

WHEN IS A DOG NOT A DOG?



WHEN IT'S A GREYHOUND IN KANSAS



That's how Bev Chapman, a reporter for Kansas City's ABC-TV affiliate, KMBC-TV, began a news report in February that, needless to say, attracted a lot of interest. Though it sounds like a schoolyard riddle, it's no joke. Two years after the Pari-Mutuel Racing Act was passed in Kansas, the state law prohibiting cruelty against companion animals was changed to specifically exclude racing greyhounds. In Kansas, a greyhound is simply not a dog! House Bill 2508, filed by the national greyhound protection group GREY2K USA in the House Agricultural Committee, is looking to change this strange anomaly.

Gary Guiccione, Executive Director of the National Greyhound Association (NGA), calls the argument "absurd" and says the reason greyhounds are excluded is because they aren't bred to be pets. But Kevin Neuman of Overland Park, who testified in support of the bill, feels that humane laws should apply to all dogs. "Protect greyhounds just like collies or German shepherds or any other breed of dog," urges Neuman who is a

long-time greyhound rescuer and officer of GREY2K USA.

History tells us that these swift and graceful hounds are the descendents of dogs bred by Bedouin tribes in North Africa and Asia several thousand years ago. Images of their sleek bodies grace Egyptian mummy cases, Greek vases and other artifacts. The second fastest animal on earth, greyhounds served as hunting dogs during the Renaissance and Middle Ages and were the prized companions of royalty. Welsh King Dda even made killing a greyhound punishable by death.

After the mechanical lure was invented in modern times, however, the lives of greyhounds changed dramatically. Dog tracks began springing up all over the United States. The NGA was formed in Abilene, Kansas, to promote a booming new industry. State regulatory agencies were created to oversee racing and share in the profits.

TODAY: A DECLINING INDUSTRY

Today, the once lucrative business of greyhound racing is shrinking and, happily, racetracks are closing nationwide. In fact, a total of eight states

have made greyhound racing illegal in the last 11 years. Despite this welcome trend, 45 facilities in 14 states still remain. Annual subsidies from friendly legislators and repeated tax breaks have provided track owners with the help they need, temporarily insulating them from market forces.

Christine Dorchak, Vice President of GREY2K USA, describes greyhound tracks as "corrupt dinosaurs" that are "only around because of longstanding political friendships." She adds, "It's no mistake that dog track owners are typically leading contributors to political campaigns in the racing states." Take Florida for example—in 2000 the state awarded its dog tracks a \$14 million tax cut. In 2001, Massachusetts legislators gave area tracks a \$5 million subsidy. And so on....

SHORT-TERM INVESTMENTS

The life of a racing greyhound isn't pretty. Spread out across the country, breeding farms produce tens of thousands of dogs a year. Several thousand puppies simply disappear from record. In 2000, for instance, the NGA, which is the registry for rac-

ing greyhounds in North America, reported that 34,141 greyhounds were whelped as potential racers. The same year, only 26,464 greyhounds were individually registered to race at 14-17 months of age. The industry simply cannot explain what is happening to all these puppies.

At the tracks, dogs are kept for 18 to 22 hours a day in tiered crates. Each crate is just large enough for a greyhound to stand or lie down. Bedding generally consists of shredded newspapers or carpet scraps. Greyhounds wear plastic or metal muzzles whenever they are outside, and are sent to race once every three to four days. Their diet usually consists of raw "4-D" meat, which has been deemed unfit for human consumption. Kennel cough, ticks, parasites and fleas are common.

There is a constant turnover and injuries are frequent. Studies performed in Massachusetts and Oregon show that up to 10 percent of greyhounds are seriously injured while racing. Common injuries include broken legs, spinal chord seizures, cardiac arrest and sometimes, electrocution. Dogs who are no longer able to run may be sold for medical experimentation or simply abandoned.

Over 300 private rescue organizations in the United States work tirelessly to adopt out as many greyhounds as possible. Greyhound advocates and the racing industry disagree on the numbers of successful placements, but the NGA admits that at least 7,000 greyhounds are killed by the industry each year simply for lack of homes.

STATE BY STATE

On a brighter note, greyhound racing is something that advocates like Dorchak believe will end in our lifetimes. "If we're smart, we can defeat further subsidies, prevent expanded gambling at racing facilities, and bring greyhounds home where they rightfully belong."

Savvy legislative strategy is the prime ingredient for achieving success. A recent triumph last December

2004 was the closure of the last greyhound park in the Pacific Northwest. Multnomah Greyhound Park of Portland, Oregon, shut its doors for good in December 2004. Pennsylvania made dog racing illegal last June. Florida, the home of 16 greyhound tracks and the majority of breeding farms, is the current focus of advocacy efforts. Recently, Hollywood Greyhound Park in Broward County received voter permission to install slot machines as a means to prop up its business. Advocates are now posed to derail implementation of this scheme in the state legislature.

AROUND THE WORLD

Sadly, greyhound racing is popular in several European countries, Australia and is expanding in Asia. Reports of neglect and abuse in the "sport" worldwide are common and laws protecting animals vary widely. One notable example of abuse in the news recently is in Spain, concerning galgos—native Spanish greyhounds. Animal advocates there have received numerous reports about the shocking practice of disposing of galgos after racing season by hanging or abandoning the dogs in wells. Even though the Spanish government denies the veracity of these reports, dogs are being rescued each week and adopted into loving homes throughout Europe. Thankfully, animal activists around the world are working to help these dogs and others who have become victims of an industry more interested in profits than compassion.

DORIS DAY AND GREYHOUNDS

Doris Day's animal protection organizations first became interested in plights of these dogs long before


the horrors of the industry were widely known. "Greyhound racing has been a top-down issue here for years," says Sara Amundson of DDAL, who is also a board member of GREY2K USA. Since DDAL and GREY2K USA are vested with full lobbying privileges as 501(c)4 nonprofit organizations, no opportunity to effectively lobby for greyhound protection is missed.

It seems public sentiment is on the side of the dogs. KMBC-TV posted an online version of the "greyhounds aren't considered dogs" story along with a "Vote Here" question, asking people if they were in favor of the bill that would grant greyhounds the same protections as other companion animals in the state of Kansas. An overwhelming 98 percent of those who replied—more than 30,000 people—voted YES!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about greyhounds by visiting the GREY2K USA Web site at www.grey2kusa.org or by calling (866) 247-3925.

Write to your state legislators to let them know that you strongly oppose this industry. If there is no racing in your state, be vigilant about any efforts to bring the "sport" in.

Adopt a greyhound! Call the National REGAP Network toll free at 847-217-1836 or visit www.regap.org for information. 

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Photo by: Robert De Haas/Golden State Greyhound Adoption



Photo by: Greyhound Adoptions of Florida

Top: After living their lives in a kennel, retired racers Mel (top) and Charlie were adopted into a loving home. Bottom: Briana Davis with foster dog, Oliver Twist.