



**C & P GSMD C All Breed Draft Clinic**  
**Drafting Resources and Ideas**

For an electronic copy of this booklet, please email:

[rasmussen.jr@gmail.com](mailto:rasmussen.jr@gmail.com)

[mjrasmus@gmail.com](mailto:mjrasmus@gmail.com)



## Schedule of Events

8:30 Welcome and introductions

### Beginners strand

9:00 *Seminar* for those just starting out:

- Introduction to drafting equipment and fitting
- Basic obedience training
- Getting started with pre-cart activities and the cart

10:00 *Individual assistance* for beginners—try out pre-cart equipment, harnesses, training wheels, carts

### Intermediate/advanced strand

9:00 *Seminar* for those already carting who want to learn more or prepare for a draft test (running concurrently with beginner's seminar)

- Advanced maneuvering
- Conditioning your dog to haul weight over a distance
- Making it safe and easy for your dog: critical aspects of balance and fit

10:00 *Individual assistance* for experienced drafters—three-point turns, refine backing skills, practice stations (90 and 360 degree turns, figure eight, slow, negotiating narrows, down stay)

12:00 **Lunch break**

1:00 Narrated draft test demo

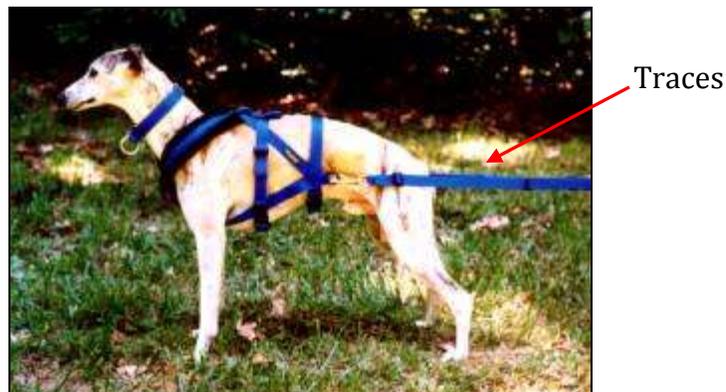
1:30 Ring work—walk through, practice run, practice stations, more individual assistance



## Drafting Made Easy and Safe

### Harnesses

- Make sure to use a properly fitting and adjusted harness (see photo).
- A siwash cart harness is preferred because it spreads the weight evenly, can't ride up the dog's neck and leaves the dog's shoulders free.



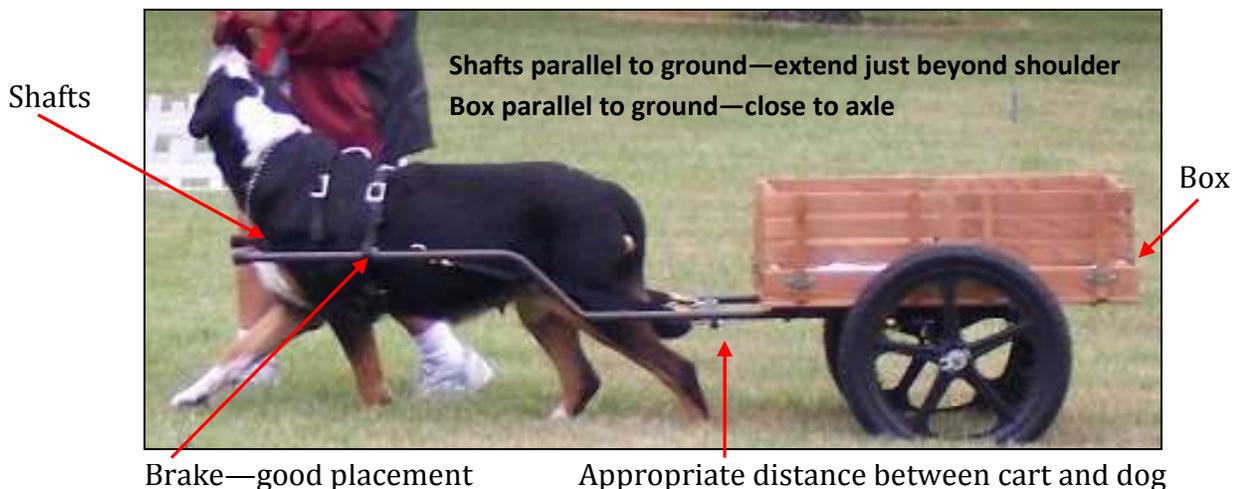
*Notice the snug fit and padded neck of this siwash harness. The neck pads are at the base of the neck and end just beyond the withers (top of the shoulder blades). The traces attach to the harness at the lower third of the dog's body. This whippet is comfortable in his harness and ready to go!*

