

Rally isn't musher's usual island run

The low temperatures won't stop the sled dogs, or their Jamaican driver, in the Winter Carnival event on Harriet Island this weekend.

By **Joe Kimball**, Star Tribune

The sled dogs are going to be fine. It's musher Devon Anderson who is worth worrying about.

Anderson, from Jamaica, is scheduled to run the dogs from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. today and Sunday in the Winter Carnival dog sled rally at Harriet Island.

"I'm up for it," he said Friday. "I think I'm going to have fun."

Anderson, 42, heads the Jamaican dog sled team and is in St. Paul on a promotional appearance for the Chukka Caribbean Adventures organization, which offers dog sled rides (on wheels) to tourists in Jamaica.

"I'm going to dress very well -- LaCrosse boots, insulated pants, polar fleece underwear, a heavy parka and a custom-made, trapper-style hat," he said.

In Ocho Rios, Jamaica, Anderson's dogs are mutts rescued from the local humane society.

But this weekend, he's using a team from Twig, Minn., trained by Ken Davis.

Anderson has driven a hardy team before, in races earlier this season in Cannon Falls, where he placed second in a field of 12, and Brainerd, where he was sixth of 15.

At the Harriet Island rally, teams of sled dogs will circle a track about one-third of a mile long. Spectators can meet the trainers and dogs during rest breaks. Several local dog teams will be on hand.

Anderson said he's a longtime Chukka employee and was surprised a year and a half ago when his Jamaican bosses told him that they were adding dog sleds to the stable.

"I told them that's something they do on ice. And we don't have ice," he said,



Devon Anderson
Richard Sennott, Star Tribune

But Chukka Chairman Danny Melville had seen dog sleds on wheels in Canada and thought that they would be a great attraction for his tropical adventure business.

He hired Scottish dog sled trainer Alan Stewart and Rick Johnson of Mahtowa, Minn., to help train dogs and mushers.

Johnson, who's in town to help Anderson with the dogs, said the cold never stops dog sled races, which are often run in temperatures of 20 below or lower.

The dogs are well-acclimated to such low temperatures.

"One of our biggest problems is too much heat; the dogs can easily overheat," Johnson said.

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