

Fat Cats & Dead Dogs

The dogs need a penny in the pound for greyhound welfare



Greyhound racing – a cruel sport?

The League Against Cruel Sports believes that greyhound racing is in urgent need of reform through statutory regulation.

Greyhounds are made to suffer cruelly before, during and after their racing careers.

This suffering is unnecessary. It is cruel. And it is preventable.

It is a scandal that the industry has not resolved the problems of greyhound suffering. Given their failure to do so, the League Against Cruel Sports will campaign for protection for greyhounds to be included in the Government's forthcoming Animal Welfare Bill.

The bookmaking industry takes in £2.1 billion per year from betting on greyhound racing, yet just 3p in every £100 bet is spent on retirement provision for greyhounds.

We believe that a compulsory levy of 1p in the pound on the bookmaker's turnover is vital if the welfare problems associated with the greyhound racing industry are to be addressed.



before

Greyhound suffering

It is estimated that every year in the UK 5,500 greyhounds are bred for racing, but around 2,000 of these greyhound puppies vanish before even being registered as racing dogs. Most are believed to be killed because they are surplus to the requirements of the racing industry.

The same problem of over-breeding occurs on a larger scale in Ireland, which provides three quarters of the greyhounds racing on UK tracks.

The League Against Cruel Sports believes that it is wrong to over-breed greyhounds for sport.

Legislation should provide for:

- Licensing of greyhound breeders, the registration from birth of all puppies, and full publication of statistics.
- Breeders should accept full responsibility for all puppies born and those who over-produce and kill puppies should lose their licences, or bookmakers should provide puppy sanctuaries.

A penny in the pound

A statutory levy on bookmaking income would generate £21 million per annum, to be spent on:

- Finding homes for the 12,000 dogs that are surplus to the industry's requirements every year (10,000 leaving racing, and around 2,000 never starting their careers).
- A major advertising campaign to encourage the ownership of retired greyhounds.
- Grants to upgrade tracks, kennels, and track surfaces in the interests of dog welfare (it may be necessary to repeat this procedure as knowledge of dog safety improves).
- Microchipping of all dogs currently registered, whether racing or retired, and all new puppies to be microchipped.
- A DNA register of all greyhounds.
- Independent vets.
- Funding greyhound sanctuaries.
- The cost of moving to larger, brownfield, out-of-town sites – this should be largely self-funding if the tracks sell off their current sites.

before, during and after their racing careers

during

Greyhounds are currently seen as commodities for the racing industry, with insufficient care given to their welfare needs. Dogs have very short careers, due to the stress caused by repeated minor injuries.

In particular, dogs are frequently injured by having to run round tight bends or to run with minor injuries. The majority of serious injuries happen on bends. The smaller the bend, the larger the amount of centrifugal force exerted on the dogs' joints as they run – this leads to joint problems and injuries. Paddy Sweeney MRCVS, Britain's best known greyhound racing vet, argues that tracks should have larger radii – at least 80m – to enable greyhounds to run upright around bends.

Some tracks have no vets, yet where there are on-track vets, they are employed by racing promoters. This means that they can come under strong pressure not to restrict dogs with minor injuries from racing, which would disrupt the racing and betting calendar.

Vets also have very little time to examine the dogs, making it difficult to spot minor injuries. They are not allowed to stop meetings if the track conditions are poor, which can also increase the likelihood of dogs being injured.

There have been several cases where poor track or kennel standards have led to greyhounds dying or being seriously injured – such as the death from heat exhaustion of the dog Football Focus at Catford stadium in August 2002.

Trainers also need more money to be able to improve training provision for kennel hands (enabling them, for example, to do NVQs), and to ensure that all trainers' kennels have a high enough ratio of kennel hands to dogs.

The League Against Cruel Sports wants to see legislation to provide for:

- Vets to be employed at all tracks, and to be independent of the greyhound racing industry.
- Full rights for trainers to withdraw injured dogs subject to veterinary certification, or for vets to stop race meetings in appropriate circumstances.
- Much higher standards at track and trainers' kennels, and frequent on-the-spot inspections.
- A move to larger radius tracks.

after

10,000 greyhounds retire from British greyhound racing every year, and most are then untraceable. Only around 2,000 per year are known to be rehomed by greyhound welfare groups.

A large number of retiring greyhounds die; too many are put down inhumanely, dumped on the side of motorways, mutilated, or otherwise horrendously injured. One of the worst cases was in Scotland in 1994, when 19 greyhounds were found dumped in a quarry. Dogs have been injected with antifreeze to kill them, or simply abandoned without food and left to die. These cases sound horrendous, but such cruelty is all too common.

Greyhounds are currently identified by ear tattoos – this is supposed to mean that owners who mistreat or abandon their dogs can be identified. However, this has led to unscrupulous owners cutting their dog's ear off before killing or dumping it.

A better solution would be to microchip all dogs from birth, using intra-muscular techniques, and back this up with a DNA registry, so that all dogs can be readily identified. The register must also be readily available, so that owners or trainers who mistreat greyhounds can be found and prosecuted.

It is unacceptable that so many greyhounds die every year. A strategy needs to be put in place to ensure life-long homes for all retired greyhounds.



Whilst greyhound owners should take responsibility for their dogs, the industry must accept its responsibility too. An effective strategy would see a major increase in the re-homing of greyhounds and would require a substantial advertising campaign.

These dogs are excellent urban or rural pets, as their exercise

requirements are not large. Only a 1.6% increase in UK dog ownership would be required to provide homes for all greyhounds – an extra 0.4% of dog-owning households.

Properly regulated greyhound sanctuaries should be provided by the industry to provide accommodation for all retired greyhounds until a home is found for them.

Why Government intervention is needed

In 1991, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee conducted an inquiry into the greyhound industry. Their report, whilst concentrating on the gambling aspects of the industry, did also refer to animal welfare concerns, in particular to the fate of dogs after their racing career ends.

Since this inquiry, greyhound welfare has hardly improved. The sanctuaries which MPs recommended, to be financed from industry profits, have not materialised. The official Retired Greyhounds Trust only re-homed 2,000 greyhounds last year, compared to the 10,000 greyhounds that retire from racing every year. The disappearance of greyhounds that retire or simply never make it to the track is still a major problem. Unsuitable tracks with bends continue to cause injuries to greyhounds.

The gambling industry, which takes in £2.1 billion per year from greyhound racing, appears not to feel the need to make a major financial contribution to animal welfare.

The greyhound industry does not protest about the lack of funding for better welfare. The British Greyhound Racing Board (the industry's representative body) and the National Greyhound Racing Club (the industry's supervisory body) were each invited to contribute to the Government's initial public consultation on its planned Animal Welfare Bill.

Neither thought that greyhound welfare was sufficiently important to respond.

In May 2002, the greyhound industry signed up to a 'Charter for the Racing Greyhound' and a 'guide to best practice'. The Charter is aspirational, not binding, and does not cover such basic issues as independence of vets, track radii, the ability of vets to withdraw dogs from races and the rehoming of all retired greyhounds.

A proper charter would be compulsory and would require proper funding from the bookmaking industry, which has thus far proven unwilling to make the substantial financial contributions needed.

The League believes that a penny in the pound of bookmakers' greyhound racing turnover is needed to fund better greyhound welfare. The industry must be reformed and must take full responsibility for the welfare of the dogs on which its profits rest.

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