

Greys and Galgos: Saving Dogs in the UK, Ireland, and Spain

by *Lucinda Read, Greyhound Compassion*



OUR HISTORY

During the 1990s, a small group of friends in the UK came together as a result of their mutual interest in ex-racing greyhounds as pets. We couldn't believe the stories we heard about what our pets had been subjected to whilst racing and were astounded at the racing industry's homing methods: dogs handed over in pubs, car parks and lay-bys. And that was for those lucky enough to find a home. We decided we had to do what

little we could and started to raise money through jumble sales, bucket collections, garden parties, and sponsored dog walks to help the few small, independent shelters who were rescuing these poor abused greyhounds, probably the most exploited dogs after beagles in vivisection at that time.

We knew that the majority of greyhounds racing on UK racetracks originated from Ireland and a visit to Ireland showed us a glimpse of the thousands of greyhounds being bred to

feed the gambling industry its commodity. We were devastated when a local told us that in days gone by greyhound skins had been used for the drums in traditional Irish music.

We were shocked when a farmer told us that he was about to string up the corpse of a cow, once skinned, and let his greyhound puppies feed from the suspended carcass.

At the time the EU was subsidising (thankfully, stopped now) greyhound

breeding in Ireland under its agricultural programme, we were EU tax payers into this system and horrified by the volume of greyhound breeding and the welfare problems associated with racing: something had to be done! We stepped up our fundraising and eventually became a registered charity in the UK.

We incorporated fundraising for the Spanish galgos into our charitable objectives as well after hearing about tens of thousands of galgos being bred for hare coursing annually in Spain in the hope of producing the national champion.

Thousands of galgos were being killed by hanging in the pine groves in the hunting areas, dumped down wells in the countryside or let loose amongst the traffic on the roads in Spanish towns and villages.

We joined forces with Protectora y Santuario Scooby and put our muscle and funds into building its animal shelter in Medina del Campo, Spain. Its largest number of rescues by far are the galgos.

In 2001, we joined forces with World Animal Protection on a research mission into the fate of galgos and everything we feared was borne out in the evidence we found: galgos bred in their thousands, kept in squalid conditions, used for hunting and then cruelly killed or abandoned.

TODAY

Nowadays, hangings are rare and thankfully public opinion is very slowly turning in favour of the galgos. The children of the Spanish people who

shunned the galgos as vermin when we started are now speaking up for them. Some are supporting the Scooby shelter and hundreds demonstrate annually against hunting with galgos in at least thirty Spanish cities where the national championship takes place.

However, it continues to be hard to home galgos in Spain. They are not seen as pets and Scooby homes hundreds of galgos in mainland Europe and some in the USA (now that greyhound racing is waning there).

When we launched Greyhound Compassion we spent a lot of time extolling the virtues of greyhounds as pets. We came up against many misconceptions: high aggression levels, need for lots of exercise, not very cuddly or affectionate. Racing images and the muzzles used in racing did not help the PR for the greyhounds. Anyone who has a greyhound as a pet knows they really are the “45mph couch potato” with limitless affection and loyalty.

The homing successes in the USA gradually translated to the UK and the actress, Annette Crosbie OBE, is a fantastic ambassador for greyhounds here. Now when we are out and about, the public tell us they know greyhounds are top pets and they either have one on their sofa at home or their next dog will be a greyhound.

For many years, greyhound welfare campaigners estimated a significant (tens of thousands) wastage of greyhounds, including: “saplings” not making the grade; treatable injuries resulting in death on “economic grounds”; on-track fatalities; “retirements” at the age of 3-5 years, and ex-racing greyhounds languishing in trainers’ kennels. There was a complete absence of data to show otherwise but we knew dog rescue centres were also full to the brim. In some horrific cases, greyhounds were rescued with ears hacked off to remove the ear tattoo and any traceability.

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EXPOSING THE KILLING

In 2006, The Sunday Times exposed a killing field of greyhounds in the north of England where a builder's merchant had been shooting greyhounds in the head with a bolt-gun for £10 per dog and burying the corpses on his land. Ten thousand greyhounds had been killed over 15 years. This revelation was the wake-up call the UK Government needed about this gambling industry. Sadly, it came too many years after racing started in the UK in 1926. We couldn't bear to think about all those poor greyhounds who must have suffered in the preceding years.

