

THE MYTH OF THE LAZY GREYHOUND

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I can recall the first time I visited a greyhound breeding facility. It was a relatively small establishment, but well planned and laid out. There must have been close to one hundred greyhounds, of all ages, on the premises. What struck me, was the level of activity among the dogs, as we went from building to building, and from kennel run to kennel run.

We immediately became the most important thing in the galaxy to an assortment of puppies, saplings, and brood females. Their energy and enthusiasm was overwhelming. We stepped back, and began to watch the saplings race up and down the long, straight runs. The corps d'esprit was contagious, from pack to pack and from one run to the next, and soon the entire colony of youngsters was competing with one another, up and down the runs, pausing only once in a while, to bark and display their fierceness to one another. Even the brood bitches joined in the cacophony. I remember thinking that these guys would have had no problem with the grueling wind sprints that sadistic football coaches like to punish their charges with, and otherwise use to help get them into playing shape...or to make them quit.

Now, when I became a greyhound trainer, I learned the importance and techniques of keeping greyhounds on the cutting edge of peak fitness and performance. Which is sometimes a very delicate matter, in a sport where the differences between "All American" and "All Ready For A Couch", are often measured in nanoseconds.

There are basically two schools of thought among trainers, whose dogs are racing in rotation, every fourth, fifth or sixth day---or thereabouts.

The first school posits that once the greyhound is in racing shape, and has reached his/her peak form, they require little to no work in between starts, and this becomes ever more the case, as the rotation "speeds up". For it sometimes does, and it is not entirely uncommon for greyhounds to race every third or fourth day, at some racing venues, or for certain periods of time, depending on how many racing programs are scheduled, and the number of actively racing dogs on site.

The second school of thought, as regards keeping greyhounds at peak fitness levels, suggests that they should be worked in between races, depending upon how much upside the trainer feels is still left to be realized, and that a greyhound should "move" every third or fourth day, regardless. This "move" might be a hard galloping session, or a more leisurely one. It could be a stiff half mile or a mile walk, taken on an in-between day, or even a swim, weather permitting. The trainer may even decide to hand slip the dog at morning schooling, solo, behind the lure, for a short, 300 yards or so, "front end". This can be especially useful for a dog who may have been unsighted in his last race or last several races, and didn't get much out of them, merely following the pack, and not expending full effort. Letting him see the lure, and chase after it, free of traffic or impediments, can sometimes "brave them up", and restore their confidence and verve. If the trainer requires more time for the greyhound in between races, he may take the dog off the active list for a day or two, so that they drop back in the rotation.

Now neither of these schools of thought is necessarily wrong or right, because each and every greyhound is an individual, a law unto themselves. What has worked for Kid, many not work for Gig, and vice versa. The proverbial "grey" area is not necessarily in keeping the greyhound in top form, but is in

realizing when the greyhound has achieved peak fitness, and how one goes about attaining that, for the greyhound.

The trainer often receives young greyhounds, fresh off the “farm”, guaranteed by the breeder or finisher, “ready to race”. This may or may not actually be the case, depending upon the skills and acumen of the individuals involved, and upon how the dogs reacted to being shipped, in many cases, halfway across the country, and how easily they acclimate to their new environment, regain whatever weight they have lost or require, and are again properly hydrated.

In most cases, it is to the trainers’ and the greyhounds’ advantage, to let up on the gas, at this stage. Young, still maturing greyhounds, can benefit greatly from being allowed to settle in and to fill out a bit, after the rigors of the training track at the “finishing” facility, or the breeder’s farm.

To develop a deep fitness base, there is no substitute for walking. Brisk walks of a mile or two, are no problem for a young, vigorous greyhound or trainer. A motorized treadmill, with variable speed, and propped up so that it simulates uphill walking for the greyhound, can be a great aid in this process. Like people, greyhounds learn to walk before they can run, and at square one, this is how the process is best begun.

After a week or so of this daily routine, free galloping can be added to the mix, every day at first, or every other day. The trainer then can decide when to introduce the greyhound to the lure at the racetrack, depending upon how the greyhounds present and act.

Now, at this stage of the game, training is done by increments. It is usually better to err on the side of caution, and begin with shorter hand slips at morning schooling, of 300-400 yards, working their way down to the starting box. A competent trainer can tell when his greyhounds are finally ready to begin official schooling, or when greyhounds he may be bringing back from injury or rest spells, are fit to return to schooling, and then onto the real races. An incompetent trainer prepares them insufficiently, rushes them, and usually winds up waiting longer, than if he had been sufficiently patient and attuned to them in the first place.

Now you may be asking yourselves, “What does all this have to do with me, a simple greyhound pet owner, and my greyhound(s)?”

And my answer would be this:

It has everything to do with your greyhound’s health and future well being. While greyhounds are like all other canines, and can require anywhere from 12-16 hours’ sleep within a 24 hour period, the popular musing, that they are “lazy” by nature, just isn’t the case. There are few breeds of canines that lead more active or busy lives than greyhounds, or of whom more physicality is required, during their preparation and their careers as racers. They don’t suddenly become lazy for perverse reasons that no one can understand. They are often, however, allowed to become lazy.

Physically inactive and mentally un-stimulated greyhounds may become lazy, out of sheer boredom. Now, that being the case, unless the retired greyhound is going to compete in lure coursing or amateur racing, or some other physically demanding sport, there is no reason for a retired greyhound to be in “racing shape”. But neither should they be entirely “out of shape”---underweight and under-hydrated, overweight and over-indulged, or any combination thereof. A brisk, daily, or twice daily walk, is good for

both greyhound and owner, and as in their race training, the duration and intensity can be increased by increments. A bracing galloping session in the back yard, or in a fenced-in area, or a game of lure-poling, can not only physically engage and benefit your greyhound, but can do wonders for his mental and emotional state.

There is so much pure nonsense on social media about greyhounds, it simply boggles the rational mind.

Perhaps foremost, and most regrettably, among those various cultured pearls of un-wisdom, is the idea that greyhounds are all miserable during their lives as racers---the idea that they somehow resented doing what it is that they have been meticulously bred and love to do, and that they must be prevented and protected from indulging in any physical expression that simulates the source of their prior miseries. Nothing in the known universe, could be further from the truth. We're talking light years away.

Greyhounds thrive on, and greatly benefit from physical and mental stimulation. Just like us.

Walking, galloping, and racing one another, are first nature to your greyhound. Not second nature.

The lazy greyhound?

He or she is, more often than not, a matter of nurture---but seldom one of nature.