

Santa Paws: South African canines sled on sandy beaches



A pack of 20 dogs run for 5 kms on Muizenberg beach in Cape Town. — AFP photos



One of the 20 dogs that completes the team poses for a photograph before the start of the race at Muizenberg beach.

Muizenberg outside Cape Town can boast of many things - golden sands, colorful beach huts, great surf. But this popular spot has something its rivals can't even begin to match-teams of up to 30 huskies pulling sleds. Every Saturday, tourists and joggers are treated to scenes straight from the Arctic with dogs that have swapped snow for sand. Locals and holidaymakers alike are stunned to see the barking teams of huskies mushing along the white beach at up to 25 km/h (15 m/h) with a blue sled at the rear.

It's the brainchild of husky lover Sam Gunter, 43, who realized the breed, though



Scarlet takes a break during the run on Muizenberg beach, Cape Town.

very popular locally, were not getting the amount of exercise they needed. He built two sleds and started inviting husky owners to bring their hounds to Muizenberg beach outside of Cape Town each Saturday. Eleven years down the line, there are now around 100 huskies that

regularly sled on different weekends. This Saturday, 23 black-and-cream thick-furred huskies turned up with their owners-some having driven for up to an hour to the beach. Gunter straps them into blue harnesses. Once all are safely in, he gives a shout of "go" and the dogs do what comes naturally. Always in a straight line, they run up back and forth, pausing briefly to rest.

"It is the perfect exercise for huskies who were bred to pull sleds and they just love it," said Gunter from Strand, a small resort town located 40 kilometers (25 miles) up the beach. "They get so excited... and can't wait to get going. And after work-

ing hard all week it is my weekly therapy and is just wonderful to see," Gunter, a financial broker told AFP.

'Huskies need exercise'

Popular for their thick fur and bright blue eyes they "can easily get neglected," he warned. "Huskies need lots of exercise... they need to do up to 20 km a day." "This way at least once a week they get a five kilometer run for between 35 and 45 minutes."

The dogs only run in the evening or when temperatures are 15 degrees Celsius or lower, because they are Nordic

dogs, "so you have to be careful in the South African climate not to overheat them". Depending on the day, husky sledding can attract quite a crowd of spectators. Gunter says he is the only person in Africa doing husky sledding, "and the looks you get from some sunbathers when 30 huskies come past with Santa hats pulling a sled, is one to behold." "At this time of year people would be looking out for reindeers pulling a sleigh through the sky but in our case we have huskies pulling a sled on a beach!" — AFP



Sam Gunter (center) and two young assistants, prepare the sled as the first two dogs arrive at the meeting point at Muizenberg beach in Cape Town.



One of the first pairs of dogs tied to the rope, is excited about the start of the race.



Regan, 17, the oldest son of Sam Gunter, helping him train dogs and make them run on the beach of Muizenberg.

What's next for Britney? Check Instagram

After nearly 14 years living under a strict conservatorship she deemed abusive and exploitative, Britney Spears is free. And now that a California court has lifted the controversial legal arrangement barring one of the world's best-selling pop stars from managing her own life and finances, many fans are asking what's next. Speculation abounds-Kids? Travel? Suing her family? — but the answer is elusive, particularly given the guarded lifestyle Spears was legally bound to during more than a decade that saw her largely governed by her father, Jamie.

The magnetic superstar, who turns 40 on December 2, has not given an interview in years, rarely makes public appearances and last performed in October 2018. Today most of what the public knows about Spears—who soared to global fame as a teenager on a burst of hits including her breakout "...Baby One More Time," before a highly publicized mental breakdown saw her become a paparazzi punching bag-comes from her eccentric Instagram account.

For years the bubbly star has posted regularly, sometimes uploading videos of herself twirling or doing dance routines, other times waxing poetic on hopes and dreams. The line of communication from Spears's lavish Los Angeles mansion to the outside world-she has more than 90 million followers across Instagram and Twitter-has offered the singer a modicum of control over her image, and is perhaps where the most accurate reading of her plans lies.

