



BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CANICROSS

Everything you need to know about running with your dog



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WHAT IS CANICROSS?

Canicross is the exciting sport of cross country running with your dog. It offers a fun, social and highly effective way for you and your dog to get fit. It is also the safest way to enjoy running with your dog – by using specially designed equipment that allows you to run hands-free and for your dog to run comfortably and efficiently.

Canicross originated in Europe as invaluable training for the mushing (dog sledding) community during off season months. It is very similar to skijoring, where people ski with their dog pulling out in front of them and bikejoring, where people cycle off-road with their dog pulling in front.

Whilst canicross dogs were originally breeds one would associate with sledding, that is no longer the case. As the sport has evolved and its popularity has grown in the UK and other 'non mushing' communities, all types of breeds, large and small! are actively taking part and enjoying the health and social benefits it brings. It's not unusual to see people running with their little Terriers as well as more standard sized dogs such as Labradors, Vizslas, Beagles and Staffies.

The same can be said for the humans! You don't have to be an experienced runner to enjoy the sport - canicross is suitable for people of all ages and abilities and if you really don't fancy running you can even use the equipment for power walking!

Furthermore, there is no set distance or pace to stick to with canicross as it is suited for people and dogs of all ages and abilities. This is what makes it a truly wonderful activity to do together.

However, we do advise that your dog is at least 12 months of age, or has fully matured. Growth plates in the legs especially, are still forming and too much stress can lead to complications later in life. If in any doubt do seek guidance from your vet.

Canicross is largely a social sport but it is also enjoyed competitively across the country whether as a dedicated canicross event or a regular running or Park Run type event that permits canicrossers to take part.

WHY EXERCISE WITH YOUR DOG?

Exercising with your dog is the perfect way for you to both get fit. In fact, a study cited in the Journal of Physical Activity and Health found that owners who exercise their dogs are 34% more likely than others to be physically fit. This group experienced higher overall levels of both moderate and vigorous activity, thus proving that owning and exercising a dog is good for you!

Not only that, exercising regularly with your dog will improve bonding with your pet, ensure overall happiness and well-being, allow your dog to express their natural instincts and behaviour and save you time!

So, our dogs provide so much more than just faithful companionship.

MEET YOUR
NEW
PERSONAL
TRAINER!



WHAT KIT DO YOU NEED?

You need just **3** essential items to get started.



1 A WAIST BELT FOR YOU

Our technical canicross waist belts with fixed, adjustable leg straps, are specially designed for comfort and to prevent any back strain.



2 A HARNESS FOR YOUR DOG

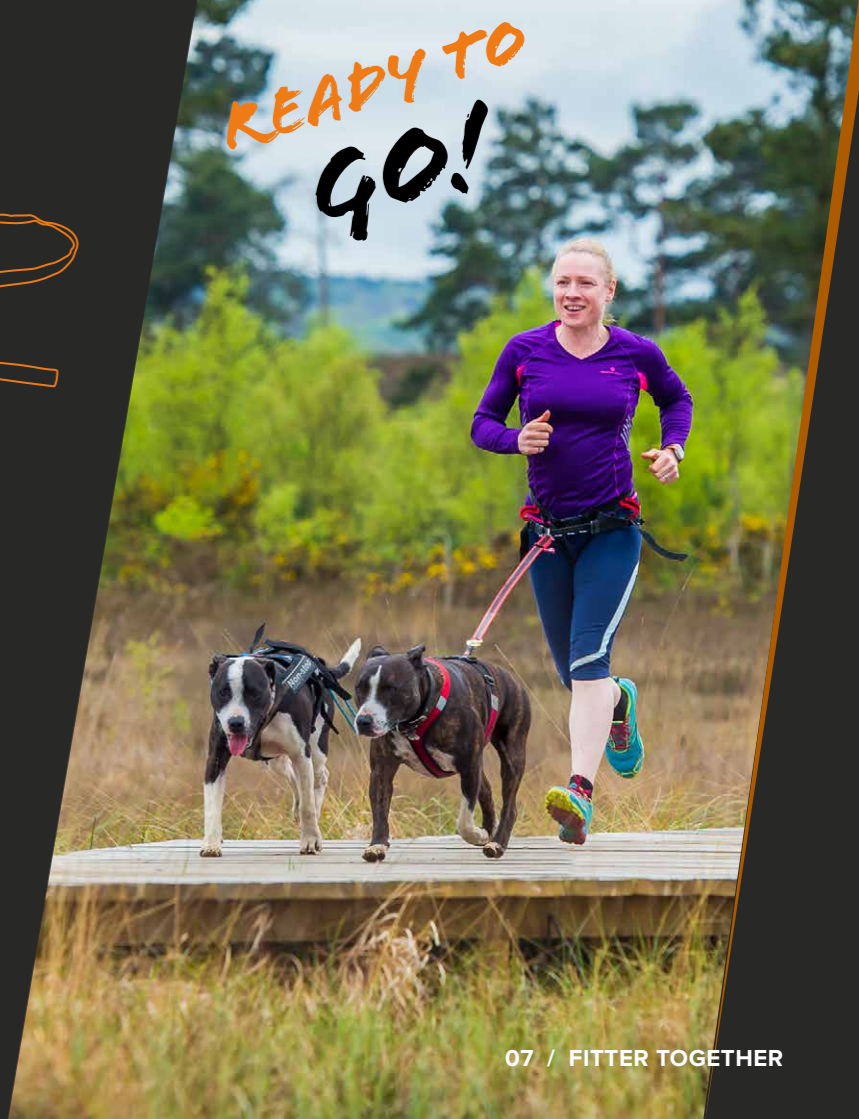
It's important that your dog has a properly fitted harness - one that sits comfortably and doesn't obstruct their airways. There are different styles according to your dog's size, power and running style.



