

Monica Zappa – December Update!

**Here's what we are wondering this December:**

1. How is training going?

It is going well. We just returned from a big trip on the Denali Highway where we went close to 200 miles in 4 days. We participated in a fun, impromptu race from Cantwell to Alpine Lodge, 62 miles. Race in and mush back. I ran 16 dogs for the first time ever. The dogs over all did really great. We camped for a little more than an hour on the way out, so we finished near the back (Monica 9<sup>th</sup>, Tim 8<sup>th</sup>) but we wanted to just be easy on the dogs because they had not run that long of a distance yet this year. The second day was not a competition but we ran straight through 62 miles. The dogs all did great and we now have more confidence in them and they had their first chance to practice camping on the trail. For eleven of them it was the first time ever camping for any length of time. They behaved well and only Bagheera ate a harness. A few of the puppies were a little sore after all that running, but they have gotten the last few days off for traveling and sorting our life back out, and now they are looking ready to go tomorrow!

2. How is the snow? Are you using your sled?

Last week when we were up north we got ten inches. Then tonight we got another five or so. Tomorrow will be the first time running in the Caribou Hills since the snow came. We have been fortunate that we have been able to keep using our sleds through the melt, but we did have to travel. Finally! The weather all over Alaska seems to have turned to winter. It was -40 in the Denali area just the day after we left!

3. Why did you pick yellow and black for your team colors?

Yellow came about when I met Deborah Ives, the creator of Posh House. She started sponsoring gear for me and a lot of it happened to be yellow. I fell in love with wearing yellow on the trail because it is so bright and happy and unique. I think it makes me feel more beautiful and happy and therefore, the dogs are happy too. I also wear a lot of bright pink, orange and green. We have been working on designing my new parka for Iditarod. We spent the whole day cutting it out; you guys are just going to love it! Neon yellow! With hot pink and some other fun touches. The reason I said black too, is because that is what I made my t-shirts from. And a lot of our booties will be black. Some will be yellow.

4. Did you get any more sponsors?

Not many more lately. I have been working lots with the 2 I have; Musicians United to Protect Bristol Bay is doing the IOBY fundraiser, which has been a lot of work giving them dog descriptions, pictures and video to include in the campaign. So far it has raised just over \$600 and we hope for \$15,000.....will see how it works out. The Petchup social media promotions will start after the holidays. I would really like to get another good sponsor or 2. I have a few ideas, just have not had much extra time lately to get things together, hope to soon!

5. Any moose sightings lately?

There were lots of moose around Cantwell on the Denali Highway last week. One crossed the trail about 30 feet in front of the team. Tim was riding on the whip sled behind me and he stopped the whole team before I even saw it! We also saw caribou, a herd of about eight

crossed in front of us on the way home from our long run. It sure gave the dogs a new burst of energy! We even saw a poor moose smashed freshly on the road on the way home. This is the time of year where there are lots of moose collisions and drivers must be very careful and aware at all times. They are big, scary monsters!

**This month we are curious about your sled:**

1. How many sleds do you think you will use during the race?

I will probably use three. One will be finished shortly. It is being built by the great sled maker, Bernie Willis. I am very excited about it, will be my first brand new sled ever! I will use it for most of the race, but might start with a very sturdy toboggan so that if I crash it might not break as badly as the good sled! And the last sled will be a light racing sled made by Hans Gatt that I bought used last year for a great deal (\$600) after winning the Freddie's Midnight Run Race. I haven't had the chance to run this one much yet, but am excited to in the upcoming races, it is so light and fast!

2. What is your sled made of?

The Gatt sled has aluminum runners and wood. The Bernie will have wood runners. We are thinking of putting plastic on the Toboggan runners. Mainly wood, aluminum and plastic are the main sled materials. Sometimes carbon Kevlar is used to strengthen the wood. Fabric is used for the belly on some.

3. Did you make it yourself?

Not totally. I leave it to the professionals. Sleds need to be just right or things can go majorly wrong. The runners need to be just right with the correct curve and tilt. The break needs to be strong and dependable and the track needs to be easy to have up or down and able to hold 16 dogs back.....all things that take some major engineering. Hans' and Bernie's sleds have been tested on the Iditarod Trail many times year after year. I sure hope having good sleds will increase my chances of making it to Nome!

