

## **Truck Routines**

by Leigh Gilchrist

pp 271 – 273, 1994. The International Siberian Husky Club, Inc. presents: The Siberian Husky. Senior Editors, Pamela Thomas, Ann Stead, Nancy Wolfe. Section Editors: Sharon Brunzlick, DVM, Ann Mariah Cook, Lois Leonard, Al Stead, Bob Thomas.

Before discussing routines, let me voice one of my pet peeves in the area of dog boxes: the size of the box opening is too small on many trucks I see. What brought this to mind was a discussion with Harris Dunlop at a sprint race. Harris was explaining why he had such large door openings on his dog box. Harris went on about respiratory diseases and condensation in the box caused by lack of adequate air. Openings (not door size) should be a minimum of 8" by 10". Mine are 14" square. Harris's are 12" by 16". A large opening in the front allows for lots of air and does not create a draft.

In the past, one of my most frustrating problems was dogs that wouldn't eat and/or drink away from home. I watched other drivers, asked questions, and most importantly for me, learned to be patient and not get upset with a finicky eater or drinker. Dogs are creatures of habit, and when their routines are changed, some don't handle it as well as others. It is up to the trainer to establish routines that work. The following is what works for me.

During fall training, I do not normally truck dogs overnight, but do follow a few common sense routines like parking in the shade while training. If this is not possible, we drop the dogs so they can lay under the truck.

I take water with me on the rig or atv and give dogs a drink as many as three times during a run, as well as at the end when back at the truck. I use a 2 ½ gallon plastic pail with a lid. It can be carried in the basket of a Risdon-style rig, or in a plastic milk crate tied to the racks of an atv. Just set the bucket down between pairs for a drink when out on the trail. Ten dogs, drinking twice on a typical 4 to 5 mile run would drink most of the two gallons. This water can also be used to wet down a dog that has become overheated. (pour water over the head and splash over the groin.)

Once back at the truck, each dog gets an ice-cube sized piece of semi-frozen of semi-frozen liver, which besides being a nutritious and tasty reward, helps cool them down. Sometimes I let them stand in line for more water from dishes, or they might be tied to the truck then given more water. Water is one of the few things they can't get too much of. If a dog does drink too greedily, he can simply vomit. Dogs go back into the box only after they've cooled down all the way. Usually, by the time I have the second group harnessed, the others are cooled down sufficiently. I don't use baited water during or immediately after a run in the fall.

As the temperature decreases later in the fall, I decrease the number of water stops until most runs in late October would be without water out on the trail, but I still carry a bucket with me in case it's needed.

Late in the fall, we like to keep the dogs on the truck a few times overnight to get them used to a different feeding and watering routine. It's no fun to get to your first race only to find that your best yearling won't eat or drink.

It's extremely important that dogs drink the morning of a race. To help establish this routine, I water every morning from late fall (when I can't leave water in buckets overnight), until spring. I use a long handled 2 cup ladle and a 5 gallon bucket to mix bait into the water. I used to use about a pound and a half of meat to the water for the 35 or so animals in the yard. I now use 2 cups of Annamaet 32 (High quality performance dry dog food) in the 5 gallons of warm water. Let it soak until the food is completely mushy. This works better than any meat I ever used. Each dog gets 2 cups (females, retired dogs, and puppies), to 3 cups (males) of this warm, baited water. If some dogs don't drink, use more bait. Puppies and young dogs pick up the morning drinking habit very easily this way.

In the past when I had problems with poor drinkers, I made sure they got some water into them by feeding and watering at the same time. It worked well and I continue to feed this way throughout the frozen months. I carry two 5 gallon pails (one water and one dog food) to each feeding station. The dog gets his food, 8 – 10 ounces of Annamaet and 4 ounces of lean red meat for most, then 2 cups of warm water, both in the bucket which is fastened to the side of his house. The water warms up the bucket so the tongues don't freeze to it, and the dogs get a nice warm meal. I feed the same way when dogs are on the truck with an additional 2-3 cups of baited water given to each dog before retiring for the night. When the dogs are on the truck, I water about 6:00 PM then drop at 8:00 PM and 10:00 PM. Insulated rubber gloves make the feeding chore easier.

Like most Siberian drivers, we race on weekends, and work during the week. The routines we follow are somewhat different from those of a driver travelling the circuit.

Our routine changes a little depending on how far away the race is. A drive of three hours or less, we usually do on Saturday morning. Longer drives mean we leave Friday night.