3 A BUNGEE RUNNING LINE

This special bungee line attaches the two of you to each other; one end attaches to your waist belt and the other to your dog's harness. The line helps absorb any shock from the pull of your dog so you get a nice smooth and comfortable pull.

READY TO
GO!



SOMETIMES A RUN
WITH YOUR DOG
IS ALL
YOU NEED!



OTHER ESSENTIALS

We also recommend that you wear suitable trainers for running in off-road/cross country conditions - trail shoes are ideal.

Any clothing you wear should be lightweight and comfortable - ideally technical apparel because it wicks away moisture/sweat, dries quickly and is less bulky than cotton garments.

It's also worth investing in a light rain jacket - rain shouldn't get in the way of exercising with your dog!



GET OUT AND GET GOING!

Once you and your dog are both kitted out, find a nice park or some wide off-road trails near you with few distractions and give canicross a proper go!

Start off by walking so you can both warm up gently and get used to the feel of the equipment. Have the confidence to let your dog pull out in front, there's no need to cling onto the line and remember, you are the one in control of the speed.

Bear in mind that, as with any sport, you and your dog need to build up your training slowly. Gradually increase your pace and mileage over time and never force your dog to run if he/she doesn't want to. Also, take breaks when needed and factor the conditions you run in, such as temperature and terrain.

Canicross is a very social sport and great fun if you go out with a group of other canicrossers, but it's not essential.

If you have a dog that is prone to running off when they are off-lead, or needs to be on a lead for any other reason, canicross is the perfect solution!

If your dog doesn't initially pull, do not worry. Some are natural pullers, whilst others need a little practice and encouragement. There are a few different ways to help get your dog to pull; from running at or near the back of the pack to switching dogs with a friend and running in front of them, as your dog will want to keep up with you! You can also try introducing commands to help give your dog some focus.

You can read about all these handy tips and more, at dogfitblog.co.uk or visit our YouTube channel **Dogfit UK** to watch our videos.

The most important thing is that you both have fun and enjoy the experience. It really is a great way to get and keep fit!

INCORPORATE COMMANDS

It's a really good idea to introduce a few directional commands when you are out running with your dog. Not only does this make your life - and your dog's, that much easier but it's a great way for the two of you to bond whilst helping with general training and confidence.

"LET'S GO"

Use when you set off from standing still and during a run when you want to raise the tempo.

Just make sure that when you use this command you raise your voice and sound confident – just call out one firm and positive 'Let's Go'


"ON BY / LEAVE IT"

'On By' is a useful instruction when you need your dog to ignore something, stay focussed and keep pulling.

"LEFT, RIGHT"

When running with a group your dog will naturally follow the direction of the dogs in front. As you take a left or right turn, start saying the relevant command at the point the dog turns (you can also gently tug your bungee line). Turning your body in the direction you wish to turn will also help your dog to instinctively follow.

Consistency is key! Over time your dog will turn left or right on command without any extra help.

 Practice makes perfect! So do persevere, make sure you are consistent and remember to (verbally) praise your dog at the point they respond to your command.

"FORWARD / HIKE ON"

A useful command to ensure your dog keeps pulling if they lose a little momentum or approach a junction.

"WITH ME / HEEL"

An excellent command if you want to get your dog to run alongside you or slightly behind you, especially when you are running downhill!


Practice the command at walking pace initially and then build up from there. Use the line to bring your dog closer to your side as you say the command. Some people even train their dogs to run 'behind' them so this may be your preferred command.

"WHOA/STOP/ STAND/LINE-OUT"

When you want your dog to stand still and wait – ideally they should maintain their forward facing position.

"EASY/STEADY"

A command to use in conjunction with you slowing down.

 If you use your own body weight to assist with the commands, this will help the dog pick up the commands quicker - eg. lean slightly forward and pick up speed when you say 'let's go' or lean back slightly and slow down when you say 'steady'.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Once you've followed these simple steps and have got the hang of canicross, there's still so much more to discover.

Why not enter a race? There are many races across the country that permit canicross entries and they are getting more and more popular.

Canicross isn't just a Summer or daytime activity. In the dark Winter months many canicrossers still take to the trails. We just advise that you invest in a good head torch and pick routes that are easy underfoot.





