

Jamaican musher prepares for Yukon Quest

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WHITEHORSE, Yukon — Newton Marshall thought he was in trouble upon receiving a call that began the Jamaican's odyssey as a dog musher.



Photo by [Eric Engman](#)

In 2005, Marshall was working as a horseback-riding guide for Chukka Caribbean Adventures when a phone call unwittingly changed his life.

"One day, they called me when I was up in the mountains and told me 'Newton, you have to stop work immediately' and I said 'Why? I didn't do anything wrong,'" Marshall said Wednesday from Hans Gatt's kennel a half-hour south of Whitehorse.



Photo by [Eric Engman](#)

It turned out the person who took care of some street dogs that Chukka had obtained from a shelter was leaving, and the tour company needed a replacement worker.

"They said 'Newton, can you look after some dogs?' I said 'No problem,'" Marshall said.

Before long, Chukka began giving cart rides using the shelter dogs, company chairman Danny Melville founded the Jamaica Dogsled Team and Marshall was among the chosen few for a brash experiment.



Photo by [Eric Engman](#)

"So Danny thinks he could push it a little further. He said 'We are going to race abroad,'" Marshall said, before adding "I'd never seen snow before."

Marshall got his mushing initiation in Minnesota, then wound up last winter at the kennel of Gatt, a three-time Yukon Quest champion.

Gatt said Wednesday that he met Melville at a dinner with Quest officials in Whitehorse, where the businessman invited him to visit Jamaica. Gatt accepted, and once there, "Danny came up with the idea it would be possible to run the Yukon Quest with a Jamaican musher. He needed to find somebody that knew how to do it so he approached me," Gatt said.

Marshall, 25, is proving to be a quick learner. He placed seventh and won the sportsmanship award at the 2008 Percy DeWolfe Memorial Race. This season, Marshall was 21st among 47 starters at the Sheep Mountain 150 and 13th in an extreme Copper Basin 300 that featured frigid cold, a stretch of open water and sugar-snow conditions. Like any rookie, he's had accidents but nothing catastrophic.