### Carts vs. Wagons

- Two-wheeled cart
  - ✓ smaller and shorter boxes makes them more maneuverable than wagons
  - ✓ most popular for draft tests
  - ✓ easily transported
  - ✓ difficult to keep in balance, especially with heavy loads
- Four-wheeled wagon
  - ✓ load is never out of balance
  - ✓ most appropriate for giving children rides
  - ✓ larger size makes them less maneuverable and bulkier to transport
  - ✓ heavier weight not suitable for smaller breeds

## Cart Design

- Bigger wheels roll more easily; go over bumpy terrain and curbs well.
- Center of gravity should be as close to the axle as possible
- Single tree makes for less jerking
- Match cart design to the size of dog; overall cart size, weight, and shaft height



## Safety Pointers

- Shaft loops adjusted properly for braking
- Brakes secure on the shafts
- Traces adjusted properly
- No heavily loaded carts until dog is two years old
- Hitch dog to cart after dog is under handler's control
- Give children rides in four-wheeled apparatus

## Cart Balance

- Distribute weight in center of cart over the axle. Too much weight in the back and the shafts “pop up.” Too much weight in the front and the shafts put a heavy load on the dog's shoulders.
- Left to right balance minimizes tipping over on side hill slopes
- Low center of gravity minimizes tipping—especially with a weighted cart
- Secure loads to prevent shifting of weight within the cart



## Basic Drafting Information

### Background

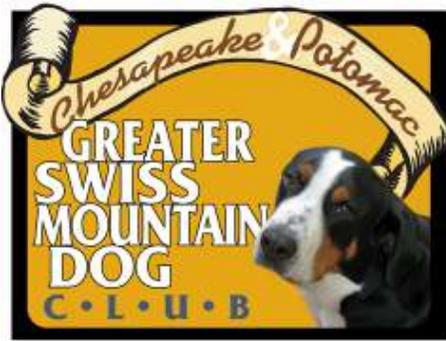
Greater Swiss/Bernese Mountain Dogs are part of a group known as “Working Dogs.” These dogs have been used to assist their masters in daily chores and they typically like to be active. Some of the larger, more sturdily built dogs, such as the Swiss Mountain dogs, Newfoundland, St. Bernard, Rottweiler are frequently used to haul loads. These dogs have deep, wide chests and strong hindquarters that make them very suitable for pulling carts or wagons at moderate speeds.

Drafting or carting are terms used to describe the activity of harnessing your dog to some type of vehicle and having them pull it. The vehicle can be a simple two-wheel cart, a four-wheel wagon, a sled and even a travois! The important thing is that this can be a very enjoyable and rewarding activity for both you and your dog. You can practice and train in your yard or a nearby park and simply enjoy working with your dog and enjoy their companionship. If you want to do more, you can decorate your cart or wagon and enter local parades or you can even earn a drafting title.

### How to get started

Although there is much to see and learn about equipment, the most important thing is your dog. Ensure that your dog is sound and fit enough for draft work. And train your dog in basic obedience commands. Bad elbows or hips do not automatically disqualify your dog from drafting activities but you should consult with your vet about how much weight or distance your dog should work with. Another consideration is that the joints of large breed dogs need time to develop. You should not have your dog pull a cart until they are at least one year old (lightweight training wheels are fine), and not pull any weight until they are close to two years old.

Training your dog to be obedient and understand verbal commands is the most important aspect to enjoyable, safe drafting. If your dog is not under control when harnessed to a cart or wagon, s/he can become very dangerous to themselves and everyone around them.



## Drafting Training Tips

Training your dog is a journey that should begin when they are a young puppy and continue throughout their life. Some things you might want to keep in mind as you train your dog for draft work are:

### Basic Obedience

- Begin basic commands as a puppy or as soon as possible. Basic training should include:

Stand	Recall
Sit	Wait/stop/halt/stay
Down	Circles left and right
Heel	Turns in place
- Attend obedience classes with your dog. It is good to work your dog with other dogs as a distraction, and instruction from a knowledgeable trainer will help a lot.

### Verbal Commands

One of the fun parts of drafting is that you are encouraged to talk to your dog whenever you want. This is true even during Draft Test competitions! One of the keys to successful drafting is having specific commands that let your dog know exactly what you are expecting. The important point is to have specific commands that mean specific things and to be consistent when using these commands. Using different commands for the same thing will confuse your dog—so remember which ones you choose!

