

Running with the Dogs

Article and photos courtesy Carol Godwin, Cycle Mania Az

One of the most satisfying things you can do for your dogs is to give them the gift of freedom out in the wild. Running with a bike is about as close as they will get to running with the pack and our dogs just love it. Cycling gives dogs the same physical and mental benefits that it gives you but there are a few things to keep in mind when starting your dog out with cycling.

The first thing to consider is the dog's current **fitness level**. Is your dog used to traveling long distances? Is your dog used to running for extended amounts of time? If the answer is no, it is only fair to begin slowly, just as you began slowly when you began to cycle. Begin with slow short rides and assess how your dog is responding. Observe their breathing rate and check their pads for wear. Your dog uses panting to regulate body temperature but labored breathing or foaming at the mouth are indicators that you are pushing your dog too hard. Dogs quickly adapt to increased physical demands placed on them but give them a couple of weeks to slowly build up stamina and endurance. We generally allow our dogs to run 10-12 miles, at about a 6-7 mile per hour pace, with water breaks spaced out during the ride. Don't expect to get in a fast and furious marathon with your dog, slow down and enjoy the ride on those dog-days.

The next thing to consider is the **terrain** that you are planning to ask your dog to travel over. Keep in mind that rough gravel roads and rocky terrain are more abrasive to your dog's feet and plan your routes to be easy on their feet. Soft dirt and pine-needled trails are much more dog-friendly than roads. A dog's feet will toughen up with use but you cannot expect this will happen immediately -- take it easy on their feet and monitor their pads for wear. Pads should be thick, rough and almost scaly. If your dog's pads feel smooth or thin after an expedition, you should give them several days to heal before setting off on less abrasive terrain.

Another consideration is **temperature**. Dogs function best in cool temperatures so early in the morning or late in the evenings are best. A dog can easily overheat in warm temperatures and can succumb to heat exhaustion. Be sure that you plan your route to include shady terrain and provide shaded rest stops when your dog appears to be getting overheated. In spring, give your dog a thorough brushing-out to thin their coats and reduce insulation.

Water, water, water. Plan your routes to include multiple water stops and/or carry extra water for your dog. Panting increases water loss and dehydration can be a serious risk, as well as severely reduce a dog's ability to thermo-regulate. Know where your local tanks and springs are and whether or not they are filled and available. Watch for **cockleburs** around cattle tanks -- these can get embedded into your dog's fur and skin and cause pain and infection in those areas.

Control is vital to your dog's and wildlife's safety. We use shock collars every time we ride although our dogs have already learned to stay close and leave wildlife and other recreationists alone. A **shock collar** allows you complete control of your dog while simultaneously giving the freedom to "run with the pack" that they crave. An additional safety precaution is to always carry **bear spray** on your trips. In the off-chance that you encounter a bear or other predator, it will most likely attack your dog first. Bear spray

will not only protect you but can immediately stop an animal encounter with your dog (one of our foremost reasons for carrying bear spray is to drive off attacking feral dogs). Snake training is also an important component of allowing your dog freedom on the trail. All dogs should know that a **snake** is always a painful and dangerous creature and is to be avoided at all costs. We use a combination of discovered harmless bull-snakes and the shock collars to deliver the message to the dogs whenever the chance presents itself. If you are **night-riding**, a LED collar will let you know where your dog is at all times.

Enjoy your rides with your dogs-- the sense of **companionship** is priceless on both ends and the increased fitness level of your dog will give it many more healthy, happy years to spend idolizing you as the leader of the pack.

The darker golden is Odie, the lighter one is Cyrus and the white one is Mila. The people are all family members and don't need names. They are all fine with their pics being used.