

Lead Up Activities to Get Your Dog Ready for Carting

1. Get (or borrow) a carting harness. Have your dog wear it for brief periods of for several days so he can get accustomed to it. (About carting harnesses: <http://foxii.com/carting/carting-equipment/harnesses/>)
2. Next, it is necessary to get him accustomed to the fact that something will be following him everywhere he goes when he's in the harness. One way to do this is to put eye bolts in a short length of 4x4 or an old car tire and attach it to his harness straps. They will bounce, make noise and provide resistance. Use your customary lead attached to his collar and encourage him to walk with you. You may have more success facing him while walking backwards. It is not unusual for the dog to balk or be apprehensive at first. It may help to have an assistant walk beside him holding his lead while you walk backwards treating him generously. Praise, praise, praise. Lots of treats and praise will help him realize nothing horrible is happening.
3. Once he can move forward comfortably against resistance, introduce the concept of shafts. Some dogs panic initially when they feel shafts touching their sides. One way to get them accustomed to the sensation is to use two 5-foot lengths of PVC. Attach a t-connector to one end of each PVC shaft and pass the other end through the loop on the harness. The t-connector prevents the PVC shaft from pulling through the harness loop.
4. With your dog on lead, walk alongside him allowing the free end of the shafts to drag on the ground. He will occasionally feel them touch his side, but your goal is to get him accustomed to that sensation without feeling claustrophobic about it.
5. When he seems comfortable with the loose shafts, enlist the help of an accomplice to walk quietly behind the dog while holding the free ends of the PVC shafts along his sides. They should occasionally allow the shafts to lightly touch his sides.
6. When he accepts the shafts without fear, you can introduce the cart. Put him in a stand-stay and have an assistant hold his lead. Calmly and gently guide the shafts up along both sides of the dog and into the loops of his harness. Praise him quietly as you connect the traces to his harness.
7. As in all previous steps, use treats and praise to encourage him to move forward in a straight line. Walk backwards if you need to treating and praising. Start with short sessions, increasing as your dog gains confidence.
8. Stay with straight line work until your dog is comfortable. Take him on increasingly longer walks. He will relax and enjoy the outings as he spends more and more time in the shafts.
9. When you introduce turns, you will notice your dog automatically making an interesting adjustment: he will cross his feet to turn. Since the shafts interfere with his ability to twist his body during a turn, he discovers that he needs to cross one foot over the other. You don't need to teach that – he will work it out himself.
10. Gradually add weights. In a Rottweiler carting trial, he will need to pull a 40 pound weight in his cart.
11. Introduce Carting trial elements similar to a Rally Course, such as 90, 180 and 360 degree turn; stop/stand; serpentines; figure 8's, backing up; fast; slow; gates, bridges and a three minute down-stay. You can talk to and praise your dog throughout. Handlers are permitted to work on either side of the dog or in front as may be advantageous for various elements.
12. For further info and photos: <http://foxii.com/carting/getting-started/>