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## FITNESS

## Clip on Skis, Hitch Rover, and Go

By **STEPHEN REGENOLD**

Published: January 5, 2006

FOUR years ago Carin Offerman clipped on a pair of cross-country skis, tethered herself to her giant schnauzer, Raven, and braced for a ride that would change her life. Her 70-pound dog started running, and Ms. Offerman felt the line go tight as she rocketed down the snowy trail.

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Allen Brisson-Smith for The New York Times

John Thompson skijoring last month across a golf course in Minneapolis.

Ms. Offerman, 57, an independent investor from Minneapolis, had read about skijoring, a Nordic sport, which involves tying a dog to the skier for increased speed and power. "My dog and I were both in need of exercise in the winter months, and skijoring looked like a great fit," she said.

Before the snow melted, Ms. Offerman was taking Raven out on local trails several times a week for a workout, which she says is equally good for both of them. "After an hour of skijoring I'd come home sweaty and exhausted," she said, "and Raven would go to curl up by the fireplace for a long nap."

Skijoring (pronounced skee-JOAR-ing) has long been practiced in Alaska and Scandinavia, where sled-dog sports are part of the local culture. But in the last five years it has gained momentum in places like Vermont, upstate New York, Michigan, Colorado and Minnesota and now has a


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Michael Okoniewski for The New York Times

Jason Sperry skijoring at the Salmon Hills resort in Redfield, N.Y., which has opened its 18 miles of trails to the sport.

following among thousands of recreational skiers and their dogs, said Tim White, the president of the International Federation of Sleddog Sports, in Minnesota. Cross-country ski areas have opened hundreds of miles of trails to skiers and their pets, and new skijoring clubs, equipment makers, races, instructional clinics and Web sites cater to the converts.

Participation in skijoring has grown as people find that many breeds of dog are fit and strong enough to pull their owners. Though pugs and bichon frisés won't qualify, active healthy dogs that weigh at least 35 pounds can skijor. Arctic sled dogs like Siberian huskies and Alaskan malamutes are popular race breeds. But Labrador retrievers, Rhodesian ridgebacks, Great Danes, greyhounds, border collies and even standard poodles can also participate. A giant schnauzer is hardly an arctic sled dog, but Raven took to skijoring with little hesitation, Ms. Offerman said.

A cousin sport to dog sledding, skijoring uses a 6- to 10-foot towline to tether a skier to one or more dogs wearing chest harnesses. The dog runs and pulls, and the human skis behind. To maximize speed and preserve the dog's energy on long treks, skiers provide some of the power by striding and pushing off with their poles. Some dogs may need training to run straight down trails rather than in circles around their owner's ankles. An experienced canine-human pair can reach speeds of 15 miles an hour or more, Mr. White said.

Speed is part of the attraction. But skijorers also like the exercise and the camaraderie with the family pet. And for those who already own a dog and cross-country gear skijoring is a relatively inexpensive pursuit.

The equipment is designed and made by small companies like Perry Greene Outfitters, in Waldoboro, Me., which sells the basic waist belt, towline and dog harness for \$65 at [www.mainely-dogs.com](http://www.mainely-dogs.com). Rick Skoglund, an owner of the store, said a growing awareness of skijoring has boosted gear sales 30 percent from 2004 to 2005.

More and more cross-country ski areas have begun opening trails to skiers with dogs, said Chris Frado, the director of the Cross Country Ski Areas Association in Winchester, N.H. Among the large American ski centers that now have skijoring trails are Bretton Woods Mountain Resort in New Hampshire, Okemo in Vermont, Crested Butte Nordic Center in Colorado and Jackson Hole Nordic Center in Wyoming. More than 50 ski areas in the United States now allow dogs, according to the Cross Country Ski Areas Association.

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Turf wars between cross-country skiers and skijorers have been minimal, Ms. Frado said, though deep paw prints on freshly groomed trails have spurred some complaints. At larger resorts, skijoring loops are kept separate from other trails so dogs do not bother regular cross-country skiers.

Skijorers are also known to use public parks, snowmobile and hiking trails and even golf courses, though it is easier to get momentum on packed snow.

Skiers and dog owners are learning about the sport mainly through word of mouth, said Jim Benson, the president of the Midwest Skijorers Club, in Minneapolis. His organization tries to recruit new members by holding clinics in parks and at outdoor retail shops. Though the club includes some skijoring racers who compete in local and national events, most of its 100 members are active dog owners interested mainly in the fresh air and exercise, Mr. Benson said. He expects the sport to continue growing. "There are untold thousands of households with one or two dogs that need to be exercised in the winter," he said, "and people are realizing that skijoring is a great alternative to walking the dog in the snow."

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Some participants consider skijoring a wilderness adventure sport. David Delorme, a member of the Snow Motion Winter Dog Sports Club of Manitoba, takes his 65-pound dog, Kemo, a German shepherd-husky mix, on endurance skijoring treks. Last year, in a journey that took two weeks, Mr. Delorme and Kemo traversed 200 miles through Atikaki Wilderness Park in eastern Manitoba, sleeping out under the stars and using a covered sled to haul supplies. "Kemo would pull the sled across the lakes and through the woods, and I'd clip on to skijor whenever the snow conditions were smooth enough for him to pull me as well," Mr. Delorme said.



Allen Brisson-Smith for The New York Times

Molly, an Australian shepherd, gets ready for a run with the Midwest Skijoring Club in Minneapolis.

Dozens of skijoring races are scheduled nationally this winter. On March 11, Salmon Hills, a resort in Redfield, N.Y., which opened its entire 18 miles of trails to skijoring for the first time last year, will be host to a 10-kilometer race with a \$3,000 prize. In February, Minneapolis will include a skijoring race in its annual urban ski event, the City of Lakes Loppet.

Recreational club races are taking place in California, Oregon, Maine, Idaho, Vermont and New Hampshire. Anchorage will be home to six races this year. And in Fairbanks, during the second weekend in March, the Alaska Dog Musher's Association will hold the skijoring Limited North American Championships, a three-day series of races.

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The International Federation of Sleddog Sports, which has club affiliates in 40 countries, is working with the International Olympic Committee to get skijoring into the Winter Olympics by 2014.

Paul Karabinos, 52, a professor of geology at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., is a recent convert to skijoring and typical of those who are attracted to the sport. Mr. Karabinos skied cross-country for more than 20 years before he heard about skijoring on a trip to Norway last March. "The Norwegian dogs all looked ecstatic pulling their owners on the trails around Lillehammer, and it hit me that I had to try this with Gimli," he said, referring to his 3-year-old German shepherd.

In December, Mr. Karabinos bought equipment from Skijor Now, an outfitter in Minneapolis. To train Gimli to use the harness he took the dog out on short jogs on nearby trails. Two days after Christmas, on an unplowed gravel road going up nearby Mount Greylock, they skijored for the first time, cruising downhill for a mile and a half through the snow.

"Gimli barked and trotted as we skied down," Mr. Karabinos said. "He loves to pull, and he knows this is sanctioned pulling, which makes him even happier."

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