



An alarming percentage of British Greyhounds who sustain injuries on the

# The disappearing

One of the many excuses from Greyhound racing defenders is that these dogs love to run. They are built to sprint over short distances at full speed. They are the earth's fastest-accelerating land animals, even quicker off the mark than the cheetah (which has a higher top speed). But Greyhounds have been running long before we put them on tracks for our own amusement.

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These tracks are causing problems, according to the Greyhound protection group Greyt Exploitations. The group hopes that its new database of injuries and race records will help to understand just how many racing Greyhounds are 'disappearing' into the system, and why.

Over a period of four years, a small army of volunteers has been collecting the racing results from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) website and recording dogs that did not finish a race. More recently, the group invested in satellite equipment to monitor and record all live racing transmitted to the bookmaker shops and then created a catalogue of injury videos as evidence to back up the findings.

Trudy Baker of Greyt Exploitations explains, "We wanted to expose the high rate of injury because we have always

thought that dog racing was in breach of the Animal Welfare Act, which clearly states that an animal has 'to be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease'. Clearly this is not the case when dogs are raced on a dangerously configured track – long fast straights and tight bends.

## Accident-prone

"For the record, the industry is self-regulated and does not enforce the AWA, and nor do any other authorities – such as the RSPCA, police or local authorities. Therefore, racing Greyhounds are failing to be protected under primary legislation."

According to Greyt Exploitations, an estimated 1,500 Greyhounds are put to sleep on British racing circuits or soon after a race every year, decisions taken when it is deemed 'uneconomical' for them to receive treatment for their

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## Global issue

Shocking statistics were reported this autumn about the Greyhound racing industry in Australia. Documentation revealed that between 13,000 and 17,000 Greyhounds are killed each year, after being unable to race competitively. Only around four Australian racing Greyhounds out of every hundred reach the age of 42 months old. The cruel practices of some trainers were also flagged up, with up to 90 per cent believed to have used live bait, such as rabbits, to 'blood' their Greyhounds, a practice believed to improve a dog's motivation.

back never race again. But where are they going?

# g dogs

injuries, considering their now poor racing prospects. This is well within the rules. In fact, over 30 per cent of injuries result in the dog in question never racing again. And what injuries they are.

Most collisions happen at the first bend. The dogs are released from the starting boxes and are evenly spaced apart down the first straight, but as they approach that first corner, they bunch up together to get the inside line. At this point they have reached full speed, and if a dog gets the spacing wrong, and if one dog clips another and knocks it off balance, the effects can be catastrophic.

It isn't only the very nature of the oval track that can cause accidents. Greyt Exploitations claims that often these tracks are poorly maintained, with management unwilling to pay for expensive consistent resurfacing. Instead, 'patch jobs'

are done here and there, which cause poor drainage and create an uneven and unpredictable surface for the Greyhounds, leading to more trips and falls.

The pressure on individual tracks to keep producing race after race is immense. UK Greyhound racing is shown in betting shops and online for up to 10 or 11 hours every day. This has led to dogs being raced in all weathers, including a two-hour lightning storm at a Newcastle track in August. Remember that freakishly hot day in July this year? Greyhounds were still raced regardless.

## Risky business

The industry is declining in this country, and has been for many years, but it is still a colossal moneymaker nevertheless, with an estimated £2.5 billion wagered annually. Greyt Exploitations claims the demands

made by bookmakers leads to individual dogs being raced too frequently, increasing the risk of injuries further.

But not everyone believes that Greyt Exploitations' database is a real representation of how the industry is treating its runners. Simon Banks of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain told Dogs Today, "The assumption that Greyhounds who suffer injuries and then no longer race 'disappear' is incorrect, because all retirements are recorded on a form that owners send to the GBGB, as they are obliged to under Rule 18 of the GBGB Rules of Racing. Should any dog not run for six months, the owner is sent a retirement form and the matter is investigated, should the form not be returned in a timely manner or if the GBGB welfare team have concerns with its contents."

"A high proportion of dogs are retired following an injury,

which is not unusual. Looking at the database, I note that a Greyhound called Ardera Twirl is reported to have finished lame at Crayford on 3 March 2010 and didn't race again. Presumably, Twirl is one of Greyt Exploitations' 'unaccounted for', missing Greyhounds. She lives happily with me in south London."

But unfortunately, Simon Banks would not, or could not, provide any information on the whereabouts of any Greyhounds other than his own. When questioned on what a 'high proportion' of dogs retired on account of injury actually means in terms of numbers, Simon admitted that the GBGB doesn't actually have a record of this, explaining that the retirement form only states where the dog is going, not the reason why he or she

is being retired. When pressed on the proportion of dogs listed as put to sleep on their form, he declined to provide figures – despite claiming the return rate of the form is 100 per cent.

Grey Exploitations too have been met with something of a wall of silence from the GBGB. Finding they were unable to fill the holes in their database, as the GBGB were unwilling to provide answers to what happened to injured dogs, Greyt Exploitations decided to simply identify which dogs remain unaccounted for, and keep their own scrutiny out of it. The full database can be found at [www.greytexploitations-greyhound-data.com](http://www.greytexploitations-greyhound-data.com)

It is now the industry's move. While Simon Banks told Dogs Today that the database was based on "weak data, badly analysed", the GBGB have yet to step up and show the press and the public that they are instead the keepers of credible facts and figures, and they have nothing to hide. It would be wonderful for them to prove that all retired racers have lovely homes, like Simon's own. Unfortunately, the sheer number of dogs this industry churns out every year makes that very difficult indeed.

But still the racing industry likes to stress the amount of money they put into rehoming schemes. The industry's official funding body, the British Greyhound Racing Fund, distributes a levy they receive from the bookmakers and provides the Retired Greyhound Trust with an annual grant, with the total in 2013 amounting to £1.4 million. This isn't enough.

## Home run

For those Greyhounds lucky to have a semblance of a normal life after racing, the Retired Greyhound Trust finds homes for around 4,000 of them annually – but this is only around half of the number exiting the sport. Why should other charities or the public or the government intervene to alleviate the problem of these homeless hounds, while others are bred continuously to find the next champion and provide a product for betting shops?

Perhaps change is due. At the end of September, the government announced a parliamentary inquiry into the Greyhound racing industry, and Greyt Exploitations has been asked to submit evidence. We eagerly await the results. ★

On 3 February 2015 at a Newcastle dog track, Calzaghe Peppe, a brindle male, was involved in a collision at the first bend. It was the 18-month-old's first ever race – and his last. A broken front leg meant he was quickly destroyed by the track vet.

