



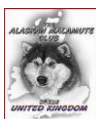
Introduction to Weight Pulling

Weight pulling is a great activity for you and your dog, and it doesn't matter if you have one dog or ten, you can still be competitive with proper training. The sport goes back almost forty years in organized form, and has showed up in such books as Jack London's Call of the Wild to show the bond between man and dog.

Getting started

I think it best to start with a puppy. Introduce them to a harness at an early age. I feel it's unnecessary to allow them to run around in the harness to 'get used to it', I'd rather they associate it with pulling right from the beginning. Malamutes aren't so timid as to be all that bothered by that thing on their back and by starting the positive training immediately they aren't given the chance to resent it and possibly chew on the harness. The initial training has little to do with actual pulling. It's very important to build the bond between you and the puppy to build the pup's confidence so she'll know you won't ask her to do something she can't do. The equipment is minimal-a harness, a small, rimless tyre with eye bolt drilled into it, line with snaps at each end, bait, and a helper. Hook the line to the tyre first, then the puppy. Doing it in the opposite order gives the pup a chance to start exploring, and at the beginning you don't want that. Crouch or bend down tapping the ground, treat in hand, no more than 1-2 feet in front of the puppy and call her excitedly, use your 'puppy-puppy-puppy' and throw in the 'pull' command. Keep other distractions to a minimum. You need to get low because the pup needs to learn correct pulling form and they can't do that if they're looking up at your face. The first couple of times you may need to wave the bait in the pup's face, and that's fine. Give your highest praise and the bait when the pup comes to you. Have your helper hold the tyre and back up a foot or two. Call puppy, and praise when she comes. Only when the puppy is absolutely consistent and coming without hesitation do you back up to being 3-4 feet away from the puppy.

DO NOT RUSH, you have nothing but time! To keep the game fun, only go perhaps 25 yards in one direction, turn and go the 25 yards back. Train no more than once or twice a week. As puppy grows, you may get a larger, rimless tire to offer a little more resistance, but the pup shouldn't pull significant weight until she's at least a year old. Always use a pulling surface that offers the least resistance, at this stage grass, fine gravel, and packed dirt are fine.



Alaskan Malamute Rescue is run by the Alaskan Malamute Club of the UK



This puppy has been working at it for a couple minutes already. Handler's posture should be the same whether starting a puppy or an adult. I do not use a leash to teach them to pull. At the beginning they often want to fight the leash, which is counterproductive and irritates the dog. I have had dogs become too dependent upon the leash and once the leash is removed they don't pull well. Many people have had success with it, I have not, but this method still applies if you decide to use the leash. When starting training an adult dog, you may go ahead and start with a rimless car tyre, but don't stand more than 2-3 feet from the dog. Follow the instructions given for puppies. When the dogs gets more and more solid in the pulling, feel free to use more difficult surfaces to pull on to increase resistance. When you try tougher surfaces, start off closer to the dog. Some tougher surfaces might include steep hills or sand. When working, you'll still want to have a helper just in case the dog needs a little help, especially in sand.

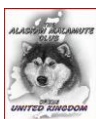
THE NUMBER ONE THING PEOPLE DO WRONG IS INCREASE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM AND THE DOG TOO SOON!

Further training

As pup becomes an adult, or as the adult gets the hang of it, you'll need to start cross training to build up strength and stamina. If you have a few dogs, you can go carting or sledding, if you just have the one, roadwork with your bike and a Springer attachment is sufficient. Be sure to only run the dog on softer surfaces, avoid pavement whenever possible. As the dog gets more and more fit, you may have the dog start pulling a small tyre when doing roadwork. Start small and go shorter distances as this will be quite a bit harder than normal running. Slowly build up to pulling bigger rimless tyres, then start going longer distances. When you want to really get more realistic weight pull scenarios, if there are other pullers in your area, you may see if they'd like to get together and train once a week.

