

GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA

Attending and Training Greyhounds

Booklet 9 – Education and Training



Greyhound Racing Victoria
Attendant and Trainer Education Pack

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This is the ninth in a series of booklets that support you in attending and training racing greyhounds.

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Education and training

9.1 Educating a greyhound

What is education?

Education (formerly called 'breaking-in') is the process of teaching a greyhound the skills required to become a successful race dog. This includes teaching the dog to chase the lure, how to be loaded into starting boxes, and how to make a clean start. Although the chase instinct is inherent in the greyhound, as a trainer you need to teach the dog that chasing is a desirable behaviour. How the greyhound is educated can influence its entire racing career, so it is important that you get off to a good start.

When does education occur?

Education usually happens when the greyhound reaches 12-13 months of age, although it may be a little later. This is the same time that your greyhound is due for their first yearly vaccination booster.

Some educators will avoid certain times of the year for educating, and as a result the dogs may be anywhere from 12-15 months of age when they start this part of their education. Sometimes a young greyhound may be very immature at 12 months and might need a few months longer to mature before beginning education.

Most educators will have the greyhound for about 4 weeks, during which they go through an intense program of training. If you are doing the education yourself, you

may choose to spread the lessons out over a longer period, taking your time to develop the dog's skills.

9.2 Using a professional educator

There are many professional educators who can do the early education of the greyhound for you. Many offer a great service and are knowledgeable and patient with the young dogs. Others are not so skilled and may have too many greyhounds at the same time with little time to devote to the individual needs of each dog.



If you do choose to use a professional educator, there are still many things you can do to help your greyhound prepare for what can be a very stressful period in its life. Hopefully you can do this well before education which will assist in reducing the level of stress experienced during this phase of the greyhound's lifecycle. Preparation can include:

- teaching the greyhound to walk nicely on a leash;
- exposing the greyhound to a typical racing kennel and starting boxes;
- travelling the greyhound in the car or trailer;
- teaching the greyhound to come when called; and

- playing chase games with toys that simulate the lure.

You do not simply pick the greyhound up from the rearer and drop it off at the educator!

If as a trainer you are intending to select a professional educator, 'word of mouth' is one way to get good information, as those people who have been in the industry for a while will know who gets good results while caring for your greyhounds to a high standard.

Once you have a few on your short list, you should go to the educator's property and have a look at the condition of the kennels and the greyhounds in their care. Look at whether the:

- dogs happy;
- kennels are clean;
- dogs have fresh water;
- dogs look in good condition, or are they underweight or overweight;
- dogs are showing signs of stress or fear?

You will also want to have a look at the condition of their training track and whether it is well maintained. Poor track maintenance can predispose young greyhounds to injuries which could potentially ruin any chances they had of having a race career.

Finally have a look at the educator themselves and;

- whether they are well-presented and professional;
- how do they handle the dogs – gently or roughly.



You are looking for someone who inspires confidence in a young dog, not someone who is rough and intimidating. You will need to weigh up all your impressions, along with word of mouth advice before committing to sending a young greyhound to them to educate.

Critical to successful education is that a young greyhound is both physically and behaviourally ready for education.



The best time for a young greyhound to develop fundamental skills to cope with the education environment and a racing environment is between 3 and 20 weeks of age. This is the period of its life when it is least fearful and has an in-built desire to explore. **However, it is a lifelong process.** The more a young greyhound can learn about its environment, what things to seek out, ignore and avoid and what behaviours are acceptable or not, the more likely it will be able to cope with different situations. It will be more likely the greyhound will be able to concentrate on chasing a lure,

rather than being distracted by or becoming nervous in the race day environment.

Without this kind of learning and experience, a greyhound is likely to find many things challenging:

- it will struggle to adapt to a kennel environment;
- its fear response can inhibit or block their chase motivation, making them difficult to break in; and
- even if they are educated, fear and distraction at the race track is likely to impact on their racing success.

Greyhounds that are not well socialised with humans and other greyhounds, and who have not had a wide exposure to different environments, can appear nervous, distracted, or unable to settle. If there are too many stimuli, the greyhound may become overwhelmed and start doing odd things like constantly drinking or licking, bopping up and down, lip quivering or chewing on bedding (called 'behavioural stereotypies').

