

Golton wins gold

By Sarah Sobanski

L'Amable has its own world champion dog sled team.

Jacob Golton and his 12-dog sled team took home gold from the 2017 Winter Sleddog World Championships. The race came to the Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve for Canada's 150th anniversary year. It was held from Jan. 24 to Feb. 1.

"A lot of these teams I had never raced before so I was pretty excited but I wanted the gold medal. We weren't going out there for a second or a third place. We were going out there for a gold medal," said Golton. "It was nice to bring that home. This event doesn't happen every year."

Over three days and three heats of 81.4 kilometres each, Golton's team consistently outmatched the competition. They took first every day for a final result of just over 14 hours and two minutes. That's more than an hour quicker than second place Taisto Thorneus's team from Sweden and more than two hours quicker than the U.S. team led by Bailey Cross-Vitello. It earned them gold in the Sled Mid-Distance 8-12 Dogs Elite race of the championships.

Each racer was allowed a 12-dog pool. From the pool each racer chose eight dogs to pull the sled each morning.

Golton said many of the dogs in his team are an Alaskan husky and German shorthaired pointer mix. On his team were Josie, Iris, Twixie, Laura, Carly, Irving, Knuckles, Luke, Slick, Sid, Lingo and Jocko. Josie and Iris led the team on the first and last day and Knuckles and Luke led the second day.

Golton was proud of Josie. She was the smallest dog on the team and she pulled each day.

"She definitely earned the MVP of the race. She was just the best every day. If you have a dog like that you can really make a big difference."

Golton walked *Bancroft This Week* through a normal day at the championships.

"It's an all day thing for us," Golton explained.

The day starts between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. The dogs are let out of the team truck and watered with what Golton described as a "meat slurry." This entices them to drink. He said it's important to make sure the dogs are well hydrated before the race "at least an hour and a half before it starts."

Each race got underway around 9 a.m. Golton said it's best to keep the dogs between 12.5 and 13.5 miles per hour so they don't burn themselves out. That usually means holding the dogs back at the start of the race.

"If you let the dogs go too quick then they can kind of burn themselves out just like a marathon runner," he said. "We think the race is often lost in the first few miles of the run, of people going too fast."

He added, "Once we get in about 20 to 25 miles we sort of push and help them. I run up the hills, I take a ski pole with me and I push with the ski pole as we're running. I'm helping them."

The team completed each heat within five hours.

At the end of the day the dogs receive an electrolyte replacement. Golton described it as Gatorade for dogs. Day two and it starts all over again.

"The first day we don't push them very hard but they're all revved up so that's the day we pull them back to most. Then the second day we had a really good trail for the first 12 miles so we ended up going a little bit faster on the start of the second day because the trail was so good," Golton summarized. "On the third day we got a bunch of fresh snow. It was a really slow run on the third day. We had enough of a lead it was sort of like, why push them? We had enough of a lead that we just sort of let them relax and work through the trail as they could."

Golton got into raising dogs after his father started with sleddogs in 1996. He and his girlfriend, Nina, now raise around 60 dogs at their own kennel in L'Amable.

"We breed and raise and train all our own dogs. Most of our team was from dogs that we've raised here over the past four years. That was really cool to be able to do that," said Golton.

That's around 16 puppies, 40 race dogs and some retirees right now. The prime racing age is two years old to five years old. Some dogs like Sid however, can still keep up and help win a race at nine years old.

"We start running the dogs late summer by letting them chase the four-wheeler. They're all in a big kennel here, but they can all be loose. We take them down to the creek, and down to the lake, through the bush on the four-wheeler. In September we'll start hooking them up. "

He joked, "It's a 24/7 all around thing for us. We can't just up and go away for the weekend."