

Racing 'Jack London' husky style

Belarus hosts first dog-sled racing event, owing to enthusiasts

By Irina Filippova

Orlovshchina (in the Volozhin District) was bright and sunny, despite the winter frost, bringing a cheery outlook to the unusual event. In the morning, entrants gathered in the forest with their pet Siberian Huskies, alongside at least 500 spectators, each eager to support the teams from Belarus, Russia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Huskies are so friendly, loving human attention, that breeders joke about how ineffective they are as guard dogs. If a thief were to enter the house, a Husky would most likely lick them to death! Visitors to the event had no trouble giving the beautiful dogs a pat.

Intriguingly, huskies don't bark at each other; rather, they

use howls and growls to communicate, with a wide range of intonation. Their canine chatter and shaggy furred appearance created the impression of being somewhere in the Far North, rather than in a Belarusian forest.

The Siberian Husky Breeders' Club in Belarus joined the Festivalny Country Club and the Riftour Publishing House in organising the event, with support from the Volozhin District administration. Drivers competed in several disciplines: dog skijoring (skiing with one or two dogs) and dog-sled racing with two, three-four and five-six dogs. A spectacular three stage relay race added to the excitement.

The 4km track was soon filled with professional dog-drivers — known as 'mushers'



BELTA

Dog-sled racing attracts many fans

— and skiers with dogs. Alla Protasova from the Moscow Region told us, "Running is in their blood; huskies can't sit on the sofa. Before each race begins, our Justin paws the ground with impatience. Huskies need huge amounts of exercise, to ensure their physical and emotional well-being." Alla's family used to live in Siberia and always loved sports. The appearance of two huskies, Justin and Lika, two years ago, forced every member of the family to go skiing. Stanislav and

Alla won first and second prizes in dog skijoring with their two dogs, while their son, Daniil, came third in dog skijor racing with one dog.

Arseny Beloruset from Russia claimed first prize in the dog-sled racing with 3-4 dogs; his pets take part in competitions several times each season. Of course, the track near Minsk was absolutely unfamiliar to his huskies, but it wasn't a problem. "They could imagine the length of the track; as we usually train on a similar site,

they knew how to make their strength last. During competitions, they always do their best. They love seeing other dogs and enjoy the excitement," he smiled.

Siberian Huskies can run at up to 25km/h over short, straight sections, with drivers having to concentrate hard to keep the sledge upright around sharp corners. Mr. Beloruset asserts that anticipating problems is the true challenge, saying, "You need to think for each of the dogs and for yourself, look-

ing ahead to anything which might appear on the track. For example, if a horse comes into view, as once happened with me, the dogs will go hunting. As a musher, you must see everything before the dogs do!"

Belarusian musher Sergey Volynkin came second in the five-six dog event. "Having a sledge dog has been my dream since childhood. I've read Jack London's works thoroughly, as I'm sure have all the dog lovers gathered here."

Rare mastery of repairing old timepieces

Gennady Martirosyan is among Minsk's oldest watch repairers, having been immersed in clock mechanisms for almost half a century, so might easily be called 'a lord of time'

By Yevgenia Ivashkina

In his workshop, he appears much like a surgeon, dressed in a white gown and wearing glasses with an additional lens. He holds a pincer, while his 'patients' tick peacefully on his wall. Among them is a cuckoo clock, once symbolising a Soviet family's wealth. It neighbours a modest clock, which has probably come from a village, bearing a simple fairytale painting. A rarity from the late 19th-early 20th century hangs nearby...

Mr. Martirosyan complains that people bring clocks for repair less often than they used to. "Our profession is dying," he sighs, adding, "Youngsters seldom come to train; the youngest master at the plant is 38. It was different in 1961, when I was an apprentice. Study began at the age of 16-18 and there were twelve of us. We became highly qualified professional watch masters, but most are now dead

or have left the country. Only four or five masters remain in Minsk, from its population of almost 2m. They are the only ones able to undertake repairs of any complexity."

Gennady's 'operating room' includes a tray containing a few hundred disassembled wrist watches, kept in a drawer. "People bring us watches which have not been able to be repaired elsewhere. We then disassemble them, reconstructing from individual components. Many hail from Soviet times, being passed down by parents. Plenty of people enjoy wearing our vintage timepieces, which are of good quality; they even rival Swiss-made watches."

People bring wrist watches and pocket watches in equal number to wall and longcase clocks. "We have Soviet chronographs and ship watches. We've seen many interesting examples," he notes. "Modern watches tend to run for just 3-4



ARTUR PRUPAS

Gennady Martirosyan repairs clocks and watches

years before losing time; they're far inferior to those made 35 or 40 years ago. I recently repaired a tank watch for a Muscovite, made after the war. I spent almost two days mending its spring and think it should last another 60 years now. Mechanisms were produced to last in those days. Expensive and prestigious watches do boast high quality today but it's not easy to repair them."

Mr. Martirosyan admits that his favourite watch is one made in Orel many years ago, known for chiming every 15 minutes. He even has one in his own home. He dreams of having his own collection of Soviet watches, adding that they need to be in good working order. Mr. Martirosyan loves his vocation, although stresses that it's no easy task to repair clocks. He would love to allow the public to visit, giving them the chance to see him at work, but fears that

the valuable watches and clocks within might inspire a burglary. He fears that people are not as honest as they once were.

Naturally, he's delighted that his son is following in his footsteps. "I won't comment on his level of mastery. I'll let others decide," he says modestly, adding, "I can only say that I share all my knowledge with him. My sister also works as a watch repairer abroad, continuing the business of our father."

No doubt, his path has been full of challenges. He was born to follow his vocation however. Even talking to me, Mr. Martirosyan continues working, polishing the glass of a wrist watch and then changing its batteries. Suddenly, he stands up and places a golden watch case into a cleaning solution, held delicately in the clutches of a pincer. The case becomes bright as never before and another component is ready for assembly...

Protecting wild gladioli from disappearing...

By Yevgeny Nesterun

Belarus plans to use international experience to develop ecological tourism

The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature in the Netherlands is ready to assist Belarusian specialists in developing eco-tourism. Belarusian scientists are currently negotiating to implement joint projects, since international experts' experience is invaluable in developing new excursion programmes for Belarus' key botanical areas.

This year, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature is to send a delegation to the Narochansky and Prip'yatsky national parks to discuss further interaction with Belarusian colleagues. They will be looking at eco-tourism and environmental projects, particularly the restoration of meadows and grassland ecosystems. "The Netherlands is successfully realising projects to restore its disappearing grassland flora, so we can use its experience in this sphere," explains Oleg Maslovsky, who heads the flora cadastre section at the National Academy of Sciences' V.F. Kuprevich Institute of Experimental Botany.

Over recent decades, Be-

larusian grassland ecosystems have significantly transformed under the influence of human economic activity and climate change. Rare plants have begun to disappear while the number of foreign (invasive) species has increased. For example, wild gladioli are now rarely seen in Belarusian meadows, with numbers ever falling. If no measures are taken, the plant may soon vanish. Shrub vegetation is a problem for Belarusian floodplain meadows, since it is growing by 3-5 percent annually, to the detriment of other species.



Prip'yatsky National Park

Collaboration with foreign experts should help us master international methods of studying and mapping grassland flora. Recommendations on the sustainable use and management of grassland eco-systems are to be followed, in line with pan-European standards. Our knowledge of how to preserve these beautiful habitats is sure to expand.