

Jamaican dogsled team sets sights on 2009 Yukon Quest

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Consider it way colder than *Cool Runnings*: a dogsledder from Jamaica will come to Whitehorse this winter to train for the 2009 Yukon Quest.

And in case you missed it the first time, it's a dogsled team — unlike a certain other wintersport team from the same country that tried to crack the Calgary Winter Olympics and was later immortalized in the 1993 movie *Cool Runnings*.



Jamaican dogsled lead musher Devon Anderson led a team across Lake Laberge on an overnight training expedition in February, during a visit to observe the Yukon Quest. (YG Photo by Joseph Bradley)

"So many people confuse it with the bobsled team," said Danny Melville, founder of the Ocho Rios-based Jamaica Dogsled Team, on Friday. "They say 'You mean bobsled team?' I say, 'No, dogsled team.' "

Melville, who came to Whitehorse this week to meet with Yukon musher Hans Gatt, said he founded the Jamaica Dogsled Team with a collection of stray mixed-breed dogs found on the streets or through the Jamaican SPCA. The idea started as a fun way to promote humane dog care in his island homeland, he said.

"As Jimmy Buffet says, 'If it's not fun don't do it,' " Melville said. As it turns out, the singer-songwriter and his restaurant chain Margaritaville are also sponsoring the Jamaica Dogsled Team.

But what started as a fun way to promote humane dog care on his island homeland started to take off: lead musher Devon Anderson and the Jamaican sled dogs were featured in Palm Pictures' 2006 documentary *Sun Dogs*, which chronicled their trip to the 2006 U.K. championships in Scotland.

Now, Anderson wants to tackle the 1,600-kilometre (1,000-mile) Yukon Quest, considered to be one of the most grueling dogsled races in the world. Getting into the race, for starters, requires teams to complete qualifying races 322 kilometres (200 miles) and 483 kilometres (300 miles) long.

"I'm pretty excited about it, because I never knew what it was," said Anderson, who had visited the territory earlier this year to observe part of the quest.

Training begins this fall

Anderson, a relative rookie to the sport, will start training this fall with Gatt, a three-time Yukon Quest champion. Gatt will supply the dogs and train Anderson for the qualifying races this winter.

"I mean, obviously it's not going to be easy to survive out there," Gatt said.

"To deal with the cold, I think that will be probably the biggest challenge we face here, you know? But he's a tough character."

Melville said the dream for his team isn't so much about winning the Yukon Quest.

"It's the toughest sled dog race in the world, and it's just competing and completing."