

Snowy Paw Canicross Race brings winter fun to canines and owners

Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

There was a lot of energy at the Snowy Paw Canicross Race held at the Island Lake Conservation Area on Sunday, Feb. 2.

Dog owners were ready to run, and the dogs were both excited to see all the other dogs that turned out as well as get out on the trails and sprint through the snow.

Canicross is the sport of cross-country running with dogs. Runners use hands-free running equipment with a belt and harness to allow the dog to run in front and pull their owner along behind them.

There are special verbal commands that owners use to guide the dogs.

Most dogs understand the new commands pretty quickly and pick up on what the sport is all about.

The races were started in heats, with two racers and their dogs leaving the start at timed intervals.

"We have a series of three races," explained event organizer, Shawn Sobon, founder of Canadian Canicross Sports. "The Snow Paw is our winter race. We have the Muddy Paw in the spring, and the Trails and Hills Classic is our fall race. Everybody has come out with their dogs and they're running either a 5-km or a 10-km run. There's also a 'fun run' category for people who don't have the proper equipment or aren't familiar with Canicross. They can still get out there and walk, hike, or run with their dog with just a leash and collar to make the event more accessible for everybody."

The race is supporting the Orangeville SPCA. At the start of the race, close to \$1,000 had been raised. That number is expected to be higher once the proceeds from a raffle and cupcake sale are figured in.

"Canicross is a sport similar to mushing," Sobon explained. "It's like cross-country running with your dog on trails. Your dog is wearing a mushing harness that allows them to run very freely. Attached to the harness is a bungee line which is attached to the runner who is wearing a Canicross belt. This allows the runner to run hands-free. The dog is pulling you and you are running with the dog."

Sobon added, "Getting into the sport is very easy. Dogs love to run and they love to pull. They're very intuitive - if you hook them up, they will pull you. The main focus that I tell people, is to make sure your dog is having fun. There's all different types of dogs here. We've got everything from Dachshunds to Huskies, Pointers, German Shepherds - all kinds of dogs can do this sport."

For most dogs, once they are in the special harness, they seem to get the idea about what is going on.

Some dogs see what others are doing and realize this event is different than going for a regular walk.

Once they are at the start line, the dogs seem to understand what is going on and are very excited to be getting ready to hit the trails.

It's also an opportunity for the dogs to do a little socializing with the other dogs at the race, and they all seemed to get a long just fine.

The race had a morning start with the first 10-km race getting underway at 10:10 a.m.