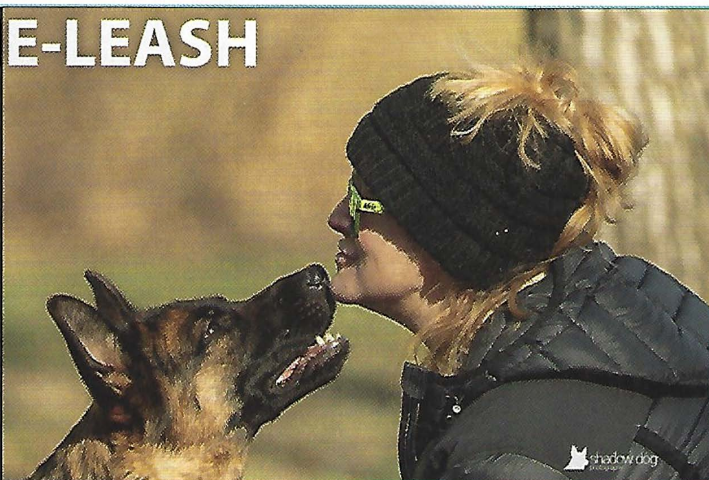


# OFF-THE-LEASH

with  
Kenosha  
Running  
Company



**G**ot an uncanny desire to bond with your dog by hitting the ground running? Well, have you considered canicross? This sport is fairly new to the United States and gaining popularity due to its ability to strengthen the human-animal bond. It began in Europe as a way to dry-land train sled dogs during months with no snow. From there, it slowly transitioned to its own sport. And although the sport started out with people participating with typical mushing dogs such as Huskies, Malamutes and Chinooks, all breeds now participate in canicross. All that is required is a desire and ability to run for both human and dog.

## Which trails are used and why?

Our events take place on trails throughout Kenosha and Walworth Counties that allow for a wide-open grassy start prior to entering the technical single-track trails. This allows for the natural seeding of the start field allowing the faster athletes to be ahead of the slower ones. This will help prevent the need to pass on the narrower paths. The parks that our canicross events take place in are not very technical as we are trying to be the gateway to the sport of canicross... making everyone feel welcome and willing to try.

Trails are used for canicross running because running on hard rough surfaces such as concrete and asphalt cause wear on the dog's paws and undue stress on the joints. They do not have the benefit of the cushioned shoes that we as runners wear. The softer surfaces such as dirt and grass provide cushioning that is beneficial to both the dog and runner.

## Why do people participate in canicross?

The people who have participated in our events do it for a variety of reasons. Some people see it as a great way to bond with their dog. Some of our participants that have adopted dogs to run canicross say it has improved their relationship with their dog making them more mindful

and less destructive at home. Other people have participated in canicross to stay in shape and keep their dog in shape as well. It is hard to say no to running when your running partner is always looking at you with those puppy dog eyes. Some people also use it to save time. They love to run and they love and need to exercise their dog. Combining the two just makes sense.

Canicross also helps the dog with their socialization. Dogs are more at ease because they are doing an activity they love; therefore, interaction with other dogs may not be as stressful.

## How does one get started?

To get started in our canicross events, there is no special equipment needed. Your dog just needs to be in good health, and you need to have the ability to control your dog. As a beginning athlete, we always allow you to start at the back of the canicross pack or even back with the trail runner/walkers if it is a combined event. We want all athletes to feel comfortable with their pace and control with the dog.

With confidence, and more events under their belt, many of our participants transition to the gear that makes canicross easier for both the person and the dog. Three essential canicross equipment items are a proper harness for the dog, a bungee leash and a waist belt for the runner. The proper fitting harness is important because it will move the pressure of the dog pulling away from the neck and distributes throughout the chest and body. The bungee leash reduces shock for both the human and dog participant by giving a cushion when the dog surges or as the human lags behind. The waist belt is beneficial because it makes canicross hands free. Hands-free is important because if you were to trip on the trails, the first thing you would do is instinctually open your hands to catch yourself, releasing the leash and letting go of the dog. Another reason a belt is essential is when the dog pulls, the force is distributed to your hips and not your back. The moving of the force from your back and the hands-free also helps to create a more natural running gait, helping to prevent injuries, which is essential as you run faster with your dog pulling you.

From a running standpoint, we always suggest that if you are not already running, you and your dog can start training together by doing a couch-to-5k program. Your dog most likely has more fitness but it is best to err on the side of

caution. If you have been running for a while and want to start running with a dog, it is best to ease into running only five to ten minutes with your dog and adding another five to ten minutes every few days.

## Is there a fee involved in this?

Our events do have fees associated with them. We try to keep the fees low to not have them be a barrier to trying an organized event. The event fees range from \$30 to \$40 and include event swag and an after party that includes a hot meal, drinks and the best company.

## Do dogs enjoy it? Pros & cons?

Canicross is beneficial to both the dog and human. Obviously, canicross provides a great way to be at a healthy weight, encourages healthy bones, joints and ligaments, and promotes healthy rest. In addition to physical benefits to the dog and person, it improves the bond between dog and owner, decreases destructive behavior at home, and provides mental stimulation to the dog as he is processing the environment, the runner's commands and working to pull all at the same time.

Remember, not all people enjoy running and the same goes for dogs. There are some dogs that would rather swim or lay on the couch. You need to respect your dog's preferences for activities as well as check with your vet before undertaking canicross with your pet.

When running with your dog, it is important to always be mindful and watch their behaviors. Dogs cannot tell us when they are hurt or have had enough running for the day. You need to be aware of the non-verbal cues that you need to stop, shorten your mileage or take a rest day or two. If your dog starts to lag behind, drop their tail, pant louder than usual, or even sit down and refuse to move, you need to adjust your running accordingly.

Fueling is an important consideration also for your dog when you undertake running. Dogs burn fat when they run. They will not benefit from a bite of your granola bar or a swig from your sports drink. Due to the fact they do not burn carbohydrates, you should wait at least an hour after they have eaten to exercise. Do carry water with you while you are running and offer it to them, but do not let them gulp. When you are done running, be sure to let your dog cool off before offering a snack or water.

## Anything else you want to mention?

Our April event is Dirty Dog Dare at Richard Bong State Recreation Area, Kansasville on April 7. All information about our upcoming events can be found at [www.traildogrunners.com](http://www.traildogrunners.com). The Kenosha Running Company also will fit and let you test canicross equipment at the events and in their retail location. Please visit [www.kenosharunningcompany.com](http://www.kenosharunningcompany.com) for store hours and to view the selection of canicross equipment we have available. Or you can call us at 262.925.0300 to answer your questions.

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