This is an agility dog (Photo 2) with a pulled Achilles tendon. Notice the red spot (indicating a warmer area) at the attachment of the left Achilles tendon to the hock. The presenting complaint was that the dog's times would start slowing down by the 2nd or 3rd day of a trial.

Here is the right wrist and toes in a young team sled dog (sprint) 2 days after a race. (Photo 3) This was a maintenance check to keep on top of any training stresses. Note the areas of more intense red in the wrist and toes of the right front. We used this information to examine physically and discuss why this dog might be stressing the right front. He was adjusted chiropractically and his booties and stretching regimen were changed.

This is scanning from above onto a dog's spine, (Photo 4) head is at the bottom and tail at the top, during a pre-race check-in. The musher had concerns with a sudden onset of a lack of drive. This is a wheel dog from a distance team that completed the Iditarod last year. She had just gotten new harnesses with a slightly different design...notice the heat on right ribcage (and musher's inside ball of left foot). Probably a harness and/or chronic crookedness issue.

Here is one of those avalanche dogs with the harness problems. It is pretty hard to miss the hot area across the front of the right shoulder, and note how the harness is fitting. I consider this a MAJOR problem, especially in a dog that might have to be backcountry searching in deep snow for the day. There was no clinical lameness yet, but I guarantee that there WILL be if this situation is not fixed. (Photo 5 & 6)

I hope you can see what potential this imaging has for performance dogs. Not only can certain injuries be identified faster, but it can also be an excellent device to monitor conditioning, equipment use and return from injury. You don't have to be a veterinarian to acquire and use a thermal imaging camera, although you would need a veterinarian's help in interpreting images if you are a lay person. In the continental US, the main supplier for thermal cameras and training is Vetel Diagnostics (www.veteldiagnostics.com). Camera costs are coming down as technology improves and new models come onto the market.

And last, but not least. Sometimes I use the camera just to have fun and remember that it is all about the team...just a slightly different perspective on it. (Magazine cover photo.)