



CHAMPION DOGMUSHER — George Atlla, great dogteam racer, is posing with his new book, "Everything I Know About Training and Racing Sled Dogs." With George is his daughter Barbara.

— Photo by FRANK MURPHY

Geo. Atlla: Champion Dogmusher

"I used to race back in the village. Owning a dog team was just like owning a family car." So George Atlla, champion dog musher and winner of at least three Fairbanks North American Championship races, describes his entry into the sport that now takes up all of his time.

In Fairbanks Saturday to sign copies of his book "Everything I Know About Training and Racing Sled Dogs," Atlla talked

about dog racing, what makes a good dog, times and competition other related topics. He noted that, while racers up here still have the biggest purse, \$15,000 racing outside is getting bigger then ever.

"They just got started five or six years ago outside and at the rate they're going I figure in four or five years they're going to have the biggest races." While

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Musher George Attla . . .

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the North American averages 20 teams per field, Attla says the smallest he saw in the lower 48 was 70 teams per field.

Asked what made a good racing dog, he replied, "I hook him up and see how his backline (the line from harness to tow line) rides. If his backline bounces when he runs, he won't make a good sled dog or a good lead dog. When he's coming down, he's slacking his line. A really good dog never does that."

Contrary to what many people believe, Attla sees dog racing as still having a good future ahead of it. "When snowgoes first came in, everybody let their dogs go. Now I think dogs are coming back again. It kind of runs in cycles."

If dog mushing is profitable, it is also expensive, in terms of both time and money. A good, proven racing dog will run about \$400, with an untrained puppy costing \$75. Attla, who buys and sells about 25 dogs a year at his kennel at 8 Mile Badger Road, Fairbanks, says it takes about a year of work before a person can even start racing a dog.

The best dogs, he thought are the ones "They call . . . the Alaskan husky, but all they really are is village dogs. The best percentage of good sled dogs still come from Huslia (his home village)," Attla said.

"I think as long as I'm physically able and am doing good. I don't want to race when I'm not doing anything," he replied when asked how long he intended to keep racing.

Question about Doc Lombard, a 65-year-old professional racer from Massachusetts, he commented, "I don't think I've got any kind of edge on him. Like, last year when I had a good winning team, I wasn't leaving him behind that much. You really can't count him out."

Starting professionally in 1958, Attla has run in races from Fairbanks and Anchorage to Minnesota and Michigan. He said that it was "just something I wanted. It wasn't hard to get into because there was no competition from the snowmobiles."

An average race, about a 70-mile course, takes well over four hours. But Attla's record shows why he is a winner and

not just any other dog musher. His time for the North American Championship in March of this year was 4 hours, 19 minutes, 33 seconds.

And his time for the 75-mile Anchorage Fur Rendezvous, which netted him the World Championship, was 5 hours, 15 minutes, 25 seconds. Of the eight races he entered in 1972, he won seven of them and only lost one by less than two minutes.

Attla sees good times ahead, both for himself and for dog racing in general. Although he boards his dogs and works as a river pilot or for the Bureau of Land Management during the summer, his winters are still taken up with his dogs.