If I can make it to the race site in less than an hour, I water at home (4 cups per dog), load dogs and leave. Watering should take place at least four hours before race time. When dogs have been so heavily watered, they can't travel more than an hour before nature calls. I like to let them down as soon as possible after arriving at the site, as they tend to get excited and need relief even more. (Note drop chains are left on the dogs while they're in the box). Dogs get let out again four hours after they were watered. Ideally this is the time of the first heat. I like to get my dogs out about twenty minutes before my starting time.

Letting the dogs down for calls of nature can easily be done in fifteen minutes, then dogs should go back into the box. It is a poor driver who leaves his dogs out for long periods of time unattended. A properly strawed and ventilated box is comfortable and safe, and dogs like it there.

A drive of more than an hour requires that either I water at home and drop an hour later on the road or

water on the road. The method used is determined by time. In any case, dogs get watered four hours before start time, and get dropped about an hour later. If the truck is not moving, you can stretch this drop to two hours.

When we have to leave Friday night, I come home at noon to feed and water. This allows us to drive to the motel nonstop after work. A drive of more than six hours requires a drop, ideally at about four hours.

It is important to give dogs a drink after their long Friday night drive. I use baited, warm water, about a cup to a cup and half per dog. It is enough to rehydrate, but not so much that they need to be dropped before morning. When I used meat to bait water I would get it out at this time to thaw for the morning water. I would soak the frozen (1 ½ pound) block in a little water overnight. This makes the water tastier, but does not allow too much bacterial growth. No such problems with Annamaet 32 as bait.

The timing of the first morning drop depends upon on the time of our first heat, but is not later than 8. Racing in the 8 dog class at Saranac means watering before 5, a terrible time to have to get up. A two o'clock heat requires that we drop about eight, then again at ten for water.

A fussy dog will be given her water after the others near her so that she sees what's going on. If she doesn't drink by the time the others have, I chop finely a thumb size piece of meat or liver, hold it under her nose, then sprinkle it over the water. Stand back and leave her alone. If there is a lot going on nearby, I might put her in the box alone with the water. I have had dogs that would tip the water or cover it up if left in the box, which is very frustrating. When dealing with this type of dog, it is important to follow regular routines, and not get upset with her. I use "her" because all of my problem drinkers have been bitches. My team has always been composed of more bitches than dogs.

After watering 20 dogs, there is some bait water left. I add clear water to it to be used after the race. In the morning I also mix food for the evening feeding and store it in the cab of the truck. I throw a coat over it to prevent freezing. Hot water goes into the five gallon thermos which will keep water warm enough for me to feed at the site, without having to look around for hot water. I wouldn't go to a race without it.

Immediately following the heat, dogs are given a hunk of liver, while still standing in line. Watering might take place in the line also, or on the truck, depending upon time and space. Dogs usually get about 2 cups of the lightly baited water, more if it was warmer or the trail was tough and they seem to want it. Dogs go into the box almost immediately, as soon as their breathing has returned to normal. They are dropped about two hours later.

Feeding often takes place at the site. I like to get a nice warm meal and their water into them as soon as possible. Dogs don't eat well right away so wait about two hours. If the feeding took place before late afternoon, I'll offer dogs another 2 cups of baited water sometime before six. My last drop is about 10 pm so I don't offer water later than six.

Dogs get dropped about an hour and a half after feeding, and again four hours after eating. When I drop dogs for the last time in the evening, I like to go to a quiet place where I can drop all the dogs, then let them loose a few at a time. This allows me to check for lameness. This last drop takes longer because I play with them.

Most driver take note of dogs' stools as an indicator of *general* well-being. It is also a good practice to watch urine color. Darker urine indicates that more water is necessary. When the dogs are dropped after a day of racing, they usually produce somewhat darker urine. In the late evening and morning, dogs should produce urine that is almost clear.

The second day routine is the same. If I suspect that a dog is lame, I'll let him out of the box alone first thing in the morning, and turn him loose right away. The first few steps tell the tale, so watch carefully.

My own weekly routine would something like this:

**Monday:** rest

**Tuesday:** train

**Wednesday:** often get ready for the next race – pack, get food ready (each day's ration in a 5 gallon pail, stored in the freezer).

**Thursday:** train

**Friday:** travel

**Saturday:** race

**Sunday:** race

Dogs will perform better when following regular routines which keep them fully hydrated and maximize their comfort.