

## Let me explain how do you choose a lead dog?

The short answer is that I ask the dog. It seems silly, but consider the following scenario.

You and your friends are driving from St Louis to Utah. You have 12 vehicles and drivers and decide to caravan. It's pretty easy driving through Kansas on the interstate and most of you take turns leading the pack. When you get to Denver, I-70 has been closed by a storm, but someone suggests going south of the storm and taking US 50 over Monarch Pass. Monarch is a typical Colorado mountain road, tight twisty turns with oncoming traffic, cliffs and drop offs, and not real wide. You pole the group and everyone is willing if someone that knows the country will lead the parade. Some people volunteer and off you go. As you get to the pass the storm moves in, visibility drops and there are several inches of snow on the road. The driver leading the pack pulls off into a rest area and says that is it, he can't handle the stress anymore. As you stand there in the storm, someone steps up and offers to lead you through to safety on the other side rather than sit there and freeze. That person is your leader.

In one of my favorite stories, a new musher was running the Denali 300 and his team quit out on the trail. John Schandelmeier, one of the race officials, came up by snowmachine to help. The poor driver said they just wouldn't go. John started up and down the team in a high pitched voice saying over and over "Who wants to be a leader?" One of the wheel dogs started to dance and talk and John moved him up to lead. The driver said he couldn't do that. That dog wasn't a leader, he was a wheel dog. John said "He's a leader now." And that is how I pick them.