

KEEN GREYHOUNDS

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We often read, on social media, messages from people who are having some difficulty either understanding or coping with certain retired greyhound behaviors. Usually, advice from a remarkable array of adoption professionals, experienced adopters, even veterinarians and racing professionals is immediately forthcoming. One thing they are seldom told, but something they need to know, is that racing greyhounds are not bred to be pets.

That particular aspect of selectivity never enters into the decision of whether or not the individual is a greyhound worthy of carrying on with the breed. Contemporary Racing Greyhounds are performance dogs, and superior performance in head to head competition is what usually determines who does and who doesn't get to input the gene pool.

"Petability" is not one of the criteria used in this selection process involving the breeding of modern racing greyhounds. Many greyhounds, while they are superb track athletes and quite prolific as breeders, can have personality traits or exhibit certain behaviors that are not necessarily desirable in a pet, or conducive toward making an easy adjustment to life as a companion dog or family pet.

However, one attribute that is quite desirable in a racing dog, and in one who might be used for breeding, is what we term "keen-ness". This involves a heightened ability to perceive one's surroundings, and a heightened ability to react quickly and decisively to them. "Keen-ness", in a track racer, is expressed as an irrepressible willingness to compete in racing competition, or to simply chase with abandon. Keen-ness, in a sire or dam, is something we want them to pass onto their offspring.

Especially keen dogs are very focused, often to the point where they can be oblivious to the humans around them. When something gets their blood up, the result can be less than ideal in a non-sporting, uncontrolled venue.

These unusual powers of perception can also predispose them to skittishness and nervousness, as they inevitably perceive and react to the known as well as the unknown, quite often to a degree not always in common with other breeds.

Remember this--your retired greyhound, at any given moment, in any novel situation, is, in his own mind, both predator and prey.

This feral aspect is held very close beneath their thin skin, as a result of centuries of highly selective breeding to a specific, elementary function. It is the essence of who they are.

Now, seldom are these unique qualities deal breakers to potential adopters--but it is important to understand that greyhounds are primal, reactive, competitive dogs by nature, and when they are bred for "racing temperament", it isn't for the same sort of temperamental qualities that we might wish to see in a Pug or a Maltese.

The fact that so many retiring racing greyhounds are still able to make a seamless adjustment in the face of a quantum leap of change in their lives, from racing athlete to family pet, is a tribute to their own innate intelligence and already learned faith in their humans.

Their coursing and racing heritage, and the primal, feral, mystical, ethereal aspects of their nature that it preserves, once taken into account, understood and embraced, are just a bonus.