

Vets Corner

Care of the retired Greyhound

Having completed a career in competitive racing, your greyhound has now moved on to a happy retirement in a new home. The naturally pleasant and friendly disposition of the breed lends them to adapt readily to life in a domestic environment. In fact King Charles the first said he preferred a greyhound to a spaniel as the former had all the good nature of the other without the fawning.

Before going on to discuss some of the potential health problems that occur in greyhounds, perhaps a brief history of the breed would be in order.

Greyhounds have an authenticated history of over 5000 years. The drawings on the walls of some of the ancient tombs in Egypt, if they could come to life, would be virtually indistinguishable from today's modern racing dog.

While the origins of the name have been lost in antiquity, one thing is certain, the name has no connection or reference whatsoever to colour. The spelling of the name in the earliest English books is highly inconsistent, with such variations as "Greyhoundis", "Grayhounde", "Grewhouwd" and "Graihound" being found. The most popular explanation of the name is that "Grey" was originally "Gre" derived from the Latin "Gradus" meaning "Degree" or "Rank" and could be a reference to either the owner or the dog.

Under the laws of Canute, no one below the rank of Gentleman could legally own a greyhound, and old writers consistently placed the dog first in their list of breeds. As one wrote, many centuries ago, "amongst alle dogges this was the most principalle, occupying the chiefest place". Another suggestion is that the name derives from ancient Arabic, the Arabic root GRY has the basic meaning of "Run" or "Hasten".

While much has been written about the "best colour" for a greyhound, very few facts have been proven. There was a strong prejudice among coursing people against white dogs, probably due to the fact that hares, when being pursued turn their heads so they can see behind as well as in front. They would naturally see the lighter dog more readily and turn away from it. This prejudice spread to racing people for no apparent reason, as white dogs were once in great demand in South Africa because they tolerated the heat more readily.

In fact as long ago as 211BC the Roman writer Oppian stated that he objected to both white and black greyhounds as being too sensitive to cold and heat. Greyhounds also have much thinner skin than most other breeds and do appreciate a warm cover in winter.

Most greyhounds retire from racing between four and five years of age and can expect to live happily to 12 or 14 years. (The author's oldest greyhound lived until she was 15.)

While racing, they are held at their ideal racing weight, but in retirement should be allowed to gain between two and four kilograms. Any more than this and they are at risk of problems of obesity. They still require regular exercise, like any dog, though not as much as a dog still racing.

Future articles will cover basic health care issues, although these are not too different from most other breeds of dog.

Congratulations on adopting a greyhound. As a part owner of over 20, I can say with absolutely no bias whatsoever, you have chosen the best breed by far!

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Malcolm Jansen has been involved with greyhound veterinary care since 1978. He advises Greyhound Racing New Zealand on veterinary matters and is a member of the GAP Board of Trustees.



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-anon

Yahoo Group

GAP CHAT

If you're not already a member then come and join us at nzgreyhoundsaspets@yahoogroups.com the online forum for discussing all things greyhound. We now have 46 members, most of whom have an ex racer as a pet and regularly get online to share stories and photos, as well as to give advice and organise get-togethers. Anyone with an interest in ex racing greyhounds will enjoy this site – we look forward to seeing you there!

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