### Introducing the Harness and Cart

1. The harness can be introduced to the dog at any age. Usually treats and a lot of praise will be sufficient although it frequently helps to do training where your dog can see other dogs doing the same thing.
2. Pulling something can be a bit scary for some dogs. Others may have no problem with this concept. You can introduce your dog to pulling by attaching a light drag weight to their harness traces or with some rope. This can be something as simple as an empty milk container or a one foot

wide piece of wood or plastic pipe. The dog needs to get used to something behind them that might make a little noise. You can also use a child's plastic snow sled—this can be a lot of fun in the winter.

3. Introducing the rigid shafts can also be scary for some dogs. You can simulate the feel of the shafts by having someone walk behind the dog (as he walks by your side on a leash) holding a broom handle and gently brushing their rib cage. Do this on both sides and then use two brooms—one on each side.
4. Next, have someone take the cart or training wheels and walk beside the dog, positioning the cart so the dog is not in between the shafts, but next to the dog as he walks. He becomes used to the sound of the apparatus and has one of the actual shafts touching his side. Repeat the same thing on the other side of the dog.

After your dog has accepted the shafts and the cart on the side—you can begin to hitch your dog up to the cart and work as a real draft team!

5. Make practicing draft work as much fun as possible. Tons of praise and treats will make a very pleasurable experience and one they will want to do again and again. Make sure to start with easy things like straight line pulling and work up to more advanced maneuvers. Always end a training session on a high note!
6. Only after your dog is reliable with most drafting maneuvers should you add weight to the cart for hauling. This is something that you need to work up to for your dog's safety. For your dog to haul significant weight over extended distances requires that they be in top condition. Like a human athlete, this takes significant exercise and time. Injury is always a possibility with heavy loads, but you minimize the risk with a well-conditioned dog.



## Conditioning your Dog

*As we get involved in various activities with our dogs, it is our responsibility to make sure our dog is physically and mentally fit to perform the task we ask of it. We must understand canine structure and locomotion learn how to condition dogs for specific performance events.* Christine Zink, DVM, PhD

### Before you begin

- Consider your dog's body type—Swissies and Berners are generally heavy relative to their height. The heavier a dog is in relation to its height, the more stress will be exerted on the musculoskeletal system. Thus, proper conditioning with modifications in training can provide significant compensation.
- Check your dog's weight and fitness. Excess weight increases the stresses on the musculoskeletal system. When palpating the rib cage and the loin, you should be able to feel the bones of the vertebrae and the ribs under the skin. Is your dog fit? Stand behind the dog and feel the muscles of the rear legs. They should be firm and well-defined.
- Evaluate your dog's conformation and obtain a thorough physical examination by a competent veterinarian to find any pre-existing medical conditions that could compromise his health. In addition, your dog's hips should be radiographed for elbow and hip dysplasia. Dogs that have physical conditions such as hip dysplasia that can result in arthritis should train and compete only in ideal conditions and carefully monitored for signs of fatigue or pain.

### Designing a Conditioning Program

Once your dog has been given a clean bill of health, a conditioning program can be established. Conditioning consists of a planned program of exercise and nutrition.

- When to start? Conditioning exercises should not begin in earnest until well after a dog's growth plates have closed. Since many working breeds tend to mature slowly, many owners recommend no fast work or weight pulling until after two years of age.
- Start gradually, and practice regularly. Conditioning is not just a weekend activity. Stretching exercises, such as the play-bow, should be used to warm up a dog prior to training and competition. Increase weight gradually and watch your dog for sign of stress.
- Keep it varied. Exercises should include both general conditioning exercises and specific skill training. For example, one day, practice pulling weight a longer distance, another day practice maneuvering skills with your cart.

- Don't forget the mental stuff. Although physical conditioning is important, mental conditioning is also essential. The best way to mentally condition a dog is to provide frequent periods of play and to incorporate play into the skill training exercises. Play is an essential part of a dog's emotional make-up. Be careful not to over-train, whether it be in physical conditioning or in skill-training. Remember—just like you, every dog needs a day off a week!
- Finally, take time to appreciate your dog's marvelous athletic ability and learn new ways to keep your dog fit and healthy throughout his life.

