



TRAIL TIPS

by JENNIFER MCCARTHY • illustration by JEREMY DUNCAN



Man's Best Friend

DOGS MAKE GREAT TRAIL-RUNNING COMPANIONS, BUT THEIR WELL BEING DEPENDS ON YOU

Trail running with dogs not only keeps both man and beast in excellent shape, it strengthens the bond between them. For dogs, a pre-dinner jaunt in the woods simulates going on a hunt, and eating upon returning home, their reward for a good effort. For humans, a dog's presence can protect you by deterring wild animals like bears and mountain lions (and even two-legged predators) from approaching, or at least, distracting them while you move to safety.

Dogs naturally love to run, however, they can exert themselves beyond their fitness limits, which means you're responsible for your dog's well being on the trails.

Condition Your Canine
Wait until your puppy (see sidebar for breeds suited to running) is at least a year old before running him, when his

muscles and joints are strong enough for the sustained effort. Start with a quarter hour and increase your runs by 15-minute increments each week as your dog's pads toughen up. Different breeds (and individual dogs) react differently to exercise, so inform your vet of your training plan and follow his or her guidelines.

Dogs get sore muscles just as humans do and recover similarly. Notice how long your dog continues to pant upon returning home before his breathing normalizes. If you notice signs of stiffness or lameness, give him a day off or do a recovery activity such as swimming or walking.

Keep Spot Safe
Dogs are at particular risk of overheating—especially long-haired breeds—so budget time for water and shade breaks, the more frequent the better when temps soar. Signs your dog is in trouble include exhaustion, excessive panting, dizziness, red or dark-pink gums and difficulty breathing.

Should your dog show signs of overheating, rest him in the shade or dig a hole in the cool ground where he can curl up. Since dogs can only cool themselves through panting and releasing a small amount of sweat through their paw pads, give an overheated dog a drink and, if available, allow him to stand in a stream or lake. Avoid urging him to continue until he appears revived.

Other safety considerations include keeping rattlesnake-bite vaccinations up-to-date and having your dog wear booties (www.ruffwear.com) to protect his pads from burning on hot rocks, pavement or sand, or getting frostbite on ice and snow. Also carry a mini first-aid kit (including bandages, hydrogen peroxide, cold pack and emergency blanket) and a collapsible water bowl.

Train your dog to carry his own water and supplies in a doggie backpack (www.mountainsmith.com; www.kelty.com), starting with a small load until he builds strength and endurance.

Maintain Control with Commands
Ideally, your four-legged running partner should respond to all basic commands ("heel", "sit" and "stay"), and when running off-leash, "come" is especially important. Train your dog to come to you using a 30-foot line or string tied to

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Best in Show

VIZSLA Originally a Hungarian hunting breed, this athletic dog has great stamina and agility for running over boulders, logs and other obstacles, and is very willing to please.

WEIMARANER This powerful and high-strung hunting breed, which can maintain a fast pace for long periods, is known for wearing out its owner faster than its owner can wear it out.

GERMAN SHEPHERD Fearless, strong, intelligent, loyal and versatile, this breed can handle cold climates and makes a good family companion, but needs frequent exercise and mental stimulation. They can carry weighty packs and still have energy to run long distances.

his collar. Walk some distance away from your sitting dog, then call his name and "come!" Immediately begin using the string to reel him toward you. When he reaches you, give him plenty of praise, then release him.

This can be a hard lesson to teach to dogs that think the "come" command means you're heading home. However, this exercise teaches that once he has come, he will be free to resume his off-leash exploring. Once your dog obeys to "come" without needing to be pulled with the string, he's ready to run off leash.

Chronic leash pulling is a common bad habit that can be corrected. You'll never win the game of tug-o-war, as any leash tension only prompts your dog to pull harder. Instead, your goal is to always have a loose leash and a dog that happily heels.

Begin running with the dog at your heel. When your dog bolts ahead, jerk the leash and turn suddenly in the opposite direction. Keep the leash slack and use firm jerks to control your dog. After turning, circle around and try again to move forward. The point is for the dog to realize that he doesn't get anywhere by pulling. You'll make a lot of turns in the beginning, but soon the dog learns to run next to your leg rather than dragging you down the trail behind him.

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