A greyhound should be getting used to the kind of things that they will face on a race day including:

- smells – other dogs, food, people, vehicle exhaust;
- noises – loud or strange noises, radio, loudspeaker;
- surfaces – feel of different surfaces such as carpet, sand, concrete, bitumen, hot surfaces, metal and rubber;
- motion of a car or trailer;
- crowds of people and other greyhounds;
- movement of banners and flags;
- being examined and handled by multiple strangers;
- confinement to small race day kennels and starting boxes;
- standing on heights such as a veterinary examination table; and
- catching pens.

Under the new Code commencing in 2020, young greyhounds in education, pre-training and training should continue to be exposed to continued handling and interaction with humans, other animals, different surfaces, environments, and activities.

They must also be exposed to multiple opportunities for isolation from other greyhounds and humans (except where the greyhound displays signs of stress in isolation). They must be carefully monitored for signs of stress, poor acclimatisation and the development of behavioural stereotypies. It is also recommended that greyhounds be regularly exposed to starting



boxes, travelling in cars and trailers, circular training facilities, straight tracks and lures.

Remember that your greyhound needs its 12-month C5 vaccination BEFORE it commences education. This is particularly important if you are sending your greyhound to another person for educating. You need to protect your greyhound against any diseases other greyhounds may bring into the kennels.

Management of stress in greyhounds

You must record observations of any signs of stress (including poor acclimatisation or

development of behavioural stereotypes) in the education or training environment. These records can be used as a management tool for assessing the acclimatisation of the greyhound to new housing or changes to daily routine.

If signs of severe stress are observed, especially if for more than two consecutive days, you must immediately act to reduce the stress or get advice from a veterinarian.

If signs of stress identified are related to small (3-9 square metres) race kennel housing, the greyhound should be moved to a pen of larger size, or other measures taken to reduce stress, and regularly monitored.

If the greyhound then shows signs of reduced stress, it may begin a program of gradual introduction to smaller pen sizes. If the greyhound does not show obvious signs of improvement over a period of two to three days, a veterinarian should be consulted.

Getting feedback on how a greyhound has performed in education

Most professional educators will have supervised the beginnings of many greyhounds' careers, so they will have a good idea of which greyhounds are educated at an above average level and which are not. Remember they only have the greyhound for a short time and will base their opinions on what they see during that time. Some greyhounds educate well, meaning they learn the required behaviours, and are chasing in good times for their level of development. Others will educate poorly, meaning that they have struggled with some of the skills or are not running good times for this stage.

Unfortunately, this is a time when some greyhounds are rejected as potential racers.

Sometimes this rejection is decided too early or without giving the greyhound enough chance to be successful.

If the greyhound does not educate well, often the owners are told that the greyhound will not make it as a racer, and that they are wasting their time and money. If this happens it is then up to you to help decide the future of your greyhound. There are many examples of greyhounds that have not educated well, but have been given additional time to mature and further develop, and have gone on to educate the second time and have a successful race careers. As a trainer, your experience and knowledge is likely to be part of this decision-making process. In some cases, it may be that the educator is not teaching a full program to prepare a greyhound for further training.

In this case it may be that some remedial training or a different approach may make the difference. You will need to consider the breeding of the greyhound, along with how it has been reared and trained prior to going to the educator, along with its level of maturity before deciding what to do.

9.3 Educating a greyhound yourself

Many trainers, especially those with only a few dogs, prefer to do the education themselves so that they have control of what happens to their greyhound. If you have also reared the pup yourself, then you have the chance to really put in the ground work, well before the dog reaches education age.

By doing the education yourself, you can

also ensure that the greyhound pulls up well from each run and that any injuries are detected early and dealt with before they become serious threats to its career. However, it is important that you do not hurry the process and are prepared to invest the time and effort to ensure that the young greyhounds are being adequately socialised and are developmentally mature before you embark on the training process. Be persistent – with care of the greyhound at the forefront – and don't give up first time!

Encouraging chasing behaviour

Greyhounds have been bred for hundreds of years for their chasing ability. This instinct is inherited, and only needs encouraging – you do not have to teach a greyhound to chase moving objects, you just have to encourage it.



From 5-6 weeks of age onwards you can play chase games with a squeaker or toy, dragging it along the ground for example to encourage the pups to chase and play with it. This is a training opportunity that is often lost as pups are not played with enough early on then are simply moved from the breeder's property to a commercial rearing facility.

Even if you do choose to send your pups to a rearing facility, you can still take the time and effort to do regular training at a young age.



Avoid rearing facilities that have so many pups that they only have time to feed and water the pups and clean the yards; although this should be less of a problem from 1 January 2020 when the new Code will have minimum daily handling, enrichment, socialisation and exercise requirements.