In October-a few weeks after her father was removed from the conservatorship, paving a path for the arrangement's termination-Spears voiced anxiety over her future in a lengthy missive. "I'll just be honest and say I've waited so long to be free from the situation I'm in," she wrote. "Now that it's here I'm scared to do anything because I'm afraid I'll make a mistake."

Family planning

Marriage has been a theme, with Spears in September announcing her engagement to 27-year-old Sam Asghari. Earlier this week she said Donatella Versace was designing her gown, although a date for the nuptials has not been set publicly. Spears also has said she wants to have another child. She shares two boys, both now teenagers, with her ex-husband Kevin Federline, who has majority custody.

In a chilling accusation in June she told the Los Angeles judge who ultimately ended the conservatorship that under the arrangement she was forced to keep in

place a contraceptive IUD, despite her wishes to conceive. Along with control of her own reproductive system Spears now has power over her fortune, estimated to be some \$60 million. This year she's taken a number of vacations including to Hawaii and French Polynesia, where she posted about taking flying lessons.

Performing 'not her top priority'

But while Spears seems focused on family and travel, high on the priority list of fans-and industry players-is whether she will resume performing or release new music. The superstar dropped four studio albums under the conservatorship, most recently 2016's "Glory." She also was among the singers to stage wildly bankable Las Vegas residencies in recent years. Her four-year "Britney: Pieces of Me" run grossed a reported \$138 million. But in January 2019 she abruptly canceled her planned return to Vegas, going on indefinite professional hiatus.

She wrote on Instagram in July that

"I'm not gonna be performing on any stages anytime soon with my dad handling what I wear, say, do, or think!!!!" "I'd much rather share videos YES from my living room instead of onstage in Vegas." In the same post Spears indicated that she had been shut out of the planning of her Vegas shows, becoming more puppet than performer. Since Friday's court proceeding tabloids have been abuzz over her next career moves, with Page Six citing an "insider" who said Spears "wants to make music and perform again" but it's "not her top priority right now and hasn't been for a while."

Tell-all?

Also on deck are upcoming hearings over the millions involved in the fight to free Britney-all of which have been billed to the singer's estate, with a constellation of lawyers and family members on both sides seeking payments. It is possible Spears could take legal action against her father, which she hinted at during a court hearing but has made no formal steps towards.

Her primary recourse against her father would be providing evidence he mismanaged Spears's money or overcharged her in his role as her financial conservator; he stepped down as conservator of her person in 2019, with a professional taking over. Spears said recently scripts for TV and film depictions of her story have been pouring in, though she said "I'm not dead" and not interested in someone else portraying her. She has also alluded to a tell-all: "Lord have mercy on my family's souls if I ever do an interview," she wrote in October. — AFP



Supporters of the FreeBritney movement celebrate following a court decision ending her conservatorship outside the Stanley Mosk courthouse in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Legendary novelist Wilbur Smith dies aged 88

Internationally acclaimed author Wilbur Smith has died in South Africa aged 88, his publisher announced Saturday. "Global bestselling author Wilbur Smith died unexpectedly this afternoon at his Cape Town home after a morning of reading and writing with his wife Niso by his side," said a statement released on the Wilbur Smith Books website. With 49 titles under his belt since his first novel 'When the Lion Feeds' was published in 1964, Smith became a household name in literature.



In this file photo internationally acclaimed Central African born author, Wilbur Smith, shares his experience during the second day of the International Festival of Literature in Dubai. — AFP

"The undisputed and inimitable master of adventure writing, Wilbur Smith's novels have gripped readers for over half a century, selling over 140 million copies worldwide in more than thirty languages," said the statement. His bestselling 'Courtney Series', was the longest running in publishing history, said the statement. It spanned generations and three centuries, "through critical periods from the dawn of colonial Africa to the American Civil War, and to the apartheid era in South Africa". — AFP