



Written by Jana Sedláčková & Helena Haraštová • Illustrations by Marcel Králík

ANIMALS IN SPORT

... Or How Long Do Snail Races Take?



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B4U Publishing

SNOWDROP RECOMMENDS:

Rabbit Show Jumping



➔ How it all began

Would you like to hear a secret? I've always wanted to become an athlete, to make a mark on the world with my paws and take part in a rabbit show jumping championship. But how could I when I get spooked whenever I as much look outside my pen? Fortunately, my coach takes care of me. A skilled and patient boy, he doesn't enjoy sitting in front of a computer—instead, he loves running and jumping. My rabbit hero in the human form. And because he's a bit braver than me, as a proper hero should, he signed us up for our very first competition.

Snowdrop

Nickname:
Grasshopper



🕒 Practicing to become a rabbit champion

Big-eared participants from all over the world take part in the competition, which is why it's a good idea to practice first. I and Jimmy began practicing when I was only six months old. I had to get used to wearing a harness and a leash—those strips of fabric itched and tickles my fur at the beginning, but I stopped minding that surprisingly quickly. Because we rabbits can jump really fast and really far (my buddy from Sweden set the record in long jump by jumping the incredible 3.01 m!), our leash needs to be at least two meters long, with a lot of leeway so that we don't get tangled up in it.

Two months later

I'm getting pretty good at this! Most of the time we practice home on the carpet because the grass outside is teeming with juicy dandelions and I get distracted. Jimmy puts a pole in front of me, 5 cm above ground ... Hop! This one was way too easy, Jimmy! How about three in a row? Oh, but I did earn a piece of carrot for not hitting the pole while jumping over it. Once Jimmy noticed that low obstacles are a piece of cake for me, he put me in front of higher and more difficult ones. I even heard that there will be an artificial water jump at the competition, made from a flower box! C'mon, Jimmy! Hop, hop! We need to practice for that!



⬆ Long hop

And now my big moment comes ... I'm so tense I can barely breathe, thinking about my Swedish friends who can jump 3 meters like nobody's business. I break into a run, suck my tummy in, and hooop! 295 cm! I land ten centimetres behind the obstacle, no problem, and then celebrate with Jimmy because we've just earned our very first victory! Yippee!

⬇ Our first competition

Wow, it's here! My very first competition. I shyly tap my feet at the edge of my carrier, looking the terrain over ... My fur bristles in fear but Jimmy strokes my back to encourage me.



Speciality:
long jump

➡ **Hoppity, rabbit, hop!**

I'm not very good at high jumping, yet ... First, I try to jump over a 70cm high obstacle. If I succeed, Jimmy is going to raise it by 5 cm. I take off and hooooop! Oh-oh ... the pole fell. I always get to 70 cm and then fail ... I always knock the top pole down. Luckily, I have two more tries. Still, the referee deducts a few points. But Jimmy assures me that it's not the end of the rabbit world to hit a pole. I fail a second time, now there's only one try left ... The hairs on my belly just about miss the highest bar but it's in the bag! That was by a hair's breadth, indeed! Would you believe that the record is held by a Swedish competitor who jumped the incredibly 106 cm high! Wow, I'd really like to meet him!



Sports diet:

hay, sweet baby carrots, fresh spring water

History is made

Did you know that rabbit show jumping is one of the youngest sports in the world? It originated in Nordic countries (specifically in Sweden and Denmark) where rabbits have been competing for only 45 years. No wonder that the sport comes from there in particular. After all, those places are terrrrribly cooold and you can get warm by jumping around! Hop, hop! Bunny rabbits jump on straight tracks and the more skilful among them can even do meandering parkour or long and high jump, stretching all the muscles in their rabbit bodies.



What my coach says about me:

"Snowdrop is my little nervous Nelly. When unknown rabbits are around, she buries herself in her bed up to her ears. But place her in front of an obstacle and she flies over it with the ease of a feather!"

Work out:

The shy Snowdrop would like to encourage you to jump as far as you possibly can. Draw a short line in the ground, gather speed, and hooooop! When you try to do a triple jump (three long jumps in a row), you might beat even Snowdrop and her (unbelievable, considering her tiny size) 295 cm!



Don't sit at home, folks! Take part in the Triple Crown instead!

A SERIOUS SPORT FOR ALL DONKEYS!

