

PERFORMANCE EVENTS: WEIGHT PULLING

by Mary Anne Zanetos

The sport of weight pulling is similar to a tractor pull. Dogs of all breeds compete in weight classes to see who can pull the most weight 16 feet within 60 seconds. Dogs accumulate points throughout the season which are used to determine rankings. Some breed clubs tabulate weight pull results and include pulling as part of versatility recognition programs.

Why compete in weight pulling? There are four main reasons: (1) It promotes the working heritage of the Great Dane; (2) It builds strength and improves fitness and muscular condition; (3) It's easy to learn and provides a constructive outlet for a natural canine behavior; (4) It's a safe and very enjoyable activity for both you and your dog.



Carmen, pulling 2,035 lbs.

Shown above is Carmen (Ch. Rojon's Loveletter) at a recent IWPA event in South Vienna, Ohio. It's her turn and the weight to be pulled for this round is 2,035 lbs. She is in harness, a freighting harness similar to those used by sled dogs. Weights are stacked onto a wheeled cart set up on the start line. She must pull this weight 16 feet within 60 seconds to move on to the next round.

Some basics... Dogs are arranged in classes determined by the weigh-in at the beginning of the day's competition. Within their weight class, they pull in rounds, with each dog either successfully completing or failing each round. At the conclusion of each round, additional weight is added to the cart (or sled) and the process is repeated. In case of a tie on the maximum weight pulled, the fastest time determines the class winner. This is strictly an owner-handler sport.

During the event, dogs are "on deck" during their class. The stewards announce the order of pulling and make sure each dog is ready to begin when called. When the referee signals each dog's turn, the handler attaches the dog to the cart's tow line. Once the dog's harness is attached, the handler tells the dog to "stay" and quickly takes position behind the finish line. The handler gives the start command. The judge watches for the wheels of the cart to move and calls to the timer, who begins timing at that instant. When the cart crosses the 16 ft. line, the judge calls "Pull" and the time on

the stopwatch is recorded. If the cart moves before the handler is behind the finish line, if the handler touches the dog before it crosses the 16 ft. line or if it takes more than 60 seconds for the dog to move the cart 16 ft., it is disqualified and does not advance to the next round.

Handlers may use any type of voice command, gesture or signal to get their dogs to pull, but cannot use food, other dogs or double handling. Once behind the finish line, the handler has no contact with the dog during the pull, so the dog must pull willingly. No harsh treatment of any kind is allowed.

Dogs are always praised after a successful pull. When a dog reaches a weight it cannot pull, it is encouraged to do so, but after the 60 seconds is up and the dog is "out", he is often assisted by removing some weight or pushing the cart a bit, so he leaves the competition by successfully pulling, even though it does not count.



Carmen at finish line

Although Carmen is relatively new to weight pulling, she finished in first place in her weight class (125-150 lbs.) and was named "Best New Puller" of the event. She won a custom-made harness and loads of dog treats.

The sport is not just brute strength. It also involves a bit of strategy in knowing your dog's patterns, mood and what you can ask of him (and when). A handler can elect to skip up to two rounds of weights, but must successfully pull at least every third round. Skipping rounds conserves the dog's strength for the later rounds, but knowing how to pace your dog and when skipping may not be advantageous is part of the strategy.

Sanctioned competitions are organized by geographic region. Events may be held either on packed snow or on grass, hard packed dirt, gravel or carpet. Points accumulated for wheeled pulls and snow (sled) pulls are tabulated separately. During the pulling season, dogs earn points. At IWPA (International Weight Pull Association) sanctioned events, member dogs earn points as follows: First place in each weight class gets 5 points, plus one for each dog defeated. Second gets 3 points, plus one for each dog defeated. Third place gets 1 point plus one for each defeated. Additional dogs in the class earn one point for each dog they defeat. Last place gets ½ point. Dogs not making at least one successful pull do not earn or contribute points as dogs defeated.

Over the season, a dog's top five scores are added to get his final score. There is another bit of strategy involved. A dog may compete in one or more regions. If one region has weaker competition, it may be easier to earn points, but only two of your dog's top five scores can come from out of region events.

Weight pulling is a cooperative, family friendly sport. Newcomers are welcomed enthusiastically, with assistance and encouragement to try this new adventure. As a result of weight pulling, Carmen has gained the admiration of many, especially those from the Arctic breeds, who have come to respect her strength and determination. Hopefully, she has served as a model for the versatility of the Great Dane.



Pictured above is Carmen (Ch. Rojon's Loveletter) in a more traditional venue.

You can find more information on the sport of weight pulling at www.iwpa.net