Facilities that have staff that take time each day to do some training or play with the pups are far preferable as socialisation and early encouragement will make training in later life stages (i.e. education, training or retirement) much easier. You should also look for a rearing facility that allows you to regularly visit your pups to start putting in more groundwork.

Even if you only have weekends, this is still a time to work on handling, teaching the pups to walk on lead, and playing chase games with them. It also gives you an opportunity to tend to other husbandry issues such as brushing the pups, trimming their nails or worming them when needed.

Most trainers use a toy, squeaker, squealer or another type of artificial lure to encourage pups to chase and play. These can be wiggled by hand, dragged along the ground or even hung from the clothesline and moved. Some trainers even use a 'bull ring' for this, having a lure move around a small circular track for the dogs to chase.

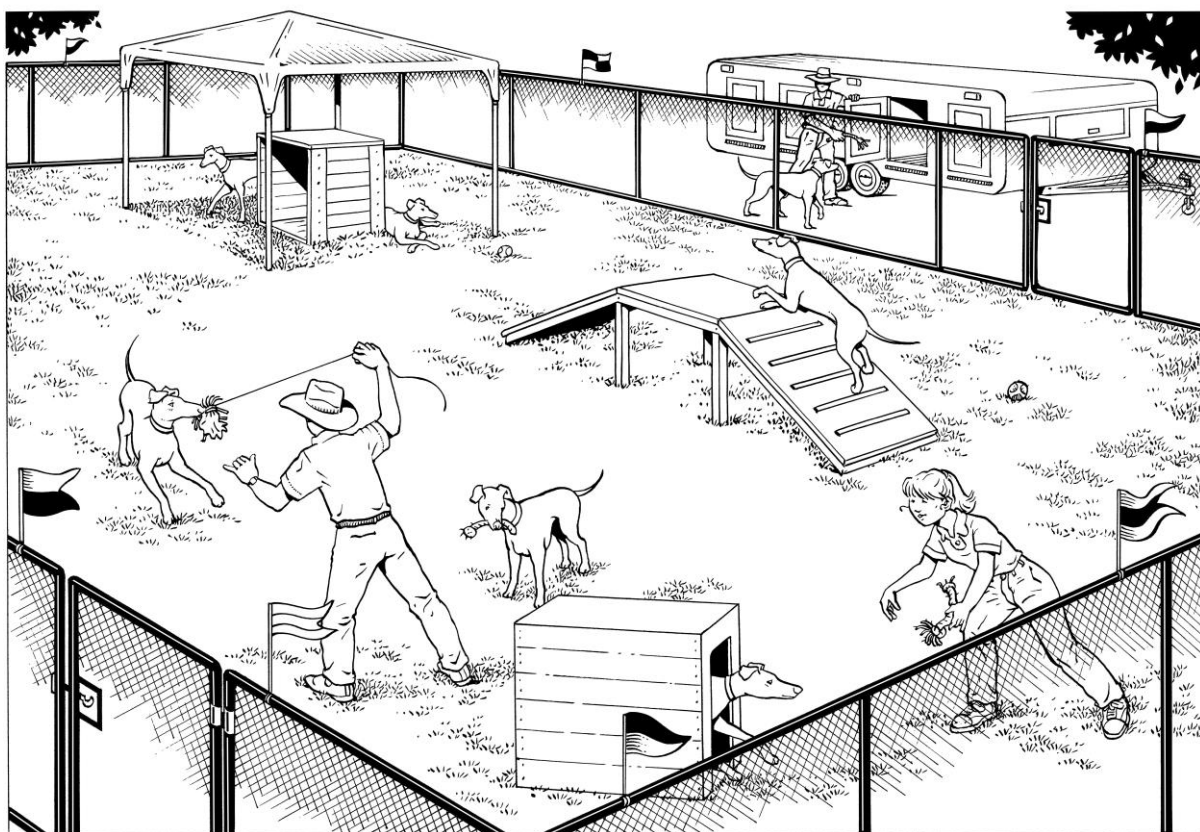


Figure 1: Educational Activities for Young Greyhounds

This training can occur at any age and is the first step in teaching greyhounds to chase the lure. With young pups you can play in small groups or with each pup individually. Playing in groups can encourage competition, but it is important that each pup gets to 'win' so that you are not just encouraging the bigger pups to play and teaching the smaller ones they don't have a chance. For shy pups, one on one play, at least initially, is probably better to encourage confidence.