BAR



FLIPPER INVITES YOU TO:

Swimming with Dolphins



📌 Curious dolphins

EeEeE, eEeE , gik, gik, gik! Hello, friends! Do you love water as much as I do? How about swimming with dolphins, have you ever given that a try? You haven't? In that case, you're welcome to go on a journey with me. We, dolphins, are naturally merry and curious. You can find us in many seas and oceans. My name is Flipper and I live in the Mediterranean Sea, near the island of Crete.

The sea around Crete is calm and the perfect warm temperature. The sky-blue waves reflect the sun and we swim in them, waiting for a cruise ship to appear. Yippee, there's one coming! Ships make large waves in the sea which we love. We like to drift with the currents, race swimmers and sailboats, and when someone jumps into the sea, we rush to look at them closer. Gik, gik, gik! Who are you? Will you swim with us?

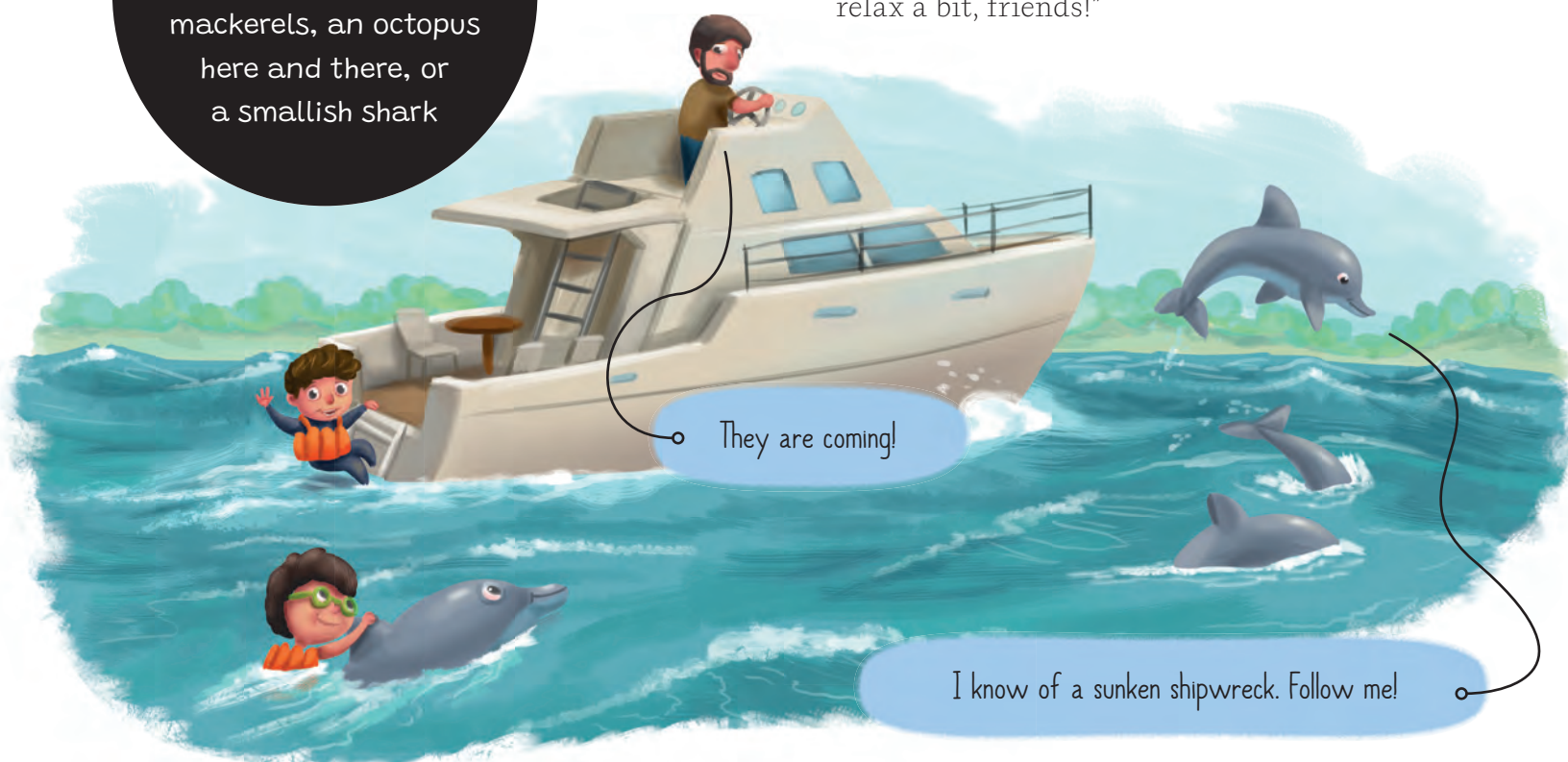
Message to anyone who wants to do this sport:

"Sports aren't the only thing of import. Which is where dolphins come in. Don't forget to play and relax a bit, friends!"



