

In Brief

Rabbit meat

Rabbit meat is regarded by many as the ultimate food for racing greyhounds. It contains slightly more protein than beef, but is low in fat and in most cases a supplement of fat at the rate of one tablespoon of lard, suet or fresh meat trimmings for each 300gms of rabbit meat is recommended.

Rabbit meat contains the highest level of natural creatine, a high-energy sugar based compound that is used as an initial energy source for acceleration during a race. Rabbit meat contains 4gms of creatine per 100gms as compared to less than 1 gm for beef.

The high level of creatine is due to the sprint capacity of rabbits to escape predators requiring that they have a very high acceleration speed over a short distance.

Rabbit meat should be introduced slowly to the ration and in some countries because rabbits can carry tapeworm cysts as an intermediate host for dog tapeworms.

It is recommended the meat be carefully inspected and boiled for 10 minutes prior to feeding. However, this procedure may destroy much of the natural creatine content.

Hitting the line

There are a number of ways to boost the energy of a greyhound to help it "hit the line" at the end of 500-700m races.

The optimum balance of starch, protein and fat is an important guideline to ensure this. But a supplement of creatine, a highenergy sugar compound that provides energy for acceleration for the first 10- 15 seconds of a race can help to conserve muscle energy (glycogen) for the finishing stages of a race. Feeding 12-15% fat will also help conserve some muscle glycogen.

Providing 150-200iu of Vitamin E for the last 2-3 days before racing can also increase the efficiency of oxygen use and conserve muscle glycogen for the home gallop.

An examination of back and hind limb muscles should always be undertaken when a dog pulls up after a race.

Mild cramping can cause a loss of sprint ability in the home straight as evidenced by hard and sore back and limb muscles.

If a dog is cramping, 150-200iu Vitamin E as above, and two slow release potassium tablets over the tongue about four hours before racing, particularly if a dog is nervous or excitable, is recommended.

OUT OF SORTS

There are a number of cardinal signs to evaluate general health.

These include: Temperature (above 38.3 deg is a sign of infection);

Colour of mucous membranes (a pale colour is an indication of anaemia, a dark colour normally indicates dehydration);

Blood capillary refill by pressing the gums in front of the top canine tooth with the forefinger and then releasing - slow return of blood colour indicated poor blood pressure, circulation stress or dehydration, and a dry nose is a sign that the greyhound is off colour and not interested in licking its nose to concentrate odours.

Overall, body temperature taken early in the morning and evening is a useful guide to infective processes and dehydration (slow skin pinch and dark, dry gums and belly tuck up) is a sign of low water intake or excessive loss due to panting or diarrhoea.

(Reprinted courtesy Greyhound Star)