Once the pups are interested in chasing the toy lure, you can begin dragging it along the ground for them to chase. You can also start teaching them how to 'hand-slip' by having one person hold the pup and the other drag the toy lure whilst running away calling the

pup. Once the pup is showing interest and is trying to break free from your hold, they can be released to chase the lure. You can find

more information on approved lures at <https://greyhoundcare.grv.org.au/lures/>.

Getting the greyhound fit

Greyhounds are the athletes of the canine world and like all athletes they need to undergo a fitness program that helps them develop the right muscles for running, along with the cardiovascular (heart and lung) fitness required to finish a race. Increasing fitness is achieved by giving the greyhound a chance to free-gallop each day, either in a long straight run, or paddock, or at a facility designed especially for greyhounds.

In the past, smaller trainers were restricted in this respect by the type of facility they had. Often training out of their own back yard, there were few opportunities to give their greyhounds free galloping exercise and they were instead reliant on walking them on leash

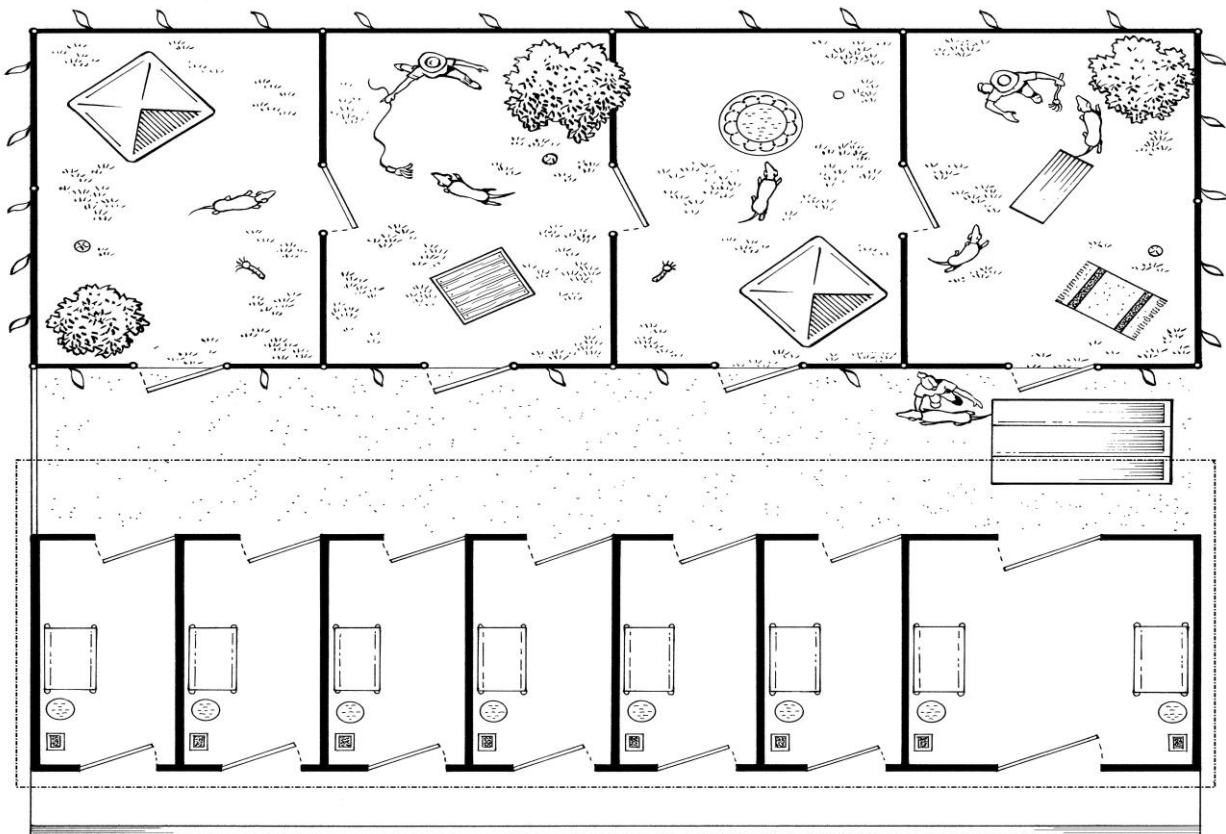


Figure 2: Optimal Exercise and Kennel Facilities

to increase and maintain their fitness. These days there are now facilities open to most trainers that offer a safe opportunity to gallop greyhounds. There are 'slipping tracks' all over Victoria that can be accessed either at certain times, or by payment of a membership fee.