Sports diet:

7 kg of fresh herrings and mackerels, an octopus here and there, or a smallish shark



Speciality:
blowing air bubbles



📌 Let's go play together!

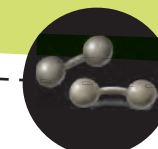
Tell me what's bothering you and I'll make your worries disappear like soap bubbles. Dolphins are good at that. We're a hoot and live in the here and now. Look, I'll make you a bubble bath ... And check out this air bubble! Can you catch it? I'll show you how—simply stick your nose out and into the bubble. Like this ... Snatch! See? Fun. And once you're tired with diving, we can leap in the water for a bit. Don't worry, I'm well aware that humans can't jump 10 meters far and 5 meters high like we can. I'll adjust to your pace and wait for you. And if I happen to get ahead, I'll come back again!

What kids say about me:

"Flipper is the best friend and swimming instructor you could ever have!"

Work out:

Flipper moves in the water as gracefully as butterflies do in the air. Try mimicking his style of swimming (called the dolphin kick). Make symmetrical circles with your hands and undulate your entire body, as if you have a tailfin. Finally, add the proper dolphin breath (see page 53). That's it! Once you're done, lay on the surface on your back and rest for a while.



Dolphin dancing

Singing our enchanting song, we rock on the waves, sway, sway, swayity sway, look! Other dolphins are coming! Together, we synchronise our speed. They mimic us, one after another, and all head into the same direction in perfect harmony. We swim like one team!



Flipper
Nickname:
Barracuda



History is made:

Once upon a time, people believed we were messengers of Poseidon, god of the sea, and admired us for our freedom and enjoyment of life. Over time, I believe we taught them a lot. And besides, we and humans are bound by hundreds of years of friendship. Even our ancient great-great-grandfathers carried the human young on their backs, as if they were huge sea horses. And experienced Cretan sailors claim to this very day that if you need a good navigator to show a lost ship the way among dangerous reefs, or someone to save an unfortunate sailor who fell overboard among a group of bloodthirsty sharks, all you need to do is slap your hands against the surface and we come! EeEeE!

Bottlenose dolphin

You won't find a friendlier, more peace-loving sea creature far and wide; I'm willing to stake my fin on that. Maybe some dolphin already told you, but did you know that we're mammals, just like you? We may live in the sea, but otherwise are exactly

as intelligent, sociable, and playful as humans. We have 150 teeth to smile with, and our strong tailfin allows us to make really loooong leaps above the surface or jump in place. If you grab our fin, we'd love to carry you for a bit, just like we carry our young to help them save energy. EeEeE!

Listen to sweet melodies of the dolphins and relax...

BREATHE LIKE A DOLPHIN

Are you ready for today's hour of relaxation? Grab my fin and I'll carry you down-current, singing a dolphin lullaby. EeEeE, gik, gik, gik! Can you hear the mysterious melody? That's how we tell stories to each other to while away long evenings at the sea. We make loads of sounds, using our tongues and especially our breath—whistling, squelching, screeching, or clicking. Our voices echo from everything; a sand-covered

sea bottom, curious corals, or crabs buried under sea rocks. They also help us find our bearings in water. Experts call this echolocation. Thanks to this, we can hear tiny fish even if it's 3 kilometres away. But did you know that we can spend just 10 minutes under water on one breath? After that we need to jump above the surface—hop!—and breathe in. Inhale, leap, and a looooong, slooo-ooow, eeeeeexhale. That's it!