Someone will need to have a weight pull cart, but an ATV in neutral works really well, too. This accomplishes several things: your dog will become accustomed to a noisier weight pull atmosphere, you can work on pulling more difficult weights, and you can pick up tips from others or see what doesn't work. **Once again, since you're trying something new, help your dog out by moving closer to the dog, you should still be bending over and tapping the ground or crouching low, that will never change.**

As your dog is pulling better and better at the lower weights, try to only use the dog's name to get their attention and your pull command-firmly-and praise at the end. The more words you use, the more you distract your dog. You should also be backing off on the 'cheerleading' at lighter weights to make it more effective when the dog is struggling. Never ever ask the dog to do something you know she can't do. If they hear the uncertainty in your voice, they are likely not to pull.



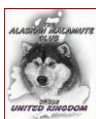
Alaskan Malamute Rescue is run by the Alaskan Malamute Club of the UK



Going to the pulls

For your first weight pull, arrive early to get set up and comfortable. Allow the dog to eliminate. You'll typically have two options, Novice class and the Regular classes. Check ahead to make sure Novice will be offered if you plan to enter that class. In Novice it isn't a competition, it's a training class, you may come closer to your dog and you may also use a leash. There are no prizes in Novice and weight pulled in that class does not count toward AMCA Working Weight Pull Dog (WWPD) legs. DO NOT spend too many pulls in the Novice class. The dogs actually seem to learn how to count and if they get accustomed to stopping at a certain weight you'll have trouble getting them past that in the regular classes. At the same time, don't rush into pulling if the dog has not been consistent in training. Throwing them into an organized pull isn't going to help. Check your local club's rules for specifics on how the pull will be run. Read their rules in advance including their title requirements should you pursue titles.

Handler is still crouched, giving the dog no reason to break form. Once you're pulling in the regular classes, take note of your dog's body language. On the pull when the dog begins to struggle, don't give in, don't get frustrated, keep your voice steady, keep using your pull command firmly and rhythmically, and once the dog begins moving the cart, continue with the pull command firmly and rhythmically. Sometimes they just need help focusing and it's amazing how this seems to help them. Then once you've taken the dog back to the crate and rewarded her, go to the scorekeepers and scratch the dog from competition. The dog trusted you because you said she could do it, she did, and that is the best possible way to end your pulling day. There is plenty of time to push a little harder later, ending the day in this fashion will only serve the dog's very best interests and create a true love for pulling. Continue to do this throughout the dog's first season and into the next. There's no reason to push the dog to do something she can't, and that will only demoralize her. If you miscalculate on a pull and the dog is trying hard but really can't do it, DO NOT wait for time to be called--your pull is already over--continuing to plead with your dog is only going to set back the training. Signal to the cart handlers to give it a push--do this non-verbally if possible--and continue with your normal routine. The goal is to end on the most positive note possible and keep the routine as normal as possible.



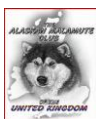
Alaskan Malamute Rescue is run by the Alaskan Malamute Club of the UK



Going forward

For more advanced training, work on ignoring distractions. Neighborhood kids are great for this, but having adults around for your weekly faux weight pull sessions is fine, too. You'll need to start off closer to your dog as usual, and probably use the dog's favorite bait. Have the distracters call to the dog make noises. For greater strength training if you're training with an ATV, have the cart holders apply some brake. Apply more brake as the dog gets better and better. The key points to always keep in mind: keep it positive, keep it fun, if something is not working, back up in the training and do something that does work. If it's not fun for the dog anymore, then look for more creative ways to make it fun and back off on the frequency of training because the dog is getting bored. Weight pulling is a heck of a lot of fun, it's a great way to meet people, and it's great for building up your dog's self image. We show our dogs in addition to weight pulling and dog sledding, the conditioning makes a big difference in their ring appearance and the muscle tone is so much more evident than in the dogs who don't work or have just had generic road work.

Good luck and happy pulling!



Alaskan Malamute Rescue is run by the Alaskan Malamute Club of the UK