

## A skier turns to 'Mush!'



By Janet Reese, Special to the Rocky

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Sunbeams shot through the lodgepole pine forest, striping the snow-blanketed mountain trail with shadows. On this crisp, clear winter morning, I could have skied. But instead, I traded my skis for a team of eight huskies yoked to a sled at Good Times Adventures, in Breckenridge.

I stepped into the sled. The barking huskies sprang up, glanced back and stamped their feet as if to say, "Let's go." It was time to mush!

During the one-hour tour, I joined four other neophytes to alternate mushing and riding in the dog-sled basket. Those not on the dog sled rode in another sled - with padded bench seats - pulled by a snowmobile that our guide, Brandon Barnhorst, drove on the trail in front of the sled dogs.

I stood on the footboards and the brake while Karl Werl, of Atlanta, sat in the sled basket. When I let up on the brake, lead dogs Indigo and Rosco, swing dogs Cotton and Hugo, team dogs Nickel and Nemo and wheel dogs Maverick and Bally took off in a burst of energy. We flew away on the trail into the rolling woodlands.

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Mushing was exciting, like riding through the forest on a magic carpet fueled by drumming dog paws. I leaned and shifted my weight in a curve. On an uphill, I pedaled a few times, a small workout.

I traded places with Werl and rode in the basket while he mushed. Riding close to the snow at the dogs' level, I watched the huskies kick up snow, some flying onto my goggles.

While the dog-sled ride was exhilarating, the experience was more about the friendly huskies - the fascination of watching them run. With a dog yard of 100 Siberian and Alaskan huskies, Good Times breeds, raises and trains its own sled dogs.

"We go easy on the dogs," said Jared O'Neill, guide and dog trainer.

Good Times differs from many other dog-sled companies. "There are few places like ours where customers are allowed to drive the dog sled," said Sarah Spalla, dog-yard manager. "Driving dogs is more real than someone driving you around. We can take anybody from Grandma to 3-year-olds, but it's enough excitement to keep even an 18-year-old athlete pumped."

Mushing was more fun than I expected. I left wanting more time running the dogs. For now, I'll vicariously watch Alaska's Iditarod mushers and their dog teams.

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### Sled dogs . . .

- \* **Run because they love it.** They're born and raised to it.
  - \* **Can run up to 25 mph.**
  - \* **Can withstand temperatures as low as 60 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.**
  - \* **Race up to age 10.** When they retire, new homes are found for them or they remain as pets in the dog yard.
  - \* **Get a minimum two-hour break between runs at Good Times Adventures.** Each is fed a pound of high-protein dog food daily and a pail of "soup" (meat and fat scraps boiled in water) after each run.
  - \* **Are supported by animal-care advocates such as "Mush with PRIDE"** ([mushwithpride.org](http://mushwithpride.org)). Races sanctioned by the International Sled Dog Racing Association require mushers to comply with sled dog-care and treatment standards.
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Sources: Good Times Adventure Tours, ISDRA

- \* **Lead dogs** find and follow the trail, set the pace and listen to their musher's commands
- \* **Swing dogs** - help the lead dogs to set the pace and turn
- \* **Team dogs** - provide the "horsepower"
- \* **Wheel dogs** - assist in steering the sled
- \* **"Hike"** - means "go"
- \* **"Gee"** - means "turn right"
- \* **"Haw"** - means "turn left"
- \* **"Mush"** - is not a command. The dogs don't know what it means.
- \* **Control** - You control the dogs and the sled by braking with one foot and leaning into the turns. \* **"Pedaling"** - Mushers assist the dogs on steep uphill by dropping a foot on the snow to push.

### **If you go**

#### \* **Alpine Snowmobiles & Dogsledding, Leadville:**

1 hour, \$70 for group ride (split between dog sled and snowmobile), \$140 for tag ride (all on dog sleds). Drive your own sled. 1-719-486- 9899, [alpinesnowmobiles.com](http://alpinesnowmobiles.com)

\* **Dog Sled Rides of Winter Park:** 45-minute ride, rates vary per sled (for example, two adults and one child in a sled is \$185). Ride only. 1-970-726-8326, [dogsledrides.com/winterpark](http://dogsledrides.com/winterpark)

\* **Good Times Adventure Tours, Breckenridge:** 1 hour, \$65/person. Drive your own sled. 1-800-477-0144, [goodtimesadventures.com](http://goodtimesadventures.com)

\* **Mountain Musher Dog Sled Rides, Vail:** 2 hours, \$160/person covers refreshments. Drive your own sled. 1-970-653-7877, [mountainmusher.com](http://mountainmusher.com)

\* **For more places**, see [dogsledrides.com/colorado](http://dogsledrides.com/colorado)

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