shop, Lolly's Harness Shop, Alaska Mill Feed & Seed, Spada Feed & Seed, and Eagle River Feed & Seed.

Just like the senior race, the winners of the Junior Iditarod will be feted at an awards banquet scheduled for March 1 at Settlers Bay. Joe Redington, "Father of the Iditarod," will be the guest speaker and will entertain the young mushers and their families and supporters with a slide show of his trip via dog team to the top of Mt. McKinley.

Rich Pralle of Wasilla will be race coordinator again in 1981. Joel Kottke will return as race marshal and Phil Meyer, DVM

will be trail veterinarian.

These youngsters, both boys and girls, are the backbone of tomorrow's long distance dog sled racing in Alaska. They come from across the state; Anchorage, Matanuska Valley, Interior. As the Junior Iditarod Race grows with continued support from parents and sponsors, mushers are expected from Outside and Canada. 120 miles of serious competition on the first leg of the historic Iditarod Trail out of Knik—a training ground, a test for these young mushers and an invaluable experience.

For further information contact Rich Pralle, Star Route Box 5433, Wasilla, AK 99687. (907) 376-4175.

AUSTIN WINS KUSKO 300

Can he carry his winning streak to Nome?

Jerry Austin from St. Michael has just come away from Bethel victorious in a rough, warm, Kuskokwim 300—a race across the tundra from Bethel to Aniak and return. In winning the Kusko, Jerry beat out some heavyweight competition. Coming in second was George Atla and behind him a hard-driving Rick Swenson and Walter Williams from Akiak.

Can Jerry continue his winning streak? Can he beat the impressive field to Nome? The Swensons, Butchers, Nayokpuks and Nordlums?

The 1981 Iditarod Trail Race will be the fourth attempt for the musher from St. Michael and, as in the past, he will carry the colors of Chevron U.S.A. Chevron got behind the Austin team in 1978 and has been a loyal and helpful sponsor ever since. Jerry is the Commission Agent for Chevron in St. Michael—125 miles southeast of Nome.

Chevron is behind more than the Austin team this year. They have donated 10 gallons of Chevron Blazo Fuel per musher. The Blazo, used by the mushers for cooking food for their dog teams as well as themselves, is a very necessary commodity in their trail supplies. Chevron has donated the fuel and the Iditarod Trail Committee will be responsible for disbursing it to strategic checkpoints between Anchorage and Nome.

Jerry, who was born and raised in Seattle and graduated from the University of Washington in 1969, already has an impressive Iditarod record behind him. In 1976, his first race, he was 23rd out of 46 finishers. In 1977 Jerry sat out a year because of illness. In 1978 he improved his finishing position

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The Case of the Hot Dogs

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Editorial

Maybe it didn't rain on Ronald Reagan's big parade, but an off-beat pre-inaugural theft—of Feets, Candy and Joey—nearly put a damper on one class act. The aforementioned are Alaskan husky dogs, renowned in their home state for leadership, manliness (dogliness?) and a fair amount of brute strength that is usually applied with great success to the pulling of heavily laden sleds. It was to these ends that the three dogs—valued at \$5,000 apiece—were hired to perform in the parade and flown here, under contract, to lead a 25-dog team in pulling three sleds (on wheels) down the ceremonial avenue.

But whoa and behold, shortly after midnight on the day before the day, the huskies were nowhere to be found at the Damascus farm where they had been staying. Who on earth would attempt to steal three bold and presumably terrifying Alaskan huskies? A case, surely, for Sgt.

Preston of the Yukon; but, absent the sergeant, enter the Montgomery County police, eschewing bloodhounds and acting on a telephone tip.

As frantic parade-masters sought vainly to buy, rent or leash qualified substitutes for the missing trio, police dogged every lead until they came to a house basement in Gaithersburg. There, listed in good condition, were these allegedly tough creatures, who apparently succumbed silently to two youths who have been charged with the theft. The case of the dogs that didn't bark.

As you may have noticed, the dogs did make their appointed rounds on Tuesday, but you can forget that mighty-husky myth; Feets, Candy and Joey were content to grin meekly, sit, shake hands or roll over as they mushed. Fierce they weren't, adorable they were. Huskies they may be, but pussycats also they surely are.