JERRY RECOMMENDS:

Hamster Racing




Sports diet:
cereals, seeds,
vegetables,
fruits

📌 What you can do on a few meters

When I found myself at the starting line of my very first race, I was slightly nervous. I knew that my cart never failed me during practice, but my opponents looked confident and ruthless. What if they push me out of the road, I thought. What if I crash? Lose my sense of direction? But then I heard someone shout “Go!”, and all my doubts disappeared. The track shone in front of me like a lighthouse in the

dark. I knew I had to step on it and couldn't ease off. Gradually, my opponents disappeared somewhere behind me. Then I just had to overtake that wild dwarf hamster—and I was in the lead! One meter followed another, with only dozens of centimetres left ... The finish line! I did it! I'll never forget the relief and euphoria victory brought me. I fought really hard to cover those 2.5 meters. That new house into my vivarium sure was well-earned.



📌 Competitive rodents

Our sport uses two types of race vehicles—transparent plastic balls, and elaborate miniature cars. Don't expect your pet to just hop in like some hot-shot, though. In my case, it took several weeks before I grew to like my vehicle. At any rate, I can always rely on the power of my own feet which is

why I practice every day and maintain a healthy diet. That's the only way I can hope to cover the 9-meter track (the usual length of a hamster race track) the fastest. The world record is 38 seconds and I really would like to break it! When running in my wheel at home, I can do up to 10 kilometres a day. So why shouldn't I brace up in the next race, right?

Work out:

Get a large box, such as a fridge or washing machine box. Make holes into one of its walls so that you can see outside. Get in, stand on the ground, and grab the walls—and you have your own race car you can use to compete with your friends! To make it even more fun, each of you can draw something nice on your box.



Jerry
Nickname:
Fittipaldi

Those years of running in a wheel have paid off!



History is made

Ironically, we owe hamster races to an epidemic of the foot-and-mouth disease which forced the British to cancel a lot of traditional horse races in 2001. "What else would people like to watch?" many wondered. Some got the idea to hold hamster races, just for fun. It was a phenomenal success! Since then, we've been competing not only in the United Kingdom, but also in North America, South Africa, Australia, and Asia. There are even professional teams, and some pet shop chains organise regular leagues at their stores. So, will you come cheer us on?

What my owner says about me:

"Jerry's sprightly and loves practicing so much that sometimes when I want to take him out of his wheel, he angrily bites my finger. That's how ambitious he is!"

Yummy, yummy!



Golden hamster

Did you know that ... we have supplies of food in our cheek pouches because we need to store resources in wild nature? Those seemingly tiny pouches fit goodies which amount to half our weight!

... and our teeth keep growing as long as we live! That's why I constantly gnaw on something, to grind them down.

Kind training rules

1) I realise that a dog's, cat's, rabbit's, or parrot's disposition can be pretty individual. Animals are sort of like people—some like to work out, others not so much. And that's perfectly alright;

2) I do sports and train only with household pets or specially bred species. I may join free animals, such as dolphins, for activities like swimming but I never train them;

3) Before I start doing a sport I first learn more about what my pet's like. I go online or ask people who work with that particular species. People who deal with dogs are called cynologists; those who are experts in cats are known as felineologists. I can also learn a lot by consulting vets, breeders, or pet shop clerks;

4) Before each practice I first make sure my buddy feels like doing it just as much as I do. I can try and get their attention by stroking them, giving them a toy or a treat. But if I don't manage to entice them it means they're not currently in the mood for a practice. In that case I don't force them. I most likely wouldn't be happy myself if someone forced me to do sports. I'll come over some other time or devise some other activity we can do together—like going out for a walk or, wait a minute, just lounging on the couch and cuddling;

5) When practicing I make sure not to overfeed my pet with too many treats; I might end up giving them a belly ache otherwise. How many treats a day is safe? Ask your vet or an experienced breeder;

6) And last but definitely not the least—treat all animals like people. That is attentively, considerately, and kindly!



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Ready, steady, go! Welcome, dear spectators, to an overview of famous as well as truly unusual pet sports. Flash the Daring Snail is waiting on track number 1, prepared to score first in snail races. Snowdrop the Shy Rabbit is shuffling her feet on track number 2, eager to show you how to do rabbit show jumping. And getting ready on track number 3, BonBon the Donkey will explain who carries whom during a donkey marathon—does a donkey carry a human on their back, or is it the other way around? And don't miss up on a load of other headstrong, ardent, bored, and quick-to-learn lovelies; ones who'll tell you, among other things, how to do the elephant slam dunk or how a lazy feline can change cat agility rules. Woofky the Husky will give you a dogsled ride and you'll run like the wind with Phantom the Black Horse!