

**Top team:**  
LandSAR training  
safety officer  
Matt Gunn, of  
Wanaka, and  
Rocket during the  
avalanche  
assessment  
camp.



# Avalanche helpers put through paces

**John Edens** in Queenstown

An avalanche has swept through a popular ski run, an unknown number of people are buried and time is fast running out to find them alive.

This scenario was used to test the Land Search and Rescue avalanche dog teams during a training and assessment weekend at Cardrona skifield and Snow Farm.

After an avalanche, a dog team is the fastest way to find any buried victims.

Teams were tested by a spring snow dump and blizzard-like conditions

LandSAR acting national training co-ordinator Fritz van Rooden said two dozen handlers and police attended the camp.

Qualified dog teams were re-examined and new teams would be qualified after the assessment, he said.

"It's always good to train when it's difficult conditions because it could be what you're going to get in real life.

"It builds confidence in the dog

teams, changing winds, terrible snow conditions and they're still nailing the subjects."

To become operational, a dog must be able to find two buried subjects, including an article of clothing or a pack, and cover a designated search area in 20 minutes.

New Zealand police dog training officer Senior Sergeant Chris Best said it was very pleasing to see quality dog teams become operational.

"The time and effort that these volunteers put into their dogs amazes me."

LandSAR search dogs avalanche co-ordinator Karyn Robertson said the camp, in trying conditions, was a success.

"A big thanks to Cardrona skifield for allowing us to use terrain and resources at short notice and great news for the Snow Farm with a timely dump of snow allowing us to complete the course on site as originally planned."

The assessment camp ends today with a search and rescue exercise known as a SAREX.

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