



ATTLA AND FRIEND — George Attla, champion dog musher, hooks one of his dogs up for a practice run. Attla will enter the 1,000-mile Iditarod Trail race between Anchorage and Nome. The dog is unidentified. Photo by JOYCE ZIMMERSCHIED

Mushing Champion George Attla

By JOYCE ZIMMERSCHIED

Take the longest and richest run in the history of dog racing. Add a man who has won so many races that, when he recently moved to Fairbanks, he could only bring last winter's trophies. Mix well, and you have a combination that's going to be hard to beat.

The race is the proposed Iditarod Trail competition, 1,000 miles of hills, forests and tundra stretched out between Anchorage and Nome. The man is George Attla, winner of three North American and four World championships. And the re-

sults should be interesting.

Attla, who has raced professionally since 1958 and for years before that in his home village of Huslia, is being sponsored by British Petroleum. The company is also chipping in \$1,000 of the planned \$50,000 purse. The rest of the money will come from other donations and there is a report that ABC's Wide

(Continued on page 6)

George Attla Enters Biggest Race in Alaska . . .

(Continued from page 1)

World of Sports might be in for a fat contribution as well.

Sponsored in the past by the J. C. Penney Co., Attla approached BP this year "before I got hungry." BP has twice before sponsored a runner in dog races.

Laurie Gay, BP Alaska's district manager and a former dog musher himself said, "Dog racing is a part of the old Alaska which we would like to see retained. George Attla exemplifies the spirit and tenacity which has always been associated with the state."

The race is scheduled for March 3. While this does not leave Attla with a great deal of time, he expressed confidence in himself and his dogs. He did say that he had more new dogs this year, meaning more training time is needed.

But he went on to say, "When I really train heavy in a couple of weeks, I should know how they're going to act. I spend more time with my dogs than anybody else."

He has been known to buy a dog that no other musher would look once at, let alone twice, and turn it into championship material. And he knows each of his 40 dogs as individuals. All of this adds up to a man who knows his business.

"I think a 16-dog team - a completely different team than my main race team," is what Attla is talking of running in the Iditarod. "It's going to take a dog team that just knows how to poke along," he continued.

He said that his regular dogs were good for about 30 miles but not much more than that because "the only way they know how to run is wide open."

The longest race he has run up until this time is 80 miles. But he knows at least part of the long trail, unused for about 50 years, through his experience as a river pilot in the summer. "The only place I don't know is between McGrath and Anchorage," he said.

He expressed the opinion that "it's going to be more than what the average musher expects" in terms of trail conditions. Although men are already clearing the way for the racers, Attla said that anything could happen to foul things up.

It is for this reason that he plans to take along enough camping gear and supplies to last for two or three days.

The trail is set up with checkpoints and rest stops along the way, but "you may not get to a checkpoint," he said.

First place will have to go to whoever gets there first, he added, since this race will be short on speed but long on endurance. The time factor is something else to worry about. Estimates have ranged from 10 to 14 days for completion.

"If the conditions are just perfect, a person just might be able to make it in 10 days,"

said Attla. He went on, "I'm planning to make it in less than two weeks because I plan to be back for the North American." That race is set for March 15-17 in Fairbanks.

Much of the outcome depends on the strength of the dogs. But equally important is the sled. Attla is working on a specially-made one, basically the same design as his ordinary one but longer and heavier. And it will be made out of the best wood available.

The only negative note he sounded was on the unfamiliarity of the area to his team. "If a dog knows where he's going, he'll get you there. But in this case, he won't know

where he's going," he said.

Joe Reddington Sr. of Knik, head of the Iditarod Trail International Championship Race committee, is a moving force behind the whole race. He is a lifetime musher with a strong feeling for the sport and the area. He has said that, although the trail means little to people now, old-timers remember when it was used for a regular travel route.

George Attla may not qualify for the title of "old-timer" yet. But he knows dogs and he knows dog racing. If this race comes off as planned, he could well have one more trophy to add to his collection.