

GREYHOUND TRAINING USA v AUST

By JIM GANNON



When it comes to comparing greyhound races throughout the world, there is not a lot of difference.

Races fall into a fairly small range of 6 - 8 contestants, out of starting boxes, on a sand or grass U-turn or circle track, with either an inside or outside lure and over a fairly limited range of distances. However, when it comes to comparing the structure of the greyhound industries in these two countries we do notice some major differences.

This is probably due to the nature of proprietary racing in USA where a small number of trainers are contracted to supply a certain number of greyhounds for each race meeting, with these contestants housed in trackside kennels owned and leased by the Track Management.

Come to think of it - do you see any similar trend developing here in Australia, where a few big kennels seem to be entering a lot more greyhounds for race meetings? Do you notice any falling off in numbers of small time hobby trainers entering and winning races where some big kennel entries outnumber them?

Are volunteers for trials and club maintenance becoming scarce on the ground? Hmm! I wonder? My veterinary colleague, Dr. Meisen Mok in Colorado USA, who breeds greyhounds and supplies them to a contracted kennel trainer, has summarised the local situation for us - pointing out that

It is important to realise that in



the USA, trainers often are in charge of anywhere between 30 to 120 dogs at any one time.

It is clear to us here in Australia that the Track (Club) Management has total control of their racing career.

Which raises the question - is this a good thing or not? Do we want to follow that path?

Dr. Mok continues, "Training the racing Greyhound at the track varies. Greyhound trainers/managers now days are largely a cross between chef and athletic trainer.

"The basic formula fed to the race dog is 4D meat (Cattle that are Down and cannot stand, Diseased, Dying, or Dead) mixed with dry kibbled dog food.

Trainers add other supplements based on their preference. Supplements might include, but are not limited to, stews, vegetables, pasta, oatmeal, vitamins, electrolytes, fruits and other meat sources such as fish.

Dogs are fed either once or twice a day to maintain their "set weight" which is the established weight at which the trainer feels his/her dog races best.

Often a small meal prior to race time is given, with the process called "snacking". Again the snack's composition is at the trainer's preference.

Feeding times, post-race feeding, and "turning-out" (letting the greyhound out of its kennel to relieve itself or "empty out") are also by trainer preference".

Now that is not very different from our Australian program - we feed pet shop meat, kangaroo, or chicken - all with preservative as in USA, so Vitamin B1 deficiency will occur if the diet is not supplemented suitably.

This deficiency problem here and in USA is called Chastec Disease.

In USA, the athletic trainer portion of a trainer's job involves developing an exercise routine for the greyhounds.

This may simply be maintaining the "active" dog, that is, just keeping the dog on its current racing schedule under the control of the track management/Racing Secretary, so that its fitness is maintained by that alone.

At other times the training program is modified for rehabilitation postinjury, with exercise composed mainly of walking, sprinting and schooling/trialing at various distances".

Again, our Australian situation is very similar - as it largely is world wide - with racing fitness being the responsibility of the trainer, based on that same range of exercise options - walking, swimming, free running, handslipping, and trialing, for fitness and post-injury recovery. "Injury detection is most crucial, and in USA is detected through physical examination or watching the greyhound's action in the

kennel or during racing.

"The treatment of any injury is also the responsibility of, and at the discretion of, the trainer - with or without veterinary aid".

This same injury detection and therapy protocol applies in Australia as it does in USA, although from personal observation when in USA, I am convinced there can be no doubt that our trainers are better informed on the nature and detection of racing injuries, and, we are more skilled in the use of a greater range of therapy modalities such as Ultrasound,

Faradism, Laser, Magnetic Field, Manipulation, and Hydrobathing.

"Finally, in USA, the trainer is in charge of oestrus control in the females, and worming/external parasite control for all of the greyhounds in his kennel, while vaccination status is maintained by the trainer and/or the veterinarian affiliated with the particular kennel" - which, of course, is no different at all in principle from the situation here in Australia.

So overall, the actual feeding, training, health and welfare

commitments are pretty well the same in USA as they are here.

The big difference lies in the greater range of freedom and options open to our trainers compared with their USA counterparts - most notably in the independence of our kennel ownership; the Australian option to nominate for a race at any track in any State; and, for the place that our smaller, hobby, trainers still have in our greyhound racing industry.

Which system do you prefer ?