This exposé from the Sunday Times prompted the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) to conduct an enquiry into the welfare of racing greyhounds. It identified major failings and made recommendations for legislative improvements. In particular, it noted poor regulation of the industry and a lack of data collection and transparency about racing greyhounds (cradle to grave) and injuries. It was difficult to judge the welfare provision in the absence of proper record-keeping.

As a result, in 2010, the Government published the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations to cover on-track welfare. The 2010 Regulations introduced some on-track welfare measures (e.g. kenneling for 20% of the dogs present at races and trials; and improved veterinary attendance). They stipulated that injury data should be collected but not necessarily published, and greyhounds should be tracked from cradle to grave.

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NOT GOOD ENOUGH

During a review of the 2010 Regulations in 2015/16, The Environmental, Farming and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee, still dissatisfied, recommended a 2 year probationary period for the racing industry. The Government finally secured the industry's commitment to publish annually its statistics about injuries, deaths, “retirements” and the means by which greyhounds leave racing, starting with 2017's figures.

In 2018, the racing industry announced its Greyhound Commitment which includes training plans for personnel

working with greyhounds, greyhound ambassadors and an overall 5-year plan to improve welfare and drive down deaths on “economic grounds”. The complete data, however, did not reach the public domain until January 2019. It showed 4,837 injuries out of 419,385 ‘dog runs’ and 1,100 deaths.”

2017 Retirement Data	
Category	“Final” published Jan 2019
Retained by Owner/Trainer	1,037
Homed by Greyhound Trust* / Other Charity	5,184
Homed by Owner/Trainer. Put to breeding	1,440
Total Homed/Retained	7,661

THE “DOG CLOG”

The CEO of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain has also been quoted as saying that there is a “dog clog” (greyhounds who have ceased racing and their fate is not yet decided) of 5,000 dogs pending in trainers’ kennels, often for years. The “dog clog” is not shown in the data. Equally, “saplings” not making the grade for racing are not evident in the statistics. Certainly even greater transparency is needed.

In response to the publication of the data, the Environmental, Farming and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee has repeatedly called for the racing industry to drive the deaths on

2017 End of Life Data	
Category	"Final" published Jan 2019
Killed: Treatment Costs/Poor Prognosis ("economic grounds")	370
Killed: No Home Found	23
Killed: Designated Unsuitable for Homing	307
Sudden Death	56
Put to Sleep: Trackside	257
Put to Sleep: Medical & Other	30
Terminal Illness	36
Natural Causes	21
Total End of Life	1,100

MOVING FORWARD

Our view within Greyhound Compassion is that racing by its very nature is cruel and is a disgrace in a nation of apparent dog lovers. In fact Professor Knight's** report, "Injuries in Racing Greyhounds" (published by Greyt Exploitations in the UK <http://greytexploitations.com>) has validated many of our lay suppositions about the impact of the configuration of the racetrack. In addition, the overbreeding of puppies to supply the racing industry along with the unacceptable level of injuries and deaths amongst companion animals used as the gambling industry's commodity render racing redundant in modern society. We cannot see how realistic a reform of the industry is and would prefer to see greyhound racing phased out in the UK.

*The Greyhound Trust is the UK charity partly funded by the racing industry to home ex-racing greyhounds.

**Professor Andrew Knight is a Professor of Animal Welfare and Ethics. He is founding director of The Centre for Animal Welfare, University of Winchester, United Kingdom.



Your donations are needed to help greyhounds and galgos. Donate on the Greyhound Compassion website or through their PayPal account:

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Other organisations mentioned in this article:

[Protectora y Santuario Scooby](#)

[Greyt Exploitations](#)

"economic grounds" down to zero and to channel more funds to the welfare and homing of racing dogs. Currently bookmakers participate in a voluntary levy which yields about £3m allocated to welfare annually.

In a February EFRA session on the subject, the Chair acknowledged that many people in the UK want to see racing banned but this is not his view. However, he was adamant that the industry "...must not make money out of misery...".

Subsequently, we have seen efforts from the Government and the racing industry to appeal to bookmakers for increased funding and to present welfare at the heart of the racing industry.



Greyhound Compassion Meet 'n' Greet at a Local Superstore (Lucinda far right)