Twitter Thread by Blair Braverman



Blair Braverman
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Been thinking about the person who called the cops on the dog truck yesterday, and the details that lead folks to make judgments, most of which have nothing to do with the actual health/safety/happiness of the dogs.

> My advice? If you see a big truck with little kennel doors and a lot of dogs in it, and the dogs seem relaxed and happy, no need to call the police! Instead, get a large order of fries and leave them on the hood with a note that they\u2019re for the pups. Everybody wins. \U0001f35f\u2764\ufe0f\U0001f618 pic.twitter.com/YWt8N7Hbmc
>
> — Blair Braverman (@BlairBraverman) October 6, 2018

If you google “sled dog truck,” you’ll see that a lot of mushers put dog silhouettes on the doors, or paw prints, or bright colors. There’s even this painted truck in Colorado, which is a-maz-ing.

We bought our dog boxes used (after our last truck burned down, we moved them onto a new flatbed) and our priority has always been making sure they’re safe, dry, well-ventilated, and comfortable. The dogs jump right into their boxes; they love going for car rides.

We like the steel doors because they’re rustproof and let the dogs see/smell everything that’s going by. In our climate, we’re usually more concerned with keeping the dogs cool—and making sure they have fresh air and ventilation—than keeping them warm.

But how many people see these doors, with their vertical bars, and immediately think of dogs in jail?

A few of you have suggested we put a sign that says “BRAVERMOUNTAIN MUSHING” or something similar on the truck, which is probably a good idea. It’s just something we never thought of because we’ve been focused on the comfort of dogs, not people.

Anyway. I’m just thinking aloud here. I think that one of the last things some people look at is the actual dogs and their body language. Dogs couldn’t care less about human signifiers (like the kinds of kennel doors, etc) but it makes all the difference in the optics of it all.

The biggest thing we’ve noticed? If your truck is old and dirty, people call the cops. If it’s new and clean, people give you the benefit of the doubt. Our culture has so many classist assumptions about who is worthy of having animals, and who is

capable of loving them.

I have a world of empathy + gratitude for people who are looking out for dogs, and erring on the side of protecting them

I have zero patience when folks try to police others based on their (perceived) socioeconomic status—making judgments about their worth + compassion + ability

I'll just say it: I think that a lot of public concern about the welfare of sled dogs comes from a culture that doesn't trust the fact that the sport is based in rural communities, is largely working class, and has deep roots in Indigenous traditions.

There ARE mushers who abuse their sled dogs, just like there are pet owners who do. The problem is the abuse, not the mushing. But it's much easier for "activists" to paint those tragedies as universal to the community when the community they're scapegoating is already othered.

As a result, mushers become paranoid. The sport has a very suspicious attitude toward media attention--which means that it doesn't end up getting much coverage. As a musher and a writer, I straddle both of those worlds.

Even so, I'm aware that people may try to "catch" me, especially as the team gets more fans. Honestly, that's part of why we started the hashtag for #OperationFatMatt; I was afraid that people would see pictures of Matt looking emaciated and claim that we didn't feed him, or care

That's also why it was so important to me to share the story of Boudica's accident, even though it was hard for me to write about. Transparency is a huge priority for both me and Q. https://t.co/pBfyPrKsgo

> I haven't wanted to talk about it yet, but last week I had the hardest day of dogsledding I've ever experienced. Actually, I still don't want to talk about it, but it feels important to share the bad with the good. This is a complicated, wild life we live. It's not always pretty.
>
> — Blair Braverman (@BlairBraverman) January 22, 2018

But a funny thing happened. Those things that felt scary to share? Like that we couldn't get Matt to gain weight, and that Boudica got hurt? That no matter how hard we try, there are always ways we're still learning, ways we want to do better?

Y'all understand. You're still here for us. You still love the team--and your love means more, because you know our challenges as well as our triumphs.

And I like to think things are changing. #mushertwitter is a great example: amazing mushers (mostly women!) sharing their lives and their adventures and their joys with friends and strangers alike.

I came to this sport--this life, these dogs--through the books I read as a kid. Stories matter. Honesty matters. Dogs matter. I'm honored, every day, to be able to share these stories of my own.