**We know you went to the Rookie Meeting last weekend.**

1. How did the meeting go?

It was good once we were there. It was a terrible weekend of weather. We drove up to Anchorage in rain and back in thick fog. There were fatal traffic accidents on either side of our trips. We were lucky to make it safe.

There was lots of informative information from various people involved in the race that really helped me to start thinking about what it will be like on Iditarod.

2. What did you learn at the meeting?

How to pack better for the food drops - like how to organize your bags and make sure you have lots of trash bags and useful things. I also learned to wash your trail dishes to keep bacteria from old dog food minimized. I had never heard of this.....but good idea! I heard lots of stories, some horrific, about other's rookie races. Learned lots about vet care and what signs to look for when a dog might have a life threatening condition.

3. How many of the other mushers are rookies this year?

There are seven female rookies and nine males. I knew several people from last year's qualifying races. Lisbet is a very good friend and it was great to catch up with her. Alex caught my team last year when I lost it on Sheep Mountain, so he is a hero to me! I knew most of the boys except for the foreign ones. For the girls, besides Lisbet, I had only met Cindy before. We delivered Cindy's new Posh House parka and bibs set too! She will be a happy chick on the trail to have some great gear and a fantastic wolverine ruff!

4. Were there any veteran mushers there?

Tim! Everyone kept referencing him during their speeches; it was kind of fun! Also Jake Berkowitz, Aliy Zirkle, DeeDee Jonrowe, and Vern Halter all were very helpful in sharing experiences, stories, tips and encouragement!

5. Did the meeting make you more nervous or less nervous?

Both! It made me very excited to get to the race but nervous about all that I have to do and prepare and fundraise and all the like to get ready for this thing. I am now confident it is just as hard to get ready for Iditarod as it is to run it!

6. Did you make any new friends at the meeting?

I got to meet Abbie West for the first time although we were Facebook friends. She is a very great gal! I met Katherine Keith, for the first time too. I am excited to race with both of these girls. I was happy to see my friend Nathan Schroeder from MN. We competed with him two years ago when we went to MN for our first No Pebble Tour. It was great to catch up with Christian Turner, who works with Dallas Seavey. Good conversations everywhere, we are all getting excited. We got our drop bags and are now ready to fill them up!

**And always - we are dying to know if you've tried the Petchup yet? Can we tell people about that yet?** [Petchup is a new sponsor for Monica! They make ketchup and mustard like products for cats and dogs!]

Sure! The campaign will be starting after Christmas....

We got our box of sample Petchup last week and I started testing some out on our trip last week. I have been trying different ways to use it (on top of food, mix with food, mix with water, and squirt directly in mouth). I put it on top of the food of a few of the dogs who weren't eating great. For one dog, Moto, he went right for it and licked it all off the food (but was still picky about the food). The next day he started eating the food without Petchup so then I added some Petchup on top and he decided he didn't like the food or the Petchup that day. I think it was more of a mental lapse.... the next meal and thereafter he ate great!

Figuring out how to keep it thawed out on the trail when it is -10 is going to take practice. The options are keeping it in pockets (practical for 3-4 packets) or thawing it in the cooker when I am using it on races or camping trips. At home it can be mixed in with the dog food. I am wondering how much of the product and how often I should give it to them to make sure the dogs are benefiting from it.

Overall, I would say most of them love it. Tearing off the corner of a packet and squirting it in 3-4 mouths is fun. Some of them are confused and don't want anything to do with me

squirting things in their mouth, but the ones who can deal with it LOVE it! They can literally suck in out of the package.

We will keep experimenting.

**And, do have you picked your Iditarod team yet?**

Heavens no! After the run this weekend we have 32 dogs that could possibly make the team. We have ekgs, blood work, and lots more training to do, so that will all play into final decisions. Ultimately we can wait until the hours before the race, but I hope to have a good idea a week before. Until then we will keep running all that want to run. That is what makes them happy and I desperately don't want to deny anyone of that pleasure.