'Slipping tracks' are a fenced straight track of either grass or sand. Being safely fenced, the greyhounds can be allowed off leash to run, often being released by one person at one end, and either being called to the other end by someone else or being tempted by a drag lure.

It is possible to increase the greyhound's fitness using walking exercise, but it is less likely to increase the heart rate to a level that is going to lead to the long-term changes that you are seeking. It also takes a lot longer for the greyhound to reach race fitness with this method. This is not to say that walking is a

wasted exercise, in fact it helps expose the greyhound to the wider world, teaches it leash manners, gets it used to travel and can be a useful variation in a training program to help keep them mentally fresh.

Progressing a stage at a time

The first week of an education program is usually spent encouraging chase behaviours and getting the greyhound to chase a lure that is either dragged on the ground or moved along in a circle (such as a bull ring). As discussed earlier, a lot of this can be achieved through gradual early training prior to education, but it is the first step in the training process.

Once the greyhound is chasing the lure reliably, it is time to introduce it to the trial track. On the first few occasions, this may simply be a hand slip over a short distance. This means that you will hold the greyhound

as the lure approaches and will release the greyhound to chase the lure over no more than 200 metres. If you have done your groundwork, the greyhound should be eager to chase the lure, and you will have just started its track education.

Starting boxes

Once the greyhound is pursuing the lure properly and has completed a number of hand slips at the trial track without any problems, it is time to start introducing the starting boxes. Teaching the boxes is a very important step in the education process. A greyhound that learns to jump out of the boxes well has a distinct advantage, as races are often won or lost at the start.



Good rearing preparation includes exposing puppies to boxes in a positive manner, as an environmental enrichment tool in a puppy yard – where the pups can walk through the box, or be fed in the box, or find interesting objects in the box.

If your greyhound has not had positive exposure to starting boxes, you will need to take this step very slowly and be guided by the reactions of your greyhound. A negative experience with the box could reduce your greyhound's chances of a good racing career.

Teaching the boxes must be done gently so that the greyhound does not get frightened or hurt in the process. Once the greyhound is in the box, the front is brought down slowly and closed. Once again it is important that they are not frightened by the closing of the lid, so avoid banging it down. You also need to make sure that no part of the dog is caught or trapped in the door as this will certainly make the boxes an unpleasant experience.

Once the greyhound is loaded, and the boxes are closed, a toy or lure can be used to encourage the greyhound to stay at the front of the box. The lure can then be brought around, and the greyhound released to chase it. By now the greyhound can be allowed to go about 300 metres as it will have been running well over the 200 metres or more prior to starting box training.

This is then repeated, with the dog loaded from the front again the next time it runs. Hopefully, the dog will be getting the hang of jumping out and then chasing the lure. If the dog has been good, then the next time it runs, it can be loaded from the back with the front of the boxes closed. The first few times it is loaded from the back, it is a good idea to have a second person with a toy lure at the front of the box. This again encourages the dog to move to the front of the box and ensures it does not try to turn around in the boxes – setting the dog up for success right from the start!

It is important that the greyhound views the boxes as a good thing, as an indicator that they are about to have the opportunity to have a run after the lure, rather than a negative. What you teach them at this point is really setting the greyhound up for its entire racing career. If it is not coping well with this step, or you are having trouble despite taking it in small steps, it may be that the greyhound needs some help from a

professional educator. It is better to address the problem early, rather than let it get into bad habits which can then be hard to break later.



Looking out for injuries and soreness

After each run, the greyhound should be thoroughly checked all over for signs of soreness or injury. Pups are often awkward at this age, and their bones have not finished developing. They are also doing exercise that they have not really done before, so it is a common time for injuries to occur. By checking the greyhound thoroughly after each run, you will quickly notice any soreness, and can act accordingly. It may be the greyhound needs to be rested until it can recover, rather than running it whilst injured. This is where a private trainer has a definite advantage over a professional educator, as you are not committed to any time frame for the education process.

During education, the dogs are run on a regular basis with free-galloping at home or at a slipping track on the days in between. This is of course, dependent on the dog pulling up well after a hard run. If it is at all sore, it may be appropriate to consult your veterinarian for advice as to whether the dog needs resting or confinement.