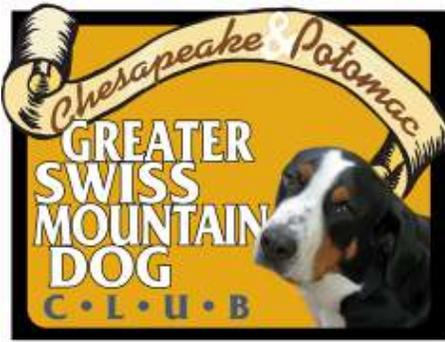
References:

*Peak Performance: Coaching the Canine Athlete* by Christine Zink DVM, PhD

*Your Athletic Dog* by Susan Clothier

[www.caninesports.com/fitness.html](http://www.caninesports.com/fitness.html)

[www.canismajor.com/dog/condit.html](http://www.canismajor.com/dog/condit.html)



## Drafting Resources

### Where to buy draft equipment

[www.wilczekwoodworks.com](http://www.wilczekwoodworks.com) - handmade, wood carts and wagons as well as harnesses and a variety of other carting equipment and accessories

[www.dogworks.com](http://www.dogworks.com) - harnesses, carts, wagons, spare parts, shafts, and tree sets for team drafting – the video *An Introduction to Canine Carting* by Beth Ostrander is sold here

[www.nordkyn.com](http://www.nordkyn.com) - a whole bunch of stuff for all canine pulling sports.

[www.ikonoutfitters.com](http://www.ikonoutfitters.com) - mostly sledding based equipment

### Internet discussion groups

[pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Carting-L](http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Carting-L)

[pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/carting\\_drafting\\_dog](http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/carting_drafting_dog)

### Book and videos—available at [www.dogworks.com](http://www.dogworks.com)

*Newfoundland Draft Work – A Guide for Training*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition by Consie Powell

*An Introduction to Canine Carting* by Beth Ostrander

### Drafting instructions on the Internet

[users.erols.com/gr8rswis/IntroCarting.htm](http://users.erols.com/gr8rswis/IntroCarting.htm)

[www.cartingwithyourdog.com/](http://www.cartingwithyourdog.com/)

[www.rott-n-chatter.com/newsletter/index-s.html#Work](http://www.rott-n-chatter.com/newsletter/index-s.html#Work)

[www.norcalbernese.org/draft.htm](http://www.norcalbernese.org/draft.htm)

[www.workingdogweb.com/wdcompet.htm#CARTING](http://www.workingdogweb.com/wdcompet.htm#CARTING) – contains links to other dog training sites covering a very wide range of topics

[www.crookeddriverswissclub.com/newsletters/2006%202Q.pdf](http://www.crookeddriverswissclub.com/newsletters/2006%202Q.pdf) - *How to Train your Dog for a Draft Trail*, by Dori Likevich; also appeared in the 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter *SENNtinel*

### Clubs with active drafting programs

Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America\* - [www.gsmdca.org](http://www.gsmdca.org)

Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America\* - [www.bmdca.org](http://www.bmdca.org)

Newfoundland Club of America\* - [www.ncanewfs.org/index.shtml](http://www.ncanewfs.org/index.shtml)

New England Drafting and Driving Club – [www.neddc.org](http://www.neddc.org)

American Rottweiler Club - [www.amrottclub.org](http://www.amrottclub.org)

Saint Bernard Club of America - [www.saintbernardclub.org](http://www.saintbernardclub.org)

*Draft test rules and regulations for these clubs may be found on the club web sites.*

\*The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club recognizes titles earned at draft tests sponsored by these clubs.



## What is a Draft Test?

If you are like most people, you hear the word “test” and your mind conjures up visions of your school days and cramming for finals. You shouldn’t think of a draft test as something scary. The best analogy would be to think of it like Driver’s Education; after some guidance and some simple instruction, anybody can do it!

A draft test is something that the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America has developed so that Swissy owners can demonstrate they are able to work as a drafting team with their dog much like you would if you were hauling mild cans from the farm to the market. If you pass the test, you and your dog get a certificate from the GSMDCA stating that you have passed either the Novice test (with leash) or Open test (no leash). It is lots of fun and you will be very proud that you and your dog are carrying on the heritage of the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. You will also be able to put initials after your dog’s name. Novice qualifiers are NDD (Novice Draft Dog) and Open dogs are designated as DD (Draft Dog).

The test consists of many elements that can be put into three major categories:

- a. Obedience—is your dog under control
- b. Maneuvering—can you and your dog maneuver through a course that includes turns, circles, starts, stops and going through a narrow area
- c. Freight Haul— can you and your dog pull a loaded cart over a one mile course across varying terrain. For wheeled apparatus, dogs pull 25-100 pounds in their cart (discretion of the handler)

On the next page, you will find the draft test course from the 2008 National Specialty.