

FOLLOWING YOUR BLISS

by Dennis McKeon © Copyright, 2020

Despite the ever-increasing popularity of the retired racing Greyhound as a personal or family pet, there continues to be a "grey" area among many of the greyhound's fan base, concerning exactly what it is that greyhound trainers do, at the racetrack level.

Let's be clear about one thing. Done properly, the job of a greyhound trainer is more like a vocation than it is a profession. While no one receives a pair of angel wings or a golden halo to go with receiving their trainer's license, in so doing, you have essentially become the guardian angel to each and every greyhound entrusted to your care. It's a serious commitment.

Once you take out a license to train greyhounds, you must be prepared to work or to be on call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, with no time off for good behavior---or for February 29th, in the case of a leap year. It might come as a surprise to the casual observer, that even if the racetrack decides to shut down operations for the occasion, our holidays, our holy days and our weekends mean nothing to greyhounds. They still require turning out, feeding, exercise and training, regardless of our social and cultural observances or celebrations.

The aspiring greyhound trainer will, in time and with appropriate dedication, become not only a bonafide greyhound trainer, but a life coach, an athletics coach, a butler/maid, a massage and/or physical therapist, a first-responder, a groomer, a valet, a sanitation manager, a chef, a dietitian, a nurse, a psychoanalyst, a playground monitor, a gym teacher, a talent scout and coordinator---a veritable "chief cook and bottle washer" to a colony of greyhounds.

We've all heard the expression which advises that one "cannot be all things to all people". It doesn't apply to greyhounds, or to their trainers. The greyhound trainer must indeed be all things to all of his/her greyhounds, if he/she wishes to maximize their potential, and to create an atmosphere and environment for them which is conducive to everyone's success.

Stress, whether it is naturally, athletically induced, environmentally induced, or brought into the kennel via human foible and fallibility, is a major, mitigating factor to that desired success. The wise trainer makes sure all of his/her greyhounds feel completely comfortable and secure at all times. The kennel is their home, and their sleeping compartments are their castles. Each of them should feel as if they are king or queen of that arrangement, however humble it may be.

Since greyhounds are born with the desire to race and compete, the greyhound trainer does not actually teach this to his/her greyhounds. His/her job is to evaluate them, and to train them, by repetition---or as human coaches might say, by taking "reps"---up to a competitive level of refinement of their innate skills, and to an optimal level of fitness. Rushing a greyhound from schooling races to official racing, before that greyhound has shown an ability to at least cope with the challenges of racing in a pack, is a recipe for disaster. As I've mentioned many times before, concerning greyhounds in all stages of their lives, and in all of our endeavors with them:

If you hurry them up, they will make you wait.

The successful, observant greyhound trainer is either born with or develops an eye for pace, and for greyhound bio mechanics. Ultimately, to the point where he/she can reasonably assess talent or

potential in an individual, with or without competition. Those of us who are familiar with Thoroughbred horse racing, have all probably heard experts opine that a good jockey "has a stopwatch" in his/her head. So do some very good greyhound trainers.

Visually and manually learning to critically observe and then to properly examine one's greyhounds, and developing an affinity for such things---and for grasping the essence and impact of stride, locomotion, gravity, centrifugal and centripetal forces upon the greyhounds' physical organism---will go a long way toward minimizing injury, and preventing many minor injuries from becoming major ones.

While it should go without saying that these things are much more easily said than done, and more easily acknowledged than learned, we'll say it anyway, for those in the bleachers. However, despite the many challenges that becoming a greyhound trainer presents to the initiate, it is rare in this day and age, to find a career where you are actually paid for doing something that you might happily do for free, were you independently wealthy.