There is a description of a quick 5-minute examination for the common injuries in the book 'Care of the Racing and Retired



Greyhound'. It is a methodical check of all the sites where common injuries occur. Checking for injuries and having the ability to notice changes in gait or running action are vital skills that all trainers need to develop.

If you are not sure, always consult your greyhound veterinarian. They are the person who can give you the best advice about treatment strategies that will ensure your greyhound returns to full fitness as soon as possible.

Many new and inexperienced trainers only listen to advice from self-proclaimed experts. Although many of these people have lots of experience and can give excellent advice, any wrong advice is likely to cost you dearly with increased time off for the greyhound, poorer outcome and even increased cost to you in the long run as you have to fix both the original problem, and any other problems you may have caused by following the wrong advice.

In addition, incorrect advice may result in a breach of rules or other legislation, so ensure you check the Code of Practice and the Racing Rules, and ensure you know your responsibilities. Always seek veterinary advice if you are unsure.

It is important to remember that these are young greyhounds that are continuing to reach adulthood. As a greyhound commences running at high speeds around corners, their

bodies and bones are exposed to increased forces that they will not yet be adapted for. It is therefore important to ensure that the developing bones are, and continue to be, conditioned for these increased forces by spacing our trials or work as bone adaptation occurs.

For further information on Microfractures refer to the **Injury and Illness Management Fact Sheet** at:

<https://greyhoundcare.grv.org.au/>

9.4 Pre-training a greyhound

What is pre-training?

‘Pre-Training’ is the preparation of a greyhound for racing. The greyhound will have learnt the basic skills required to race during the education process but will then be turned out (‘spelled’) for a period of 4-12 weeks. Pre-training begins when the greyhound is brought back into work and is prepared to the point that it is ready to run its first race

Why are greyhounds ‘turned out’ after education?

The education process can be quite a stressful time for a young greyhound, both mentally and physically, particularly if it has not had enough environmental experience and handling during rearing. They are very prone to injury, and most will have some kind of soreness from the introduction of a new type of exercise that puts pressure on bones and muscles they will not have been using as much previously. Many greyhounds up until education have not had to do very much at all and suddenly they are forced to learn a lot of new skills. However, if some of the rearing and early education activities have been undertaken previously, this will help a young

greyhound with the education process.

For this reason, most trainers will give their greyhounds a rest after education has finished. The greyhounds may be returned to their yards or kennels and will only have free-galloping exercise – no visits to the track, no loading into boxes and no hard runs. This gives the greyhound time to recover both physically and mentally. It also gives their body time to mature further, which usually results in better co-ordination and increased strength.

What happens when you start pre-training?

The first step in pre-training involves a transition from the ‘paddock’ to a ‘racing kennel’.

Racing kennels house each greyhound separately. The move to a racing kennel also involves a change to the greyhound’s routine, which most will adjust to quickly, but can be a little upsetting if the greyhound is particularly nervous or anxious.

While good rearing practice involves short, positive introductions to racing kennels, and your greyhound will have spent 4 weeks in racing kennels during the education process, this move is a permanent move.

It needs to be managed carefully.

Many greyhounds transitioning to race kennels for training and racing will undergo some level of stress. Providing as many positive experiences in race kennels during rearing will reduce the stress associated with this move and is likely to help with education.

For some greyhounds this will mean that they may need a special transition program where you gradually increase the amount of time spent in the racing kennel over a few weeks.

You also need to think about providing some mental enrichment. Greyhounds in paddocks have a broad range of environmental features to interact with such as birds, other animals passing by or changes in weather. A kennel environment offers less variety and your greyhounds can become bored.

Tips for supporting the transition to full time kennels include:

- playing the radio or music in the kennels to offer variety of sounds;
- offering bones or, in summer, frozen food treats to occupy the greyhounds;
- offering regular toileting breaks of at least 15-30 minutes throughout the day; and
- regular time in an open yard either daily or several times a week, in addition to your training activities.

The greyhound is usually checked by a veterinarian prior to commencing pre-training to ensure that it is free from injury. It will also be treated at this time for both internal and external parasites. The diet that the greyhound is fed will be changed to a racing type diet, which is usually higher in fat and energy. Any dietary changes need to be made gradually so as not to upset the dog's stomach.

The first 2 weeks

The first two weeks of pre-training concentrate on increasing the aerobic fitness of the greyhound, so there is plenty of free galloping exercise, along with some trips to the slipping track. Many trainers use 'competition runs' which are long runs side by side which encourage the greyhounds to 'fence run'. This means that they chase each other along the fence up and down, which increases the amount of exercise they get.

