

## An Introduction to Bikejor.

Bikejoring is one of the “Dryland Mushing” sports that developed as a way for Sled-dog teams to maintain a level of fitness when there is no snow around – the others involve the use of scooters (specialist off-road large-wheeled scooters for 1 or 2 dogs) and rigs (three- or four-wheeled sleds pulled by large teams of dogs), or simply running (Canicross). There are similarities in all these sports, but I will concentrate on Bikejor here.

### **Dogs:**

- One dog or two. I definitely recommend starting with one. Two dogs give you more than twice the speed and power as they spur each other on, and definitely more than twice as much to keep your eye on! Most races only allow one dog in Bikejor (two in Scooter) – but socially, a lot of (experienced) people Bikejor and scooter with two. (With the risk of them going opposite sides of obstacles!)
- GSP’s are perfect for bikejoring – they have the necessary stamina, are strong, intelligent, keen to please, keen to run, and learn the necessary commands very quickly. However, more or less any dog can do it. Many dogs doing Bikejor competitively are GSP’s, Huskies, Malamutes, (or a combination) although many other breeds are also represented. Basically, most dogs can do it.
- Dogs need to be a minimum of 18 months old to compete at Bikejor. For social rides, following the same recommendation makes sense, subject to the bone development of the dog. This means you can start them off with gentle short runs from about 15 months old. All dogs are different – PLEASE err on the side of caution. It’s better to wait a couple of months than risk injuring your dog or impairing their development.

### **Commands:**

- Your dog will need to know a few basic commands (left, right, on by, steady, stop, go) – or you can use the “mushing” commands (Gee, Haw, Whoa, Hike on, etc....). Personally I stick to English as I have enough to think about when I’m bikejoring and it also makes more sense to anyone you are passing!

### **Equipment:**

- First and foremost a crash helmet. You have to be really stupid to do this without one.
- Cycle glasses/goggles. You’d be surprised how much mud, gravel and dirt a GSP can kick up at speed!
- Cycle gloves – as well as giving a bit of cushioning, they can prevent a lot of cuts and grazes if you do come off.
- Obviously a bike. As bikejoring is best done off-road, a mountain bike is best, but you don’t need to spend a lot of money. Ideally a “hard-tail” bike is best with front suspension only, and disc brakes. I started out on a 20-year old Raleigh with no suspension and rim brakes - this was perfectly adequate.



For the really fast, Cyclo-cross bikes can also be used – one is shown in one of the photos below.

- A harness for your dog. Do not use a normal lead / collar round your dog’s neck. As well as meaning your dog would be pulling on their neck (not good!) this could be very dangerous for them in the event of an accident. There are many types of harness available – ideally one designed for the sports, but definitely

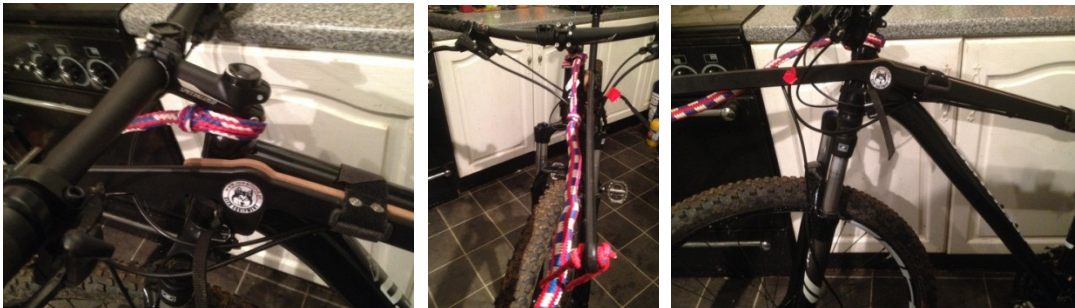
not a non-pull one. Try before you buy. Most Bikejor groups will have equipment you can borrow to try out.



- A bungee line – this attaches to the harness on the dog and to the head tube on the bike. It has an elasticated section to soften any jolts. There are rules on the line length to be used in competition, but typically lines are around 2m long.



- A Bikejor “arm”. An essential piece of equipment in my view, this attaches to the bike and holds the line away from the front wheel so it doesn’t get tangled – which results in you departing over the handlebars. Again, there are many types available, and it is a matter of personal choice. Possibly the most commonly-used is the “Rowerland” - a fibreglass arm which attaches to your bike with Velcro. My set up with a Rowerland arm is shown in the photos below.



Other arms are available:



- DO NOT attach the line from your dog to yourself! In the event of your dog seeing a squirrel/rabbit, they WILL accelerate - usually to the side. If the line is attached to you, you WILL leave the bike behind!
- Don’t be tempted by dog walking belts that go round your chest. Think about it... the laws of physics state that if you want to pull something over, you pull from higher up. Using the same logic, attaching the line at chest level simply means your face will soon hit the ground!

#### Where to ride:

- Try to minimise running on concrete/tarmac. This places a strain on the dog’s joints, and is harder on their paws. Soft ground/grass is much better. Trails are also much more fun for the dogs and easier for them to know where to go.



- A fit GSP can easily run for 10 miles or more if paced correctly. However, start them off with short gentle runs and build up to the speed and distance that **you** want to do. They will typically want to go further!
- REMEMBER – this is a **dog-assisted** sport, not dog-powered! You need to pedal as well! No one said it was easy!
- Try to avoid busy areas. Your dogs will appreciate being able to run without having to slow down for other dogs/people/bikes.
- Check that you have the landowner's permission to ride. You need to have a permit to ride on some land (e.g. Forestry Commission land).
- BE COURTIOS and keep your dog under control. ! Other people have as much right to use the trails as you have.
- Watch out for squirrels and rabbits!

#### General:

- Bikejor can be competitive, but it doesn't have to be! Go as far and fast as you want to. Above all, have fun and be safe!
- Dogs love to run – they won't need to be forced to do this!
- Dogs are pack animals – bikejoring with you is a fantastic way to increase the bond between you and your dog as when they are running with you on the bike you are all in one "pack"!
- Try to find a local group who can help you find out more about this wonderful activity. They will typically have some kit you can borrow to try it out, and you will probably find your dog prefers running as part of a group.
- Several Bikejor / Canicross groups can be found on Facebook.
- <Blatant plug coming up> **Anglian Bikejor and Scooter** organise group rides across East Anglia and will be more than happy to welcome and help you. We have loan equipment and are organising training courses. We will also be doing a demo at next year's Norfolk Pointer Party! Find us on Facebook or **AnglianBikejorAndScooter.org**
- If you have any questions, please contact me or any of the Facebook groups.

