

## Dog Carting and Drafting

The use of dogs as draft animals has a long history. Newfoundlands hauled fishing nets in to shore for their owners. Bernese Mountain Dogs and Rottweilers hauled carts containing farm produce to market for their owners, and numerous other large breeds, among them Leonbergers, have been used over the centuries to haul things. Although using dogs as draft animals is no longer extensively practiced out of necessity, more and more people are discovering the joys of involving the family dog in this sport.

Teaching your dog to pull a cart, a wagon, a sled, is not a hard activity at all to learn. The three most important things you need to get started is a dog 18 months and older in good physical health, a good quality Pulling Harness, and a cart or wagon and of course your time.

### Carting / Drafting Terminology

**Harness** – This is what the dog wears to pull.

**Shafts** – These are rigid poles positioned parallel on either side of the dog. They act as the steering, when moving the cart right or left. Shafts also act as brakes, and automatically stop the cart or wagon from running over the dog when the vehicle is going down hill or comes to a halt.

**Whipple Tree (also known as a Swingle Tree)** – This is a bar that is attached to the wagon or cart in the center which pivots freely between the shafts. It is slightly wider than the dog and has eye bolts at either end to attach the traces one on each side of the dog. The traces are attached to the Whipple Tree rather than directly to the cart to allow for proper movement of the dog, a dog's movement would sway the cart to and fro if he was pulling from the shafts.

**Traces** – These are the straps that connect to the Whipple Tree, to the harness, and must be long enough for the dog to have full rear stretch as to not have the whipple tree hit his hocks, or feet. The dog actually pulls with the traces.

## **Terms for Vehicles**

**Cart** – this refers to a two-wheeled vehicle. Some are designed to carry passengers, much like a harness racing sulky; they may also be used to haul freight. The cart must be built and loaded correctly, to always maintain a balance with no pressure or weight on the dog.

**Wagon** – this refers to a four-wheeled vehicle. Most communal used is a converted wagon. Shafts would be added and a whipple tree installed. This type of vehicle puts no pressure or weight on the dog even if loaded badly.

**Travois** – this is a no-wheeled device which is dragged by the dog. These are useful when crossing rough terrain. They are harder on the dog as this is dead weight.

## **Terms for Harness Types**

There are several different styles of harness. These include Parade Harness, Siwash Harness and Draft Harness. Siwash are traditional used with sled dogs, where they pull by being attached to a long line with 6 to 8 dogs. For a cart or wagon you should have a parade or draft harness as they are designed to have shafts attached and distribute the pull. Use of one style over another is often a matter of personal preference – sometimes it's your preference, and sometimes it's your dog's preference. Watch the dog's body language to know which he prefers. Listen to your dog! If the dog's tail is tucked under, you have a problem.

## **Carting Commands**

There are different commands used while working your dog. Here are some of the most popular commands used:

**Hike / Giddy Up / Walk On / Start / Forward** – these are all commands for start walking forward.

**Back / Back up** – this is the command used for backing up

**Whoa / Stop / Halt** – these all mean stop.

**Gee / Right** – this is the command for turn right

**Haw / Left** – this is the command for turn left

**Easy / Slow** – to slow the dog down

**Hurry / Lets Go** – to speed the dog up

**Hurray / Good Job / Well Done** – any form of praise, there is no limit to the encouragement and praise you give your dog.