

THE FOOD CONUNDRUM

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One of the most frustrating problems for the new greyhound adopter, is choosing what food should they should use, from among the incredible array of dry, kibbled foodstuffs that are readily available, to nourish their recent arrival.

These foodstuffs are often questionably marketed as “complete nutrition”, and the prices can range anywhere from half a dollar, to well over a dollar a pound. So, the new adopter decides upon one or the other, and presents it to their new greyhound, for his/her approval.

Often, the greyhound’s reaction is less than enthusiastic, if not bordering on downright incredulity. When the greyhound does deign to choke down this foreign and unpleasant concoction, just as often, the result is an even more unpleasant, intestinal catharsis.

So the adopter, wanting to do the best he/she can for their new greyhound, then decides to buy a more expensive and more hyperbolically marketed kibble--- some of which can cost quite a bit more per pound than real meat---only to have Mister or Miss Persnickety Needlenose, raise that needle-nose skyward in contempt, and either refuse to eat, or once again, grudgingly consume the substance, only to turn it into a repulsive, gurgling, projectile liquid, hours later.

So, the understandably upset and frustrated adopter turns to social media for advice. There, he or she is subjected to a virtual barrage of suggestions, which span the known universe of dog foods and additives, from the most astonishingly expensive “designer” concoctions, to the most basic, inexpensive, rancid-smelling commercial kibbles---all of them, incidentally, severely lacking the sensory and visceral appeal of the raw meat-based diets that greyhounds are used to consuming.

The racing greyhound’s “staple food”, which can comprise 60-70 percent or more of its diet prior to retirement, is almost always beef.

Racing greyhounds in America are fed “not fit for human consumption” beef. And that is because greyhounds are not human, and “not fit for human consumption” doesn’t mean that it isn’t perfectly fit for canine consumption. This beef comprises the basis of their diet, along with kibble of choice, and a variety of other additives, like vegetables, fish, pasta, barley, rice, peaches, buttermilk, yogurt, molasses, or bone meal, to mention a few, depending upon the trainers’ or breeders’ preference.

(It should be noted at this time, that there is no FDA or USDA classification of meat by “letter grading”--- and thus there is no FDA or USDA classification called “4D”, as you may have been led to believe by various and sundry greyhound mythologists. Meat is graded on a “pass or fail” system, and is either deemed fit, or not fit for human consumption---in the latter case, it may be used to feed priceless and rare zoo carnivores, processed into commercial dogs foods used by the vast majority of pet owners, or used to feed racing greyhounds).

Be that as it may, greyhound breeders and trainers have had hundreds of years to experiment with their greyhounds’ diets. Everything from soup-to-nuts has been tried, at one time or another, in order to gain a legal performance advantage over one’s competitors. It is pretty much agreed upon, by trainers and breeders alike, that beef, as the basis of the greyhound’s diet, produces the best results.

Now, when I trained them for a living, I never handled a greyhound who exhibited symptoms of chronic digestive problems.

Greyhound trainers spend a lot of time assessing the volume, shape, color and consistency of their greyhounds' digestive output, as it is often reflective of how well the dog is feeling, or whether or not there are internal parasites afflicting them. If one had a greyhound who was discomforted or otherwise indisposed by their food, it would be quite apparent, via the trainer's ritual stool examinations and observations of the dog in performance, or in day-to-day activity.

So, it would seem that for many greyhounds, transitioning from a meat-based diet as an active racer, to a kibble-based diet as a retired pet, is fraught with possibilities. Not many of them are particularly promising or pleasant.

We often read of adopters who have tried a daisy chain of relatively new, excruciatingly expensive, "designer" kibbles. Novel, cleverly marketed versions of these products seem to spring up every month or so, and may become "flavor-of-the-month" choice for frazzled greyhound adopters and their disgruntled greyhounds. It is unclear to me where the research, development and testing of these products is done---and who does it, under what conditions, and under whose supervision.

Nevertheless, with any luck, after trying a dozen or so various foodstuffs, the adopter may happen upon one which agrees with his greyhound, and with which the greyhound is comfortable. Many adopters can't afford them, and "settle" for a less expensive, commercial kibble.

Whether they are adequately nourished by any of these products, is another question, for another day.

Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of pet meat wholesalers, and to the expense of store-bought meats, many adopters have no choice but to resign their greyhounds to an unappealing diet of dried kibble, whatever the brand, or the hype that goes along with it.

Some pet owners have found that the BARF diet---bones and raw food---is a panacea for the retired greyhound's digestive complications. This sort of diet, or variations upon it, have become popular among aficionados of many breeds, and it more closely resembles the sort of diet that greyhounds are fed while actively training and racing.

There are ample online resources which explain this diet, or "raw feeding" for those who feel it may be of benefit for their greyhounds, and it is not my intent here, to go into detail explaining it. However, the feedback I receive from greyhound adopters who have transitioned their pets from kibble-based diets to "raw" diets, has been unanimously positive.

Now, if you have found an affordable kibble diet that pleases your greyhound, and if your greyhound is happy, healthy and otherwise thriving, there is no need to change or experiment. Each and every greyhound is a law unto themselves. What works for Rover may not work as well for Clover.

For those adopters who are struggling with finding a foodstuff or foodstuffs that suit your greyhound, my advice is to keep in mind what grew, nourished and sustained your greyhound prior to his/her retirement, and brought them to the point where they seized control of your couch.