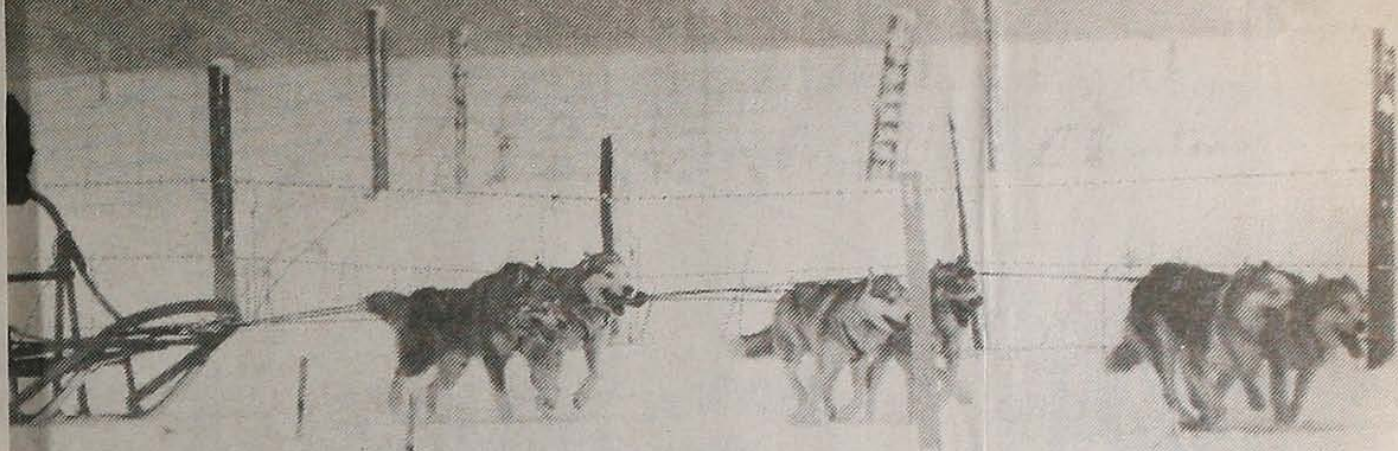


Feb 24. 1988.



Sun Times photos by John Hope

dogs leans into the traces as their driver hangs on at Hepworth Saturday

ogs, drivers just love to race

By **TERRY WEBER**
Sun Times Staff

HEPWORTH — A bowling ball won't play with your children. A snowmobile won't bring your slippers after a hard day's work. And a pair of skis won't guard your home against burglars late at night.

But a good sled dog will do all those things and more.

It's the sport of friends, according to many of the 33 competitors from across the province at this past weekend's dog sled races at the Hepworth Royal Canadian Legion.

While hooking up their team of Siberian huskies, Anita and Doug Bruce of Purple Valley said each dog has its own personality with little things that set it apart from the pack.

One's a little more dominant and a little faster so it leads the pack, the rest fall in behind, said Doug.

Once the dogs are in place the rest is natural, he said.

"It's ingrained in them. They love to run," he said.

That means even if the sled tips, the dogs keep going and the driver hangs on, said Anita. "I've done that a lot of times," she said.

Racing is just as fulfilling for the driver, said Doug.

"It gives you a reason to get up in the morning," he said.

He said the dogs know from the minute the harness comes out of the garage, they're going for a run.

They get excited as the race draws closer, straining at their chains to get out on the field. When the frantic activity gets to be too much, Anita steps in.

"Talk nicely to each other," she tells the dogs. "Don't be arguing."

Two minutes before race time the barking and yelping starts all over again and continues until each team is out on the course. Then the dogs are silent. The work is too hard to waste energy howling.

Although the Siberian husky is the closest breed of dog to the wolf, organizer Dan Gale said the animals' temper is even.

Gale said his first dog, now 15 years old, has retired to the position of master of the house.

Enid Kirby of Kitchener got into the sport when she was given a pup by a friend. She was so taken by the friendly animal she got another. The family soon started using the dogs to get them into their cottage in Parry Sound during winter and next thing she knew she was a sled dog enthusiast.

You can't beat it, she said. On weekends the family goes to the races and meets new people and through the week the dogs keep them company.

Kirby knows the dogs as well as she knows anyone.

Pointing to the mother of most of the pack she laughed, "she walks around like she's queen of the yard, but really she's the meekest."