

## Mush puppies

What has 34 legs and moves faster than a snowmobile? The eight-dog sled propelled by Glenda Walling, 38, of Pocatello, Idaho. President of the International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA), Walling is one of a growing number of women involved in the sport of racing dog teams over arduous terrain.

The race circuit, spanning Maine to



her belt, she set off on a circuit with four other female "mushers," traveling by van to compete in Minnesota and Wisconsin. "It was a fascinating time," says Walling. "I proved I could do it. We trained the dog teams, took care of the trucks, learned about animal nutrition, drove thousands of miles. For a while during races, I spent more time off the sled than on it, but I earned respect."

ISDRA now includes 1,500 members racing in 42 states, nine Canadian provinces and eight foreign countries. The sport that once excluded women simply because none had ever "broken the ice" now welcomes them competing head to head with the men. "The men tease us by saying we have an advantage because we're lighter on the sled, but steering and pumping your legs uphill for several miles is hard work. They're stronger than we are, so it evens out."

For more information about dog sledging in your area, contact Donna Hawley, Corporate Secretary, International Sled Dog Racing Association, P.O. Box 446, Nordman, ID 83848.

California, is backed by corporate sponsors with purses ranging from \$1,000 for the smaller races to \$5,000 for large events like the Alpo Championships held in Saranac Lake, N.Y., every January.

As a member of the Purina Hi-Pro Racing Team, Walling receives sponsorship for her equipment and for her dogs, an Alaskan husky mix selected from a 40-dog kennel that she and her husband breed and train.

When Walling drove her first sled seven years ago, no one would have guessed she'd become the first female president of ISDRA. She fell off, was dragged uphill by her dogs and was run over by two other sleds. She later lost control of the dogs and the sled and ran a mile through the snow to catch them. The 24-minute course took her almost two and a half hours to complete.

In 1980, with just a few races under

## Cycling through the season

Every January 1, 50 to 60 women and men from the Charles River Wheelmen Bicycle Club converge on the Boston Common to usher in the New Year with a frostbite ride through the city. The real diehards, like veteran club members/ride leaders Joan Klappert and Walter McNeil, brave the wind and cold every Sunday of the season and insist that bicycling in winter is like entering an exotic world.

"I like being outside, and the weather hasn't stopped me yet," says Klappert, who used to ride horseback year-round in her native Pennsylvania. "The air is so much clearer and crisper in winter."

"There's a beauty you can't see in any other season," adds McNeil. "You can ride the same roads you ride all summer, but you'll swear you've never been down them before. There are no leaves so you can see past the trees to the fields or the house on the hill. It's exhilarating."

For all its windy romance, winter biking can be dangerous without the necessary clothes, equipment and common-sense caution. "For starters, you'll need a bike with wide tires and a fender to help keep the snow and slush off the seat of your pants," says Klappert, who rides the same Raleigh three-speed on backroads in winter that she uses for year-round urban commuting on Boston's potholed streets. Unlike the unquestionably sleek and high-tech ten- and 15-speeds with their exposed gears and sprockets, three-speeds are what is called "internally hubbed," so the gears don't get gummed up with snow, ice, salt and dirt.

While ten-speeds can be adapted for winter riding by changing to better-gripping tires with heavier tread, they still lack the weight and balance of the three-speed (or the even heavier-duty mountain bike) which help prevent treacherous slides onto the ice and snow. The three-speed's weight also makes for a more comfortable ride along winter roads, with their sometimes roller-coaster-like "frost heaves" (bumps caused by frozen earth expanding under asphalt).

Courtesy of Purina® Hi-Pro Racing Team

While warm-weather biking brings out the speedster in all of us, winter riding demands caution. The cold weather rule is to "gear down" (ride in the lower, easier to pedal gears) and to cut your speed considerably. "Cars need a greater breaking distance in winter. You have to be able to move quickly," explains McNeil. "Lower gears make it easier to speed out of a sticky situation."

Knowing that you can come to a quick stop is essential, so whether you're buying a bike specifically for winter riding or adapting your summer touring model, check to be sure the wheels have alloy rims, not steel ones. Even with the alloy wheels, you'll still have to do a lot of "feathering the brakes" in much the same way you pump car brakes to avoid fishtailing on slick winter roads.

Dressing for winter biking is similar to suiting up for cross-country skiing: wear layers and concentrate on keeping your extremities warm and your body dry. Natural materials like cotton absorb perspiration, leaving you wet and susceptible to a chill—and possibly hypothermia—once the sun dips. So you'll want the layer closest to your skin to be a nonabsorbing synthetic like polypropylene, which wicks any sweat through to the outer layers of your clothing. The best choice for those outer layers is wool, a good insulator that dries out quickly. You'll also want to choose garments you

can peel off easily—pullover and pull-on pants and tops, the fewer zippers and buttons the better.

For headgear, tuck a wool or flannel hat or cap under your helmet. (Take the foam padding out of the helmet if the fit is too snug.) To keep out the whistling air, you can plug the breathing holes in your helmet with cotton balls. Wool face masks and nose guards are optional protection against winter chapping and wind burn, but Klappert considers ski goggles essential for keeping the icy cold out of your eyes.

"I've gone down hills with my eyes watering so much I couldn't see where I was going. That's dangerous when you need to be watching for ice spots and cars," she explains.

For footwear, stick to biking shoes or sneakers with tough-gripping soles. On particularly cold or slushy days McNeil and Klappert wear slip-on rubbers over their shoes. A couple of layers of wool socks are essential.

For your hands, you'll want warm leather or wool gloves. Mittens are okay, but avoid bulky ones that could impede your handling of the bike. Again, layers can help prevent numb fingers: try a pair of thin gloves under your wool pair.

While warmth should be your priority, winter bikers should also dress to be seen, with bright colors and reflective vests or bands. "With the lower morning and evening sun, you can easily get lost in the glare from the snow and ice," says McNeil.

Winter bicycling not only demands

more care on the road, it also calls for more bike tending. After each winter spin, McNeil and Klappert wash the salt, sand and frozen leaves off their machines with warm, soapy water, then lubricate all of the exposed gears with a rust-proofing formula.

The best thing about winter cycling is that it keeps the rider from getting rusty. "Just getting out one day a week makes the spring so much more pleasant," Klappert says. In other words, if you keep in shape with winter riding, you won't have to spend a month waiting for your bottom and knees to stop aching once the grass starts growing.

—Christine McPartland

