

Copper Haul Twister mainstay will try his luck in the Yukon Quest 300

By **JONATHAN RUSSELL**
Star Reporter

Entering the Yukon Quest 300 Sled Dog Race was a natural progression for Jonathan Lucas, even though the Feb. 5 race will mark his first sled race longer than 10 miles.

"The longest sled race I've done is probably the 10-mile Copper Hall Twisters and the Carbon Hill," Lucas said.

Lucas, who recently stepped down as organizer for the Yukon Brewing Copper Haul Twister League, has much more experience skijoring, an event that's taken him on 100-mile jaunts in the past.

With skijoring, he pointed out, you can't really lose your dogs, since they're tied to you; but with a sled, you can fall off and lose your team.

"I haven't had to worry about that for years, because I've been skijoring quite happily," he said.

Lucas recently finished fourth with a time of 46:02 in the 10-mile dogsled race with six dogs in the Carbon Hill event on Jan. 23.

That race was a rare chance for Lucas to see how his dogs would behave in the start chute with people around.

"I wanted to practice with all the fuss and clamor of the start line to see how they'd behave, and they behaved really well," Lucas said.

In August, Lucas started training with the 11-dog team he borrowed from Yukon Quest 1,000-mile mainstay Hugh Neff.

Working with a team of that size is also a new experience for Lucas.

"The power, not necessarily the speed, but the power, is considerably more," he said, adding that managing 11 dogs gets easier with routine.

"It doesn't matter if you go five miles or 100 miles, you still got to put the booties on and you still got to put

the harnesses on and get everyone ready ... so as the training's gone on, I've gotten more and more happy to do longer runs, because it takes a lot of effort and time to get them all ready, and you don't want to come back after an hour and take it all off again."

He's learned a few things about himself and the sport during training runs over the past five months.

Taking the larger team on mid to long distance runs has taught him patience, he said.

"When I was doing the short sprint sled races and skijoring, in my mind the whole point was to get there, the whole point was to arrive, so you worked just to arrive as fast as you possibly could, and it took me a long, long time to get over that with distance mushing. And for me, it's not really a great drive to arrive as fast as possible; it's the journey that's important, rather than the arrival, and that took me a long time to work out," Lucas said.

In the beginning, he became frustrated because he felt as though he wasn't getting anywhere, he added.

"But of course, you are getting somewhere, it's just slower and steadier and probably more controlled," Lucas said.

That steadier pace has built up into doing 100-mile runs, which peaked in December with a 120-mile run.

Lucas has taken the team to Carcross and back, along Mount McIntyre and Coal Mine Road, among other areas around Whitehorse.

He said the challenge and the opportunity are the most exciting aspects of entering the Quest 300.

"It's a real amazing opportunity if you're interested in the outdoors and dogs and doing this sort of thing. There are only a few places in the world where you can do it. It's a privilege; I'm really grateful to be able to be out there," he said.

But that's not to say the race won't

be daunting.

He's always questioning the temperament of the dogs.

"I constantly worry that (the dogs) are just going to say, 'We've had enough of this, and we're going to lie down for a while,'" Lucas laughed.

Also daunting will be the overflow, when creeks and lakes warm up and leak over the ice and make slush.

"The other thing is the cold," Lucas said. "When it gets to minus 25 or minus 30, everything just becomes so difficult, and metal basically bites you."

He's hoping that running the Copper Haul Twisters has taught him a thing or two.

"The attention to detail with the equipment. Whether it's 10 miles or 100 miles, there's still a lot of care to put into the dogs ... keeping the dogs happy," he said.

Lucas is happiest setting limited expectations.

No expectations, really.

He seemed pleased enough to get the Red Lantern Award, given to the last team to complete the race.

"I've rationalized that no one remembers who comes fourth to 20th, but at least if you get the Red Lantern it's something to put on your wall," Lucas said. "I'll just be happy to get through it and finish."

Lucas is sponsored by Icy Waters Ltd. and First Mate Dog Foods, as well as, he noted, his wife Laura Jane.



RACE DAY- John Lucas arrives for the Carbon Hill Sled Dog Race.



DOWN THE TRAIL - Jon Lucas is seen in the Carbon Hill Sled Dog Race Jan. 23. with his team (above).

TRYING ON SOME SHOES - John Lucas gets one of his team members ready (left).

