

Parades

Tips to make sure you have fun

...safely!



1. **Be patient!** The phrase "hurry up and wait" applies perfectly to most parades. It takes a lot of time to get going. **No parade ever started early!!** Be ready, but expect to stand around waiting.
2. **Take water.** You never know when you'll be done, or how thirsty your dogs will get. Having a supply of water available, and a handy bowl or bucket, will let you give a quick drink, if needed. Since we're talking about carts, it's usually pretty easy to have the dogs haul their own water. Sometimes a spray bottle is useful to spritz the dog to keep it cool. Some dogs will drink from a water bottle, too. However, drinking from the same bottle as your dog will likely gross out the spectators (lol).
3. **Watch the road!** Summer parades on hot asphalt can burn your dog's feet! If you are really concerned, drop out! Some people have purchased special "dog booties" that will keep the dog's pads off the pavement. Watch for sharp stones, broken glass, nails, etc. Some groups in the parade may be handing out candy. Beware of dropped candies that your dog may snatch, wrapper and all!
4. **Remember that most parades do not end up where they start!** If you've just done a three, four or five mile route, and your car is at the starting area, then you have to get back there. This is where going as a group can be great. Have one or two cars waiting at the ending point. These cars can ferry some of the other drivers back to pick up the other vehicles. Some parades will provide a shuttle service - ask about it when you sign up! You're usually on your own, though, so think ahead.
5. **Don't surprise your dog!** If you're going to wear a Santa suit along the route, don't put it on just before the start of the parade. Let your dog see you in it a few days before, and practice your carting with the suit on. Don't suddenly decorate the cart, either. Some dogs react poorly to those sudden changes and refuse to pull the cart.
6. **Have some idea of what you'll do when you stop!** Parades are notorious for having to stop. Floats break down, traffic sometimes must be let through, and TV coverage can lead to the parade bunching up and slowing to a stop. If you can do some static demonstrations - tight turns, backing up, or skills - then you can entertain people still. Dogs that are good with crowds could be taken to see some people.
7. **Beware loose dogs!** Someone will have a dog that lunges at the dogs in your group. Make sure you have control, and that your dogs will not suddenly bolt, either towards the new dog or away from the new dog. If your group offers obedience training classes, you might casually mention this fact to the owner of the dog that springs at your group.
8. **Be prepared for problems!** Do you have a pump, patch kit, wrenches, spare inner tube(s), a couple of bungee cords, some Vise-Grip(tm) pliers, etc. with you? If you're not ready to make a quick fix to your cart, you could be in trouble if something happens! You might want to make sure that your group has a first-aid kit, for both people and pets, along for the ride.
9. **Dress properly!** Layers. That's the trick. Make sure you wear several layers of clothing. It's better to have too much than not enough. You can always take something off then. Remember that cold weather or wet weather can make things slippery, so be sure you have gloves that maintain a good grip on your lead.

10. **Wear comfortable shoes or boots! *Nothing*** is more important than this. If you develop blisters with three miles to go, you will NOT be a happy person at the end of the parade. This is supposed to be fun. Wear shoes that are comfortable, fit well, and are appropriate to the terrain. Comfy shoes with slick soles are not good for Santa Claus Parades where there may be ice. If you get blisters, try wearing two pairs of thin socks. Wool socks are very comfortable, both in summer and winter, and help to reduce blisters because the wool wicks away perspiration on your feet.
 11. **Try not to follow the horses!** Horse poop is strangely attractive to the most obedient and well-mannered dog, and can cause your stately parade formations to fall into a chaotic writhing pile of dogs. You probably don't have a choice, but if you do, stay in front of the horses.
 12. **Never follow a vehicle!** The fumes from the exhaust pipe can lead to a bad situation for both humans and dogs.
 13. **Exercise your dogs before the parade starts!** You always have some idea of when you'll be starting. Try and potty your dog before you get going, since it doesn't look too good to see a dog peeing in the parade. Make sure to clean up behind your dogs as necessary, too!
 14. **TV coverage loves carting dogs!** It's a novelty to most people, but you'll no doubt find the camera right in your dog's face. Your dogs are all well-mannered enough not to mind, I'm sure, but you may want to have some carting "tricks" ready if asked by the camera operator.
 15. **Get in shape! Both of you!** The parade is like a long walk. But you should be in shape to make that walk. You don't want either of you to be dragging at the end. And that means that you must practice and train, just to get in shape. Get used to walking that distance, with your dog pulling the cart (and kids or whatever) at the same time. Make sure your dog's nails are trimmed, that the feet are in good shape, and that the harness does not chafe. Then go out and build up the endurance. Try not to load your dog down with too much weight in the cart. It shouldn't be a forced march.
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