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS?

WON'T MY DOG PULL ME OVER?

If you buy the correct kit and stick to good paths then it is very unlikely. Even if you have a particularly strong pulling dog, the special bungee line prevents any jarring and hence sudden, dramatic movements.

Like any off-road running, there is always a risk of falling over but you can reduce the likelihood of doing so by making sure you look in front of you and anticipating any obstacles and turns ahead. Incorporating instructional commands will also help you to manage your balance and speed.

HOW OLD DOES MY DOG NEED TO BE TO START RUNNING?

Your dog must be fully matured before they can take part in canicross. This is typically around the age of one year old, but may vary as dogs mature and grow at different speeds. We would strongly recommend that you seek advice and guidance from your vet if in any doubt.

CAN I RUN WITH MORE THAN ONE DOG?

Yes, it is possible to run with more than one dog...and it's loads of fun! In fact, a lot of canicrossers run with a couple of dogs. Though, depending on their size, we would recommend that you initially start with one dog, just until you have got the hang of it and are confident you could take on another dog.

I'M WORRIED THAT MY DOG WON'T PULL IN THE CANICROSS HARNESS?

Don't worry. Whilst the majority of dogs will pull, it's not uncommon for some dogs not to be natural pullers initially. But as soon as you put them in a pack with other pulling dogs they more often than not follow their lead. There are also a number of top tips to help you get your dog used to pulling out in front. Find out more at www.dogfitblog.co.uk.

CAN ANY BREED OF DOG TAKE PART IN CANICROSS, INCLUDING THE TINY ONES?

As long as they are old enough and willing enough, then any dog can take part. We know people who run with Boston Terriers through to Rhodesian Ridgebacks! All dogs and people can potentially do canicross.

WHAT FOOTWEAR SHOULD I WEAR FOR CANICROSS?

Canicross is basically cross country running with your dog, so the terrain could be uneven, wet or muddy. You will, therefore, need a suitable pair of trainers that provide a good grip for running in these conditions. There are many off-road trail shoes in the market, with different treads for different conditions, so it's worth popping into a good running shop for advice. Many runners have a different shoe for when it's particularly muddy (ie more grip) than when it's dry but a good 'all-rounder' off trial shoe is suffice.

WHAT IF MY DOG HAS BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES OR DOESN'T GET ON TOO WELL WITH OTHER DOGS?

The great thing about using the specially designed equipment for power walking or canicross is that the dog is attached to its owner at all times which makes it a safe and controlled environment – much safer, and much more enjoyable for both parties, than a normal lead or off-lead walk. When running with a group just make others aware that your dog needs plenty of space. It may be worth tying a yellow ribbon to your dog's harness to signify they should not be approached.

I'D LIKE TO JOIN A CLASS BUT I'M WORRIED ABOUT KEEPING UP WITH EVERYONE ELSE?

Don't worry! We recognise that people start exercising with their dogs at different levels and abilities. That's why we have different classes to suit different abilities; from complete beginners through to more experienced runners. Even in our beginner classes, the instructor always runs to the pace and speed of the slowest person. Our classes are first and foremost about having fun – nobody is too slow!



"Taking up canicross has been one of the best things for my dog Bai and I. We get to run together and I don't have to worry about her running off, she's with me every step of the way"

ALEXIA BOOKER

"Canicross has opened up a whole new world to me. What a fantastic way to meet new friends with a common interest. It combines getting fit, meeting new people and having fun with my best buddy, my dog!

Thank you Dogfit. Viisa loves it and so do I!!"

TARA GREEN

"I really enjoyed running with Dogfit, such lovely people to run with and the course was informative and fun. We both learnt loads, and can't wait to do more"

EMILY PERKINS

"I've really enjoyed Canicross as has our dog, Luna. It's a totally inclusive class open to all shapes, sizes and running ability and that's just the dogs! Luna's confidence has come on leaps and bounds and she loves every minute. I am even getting used to wearing the Lycra.

Thanks to the team at Dogfit for all the help and guidance on our adventures through the woods - look forward to the next outing."

TONY MARTIN



Ginetta George & Gail Walker | dogfit.co.uk

Dogfit was born out of a genuine passion for dogs and knowing the fulfilment owners can get from exercising with their dogs.

The founders, Ginetta and Gail, are both experienced dog owners and canicrossers and they have experienced first-hand the many benefits canicross brings; for both the owners and their dogs!

Sadly not every dog owner exercises their dog as much as they should. Thus Dogfit's ambition is to educate as many dog owners as possible to make them aware just how vital for their dog's health, happiness and well-being a daily exercise regime is; whether that's regular walks, power walking or canicrossing.

What makes canicross so special is that it's a truly fulfilling experience for humans too given the fitness and social benefits it brings - and it's a wonderful way to enjoy the great outdoors.

We hope you enjoyed reading this guide and join us in spreading the word that **Fitter Together** really is Better!

Thank you!

dogfit.co.uk





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