The aim of these first two weeks is to increase their fitness and muscle tone, and to bring them down to a suitable racing weight.

Knowing what race weight that the greyhound should be is a skill that you will develop over time. Greyhounds in work are typically quite lean and do not carry any excess fat. You can weigh the dog weekly at this stage to monitor its weight, giving you a feel for what its racing weight is likely to be. The greyhound will be losing fat, but gaining muscle, so it is more than likely that you will have to consider the weight in conjunction with the look and feel of its body.

Weeks 2-4

As long as the greyhound is progressing in terms of its fitness, a few short runs can begin to be introduced, usually on a straight track for the first few times. Runs should ideally be scheduled about 5-7 days apart, with the greyhound getting rested in between and taking account of any signs of injury. It will still have free-galloping exercise but will not run any trials on its 'days off'. This gives the greyhound's body time to recover after each hard run.

The first step is to take the greyhound back to the track where it was educated and give it a run out of the boxes again. It may also help to load it into the starting boxes from the front again on this occasion. The run is only a short one over about 300m. The aim of this step is to refresh the greyhound's mind and help it remember its previous education.

At its next run (5-7 days later), it is time to introduce the greyhound to a different track, where it should be able to be loaded into the boxes from behind. Once again, the run should only be short with it being repeated 5-7 days later, and the times compared. You should be looking for some improvement.

There are a number of registered trial tracks around Victoria, and each race club will offer times where you can go and trial your greyhound on their track. Trial times and

tracks are listed in the *Greyhound Monthly* (the GRV monthly magazine that you will receive with your trainer's registration fee) or on FastTrack. There is usually a fee paid for each trial, and you have the choice of trialling your greyhound in an 'Arm Trial', 'Pen Trial' or 'Field Trial'.

An 'Arm Trial' involves the greyhound chasing a straight arm lure instead of the race (hoop) lure. Trainers usually attach the greyhound's toy or squeaker to the arm, and the dogs are allowed to 'catch' and bite onto the arm at the end of a run.

In a 'Pen Trial' the greyhound is not allowed to 'catch' the lure, and instead is run into the catching pen, similar to a race.

'Field Trials' are pen trials (into the catching pen) that involve more than one greyhound trialling at the same time. They are usually half fields (4 greyhounds) but may be only 2 or 3 greyhounds at a time.

Most of the clubs run a booking system where you ring or go online at a nominated time to book your trial. They then give you a time for your trial, so that you know when you will be scheduled to have your run. By having a set time, you are less likely to have to stand around waiting for your turn. Details are all listed in the *Greyhound Monthly* for each club.

Remember, the greyhound should receive a thorough check over after EVERY run, both when it first comes back, and after it has had a chance to cool down. If you notice anything unusual during your examination, it should be checked by a veterinarian, and its training regime altered accordingly. You should also watch closely how the greyhound moves, both at the walk and at full speed. It is often possible to detect early signs of problems by detecting changes to its gait, for example it is running with its tail up in the air, or maybe

the movement is uneven. These are signs of underlying problems that need to be addressed.

There is no point running a greyhound when it is sore or injured, as you will worsen the injury and are only teaching the dog that running at the track hurts. Greyhounds remember falls, and painful events, and often associate them with the place they were at the time. This is how they get scared of the veterinary clinic! You want your greyhound to enjoy being at the track and to look at it as a positive thing, not a negative experience.

Stepping the greyhound up - increasing the workload

If, on a number of occasions, the greyhound has managed to run successfully over 300 metres and has pulled up well after the run, you might consider increasing the distance. This is done gradually, and certainly does not happen if the greyhound is not showing signs of improvement at the distance it is currently running. The first step may be up to about 400-450 metres.

Once again you are looking for the greyhound to be improving with each run, and to be running 'competitive times'. What is considered competitive will depend on the distance and the track, but there are good times and average times for each one.

The greyhound will now be running regularly and will be checked after each run, so you should know how well it is progressing. It is a good idea to record each run time, along with the sectional times (times for each section of a distance) so that you have a record of what the greyhound is doing. You can also record the date, time, and weather conditions, along with any other important information in a 'Training Record'. If the greyhound is sore, or is not showing improvement, there is no point in increasing the distance it runs as you

are only going to injure the dog or cause undue stress.

Racing in company

It is not enough for a greyhound just to be fast, it must also learn to run with other dogs and to compete against them. It is not always the fastest dog that wins a race, but rather the most determined and confident dog. A dog that is keen to chase, and focused enough to move through the pack and not be distracted in reaching the lure, is the one you want.

When first introducing a greyhound to racing in company, it is important that they do not lose their confidence.



It may be that you have more than one dog yourself, and that you can race them against each other (ideally not littermates, or dogs that run together at home), but you may need to find someone else's dog to run against. This is where homework is important so that you can select greyhounds that enable you to focus on teaching confidence. A knock or bump during a race, for example, can lead to a loss of confidence, and predispose your greyhound to injury, so watch the trial closely.

Some clubs offer graded trials so that the maiden greyhounds are only racing against other maidens and the Grade 5 or Free for All

greyhounds are trialling with others of equivalent ability, not against the maidens.

Deciding when to race your greyhound

As racing time gets closer, you may want to consider running your greyhound in formal trials. These are races in smaller fields that are run under race conditions meaning the greyhounds have to be formally nominated for the trial and have to run wearing racing vests. This is an opportunity to give your greyhound experience as close as possible to the events of a normal race meeting and is yet another step in its education process.

Qualifying trials are similar to heats of a normal race, with winners and sometimes the placegetters (depending on the number of heats) moving on to a 'final' which is held on a normal race day. This means if your young greyhound wins at the qualifying trial, you will be required to return on another day to race in the final.

As your greyhound continues to trial competitively and recovers well after each run without injury or soreness, it will be increasingly ready to race.

You will then need to nominate the dog for a maiden race over a suitable distance. The distance is usually determined by the greyhound's performance during training. By keeping an eye on the sectional times, you should have a good idea of how it is performing over each distance that you have run it. Generally, young greyhounds are not suited to distance racing, as this is something that they may move into later as they mature, so is generally not something that you would aim for with a young dog. If your greyhound is 'slow' over 400-500 metres but is running on strongly at the end, it may be worth trialling it over a longer distance to check if the dog is a possible long-distance

dog ('stayer').

At this stage it is time to make sure that your promising young greyhound is named if hasn't been already. This is a requirement prior to being able to nominate the greyhound for a race. The naming and clearance process can take up to a few weeks, so make sure that all the paperwork is ready to go well in advance. Your application for naming must be accompanied by a vaccination certificate showing that your greyhound received its a C5 vaccination after 12 months of age.

9.5 Race training your greyhound

What is race training?

'Race training' is the maintenance of all of the pre-training a greyhound receives. It includes maintaining the fitness required for racing, entering it in suitable races, along with keeping the sport fun and interesting for the individual greyhound.

What is a normal racing schedule for a greyhound?

Most greyhounds are raced approximately once a week. If free from injury and suitably conditioned, a greyhound may be able to run a little more regularly at a level similar to the frequency of training. Of course, racing is a little more strenuous and has the added stresses of kennelling, travel and racing at unusual hours of the day. All of this can affect a greyhound's ability to race and recover, and hence affects the interval between races that is necessary to ensure the greyhound is presented in top form.

If the greyhound is racing once every 4-5 days, they do not really need much other exercise apart from some free galloping in

between starts to maintain condition. If the interval between races is longer, then it may be necessary to trial the greyhound in between race starts, but you would generally only give it a hard run every 4-5 days, allowing for the greyhound to rest in between.

The thing that most dictates the racing frequency is injury or illness. If the greyhound does not recover well from a race, or is unwell for other reasons, then they should be allowed to recover fully before being raced again. However, any time off for injury or illness will affect their overall fitness level, and it may be necessary to bring them back into work gradually until their fitness levels return to that prior to the time off.

It is not uncommon for a racing greyhound to reach its peak form several months into full training/racing. After this some greyhounds will taper off, and you may find that they need a break from racing to restore mental and physical freshness. Giving a racing greyhound 'time off' can often mean they return to racing fresh and keen rather than allowing them to sour.

Watching your greyhound's form

As a trainer, you need to be watching and monitoring your greyhound's performance at each race. It may be that a few minor changes need to be made to increase its chances of winning. Maybe a small change to their racing weight, or a different distance or track, may suit your greyhound better and lead to race success.

You need to continually monitor your greyhound's performance times and sectional times. These are often an indicator that things are not right. If your greyhound has suddenly lost ability, then it might be time to have it checked thoroughly by your greyhound veterinarian. They may choose to

do a blood test or may detect an injury that had previously gone unnoticed, explaining why it has lost form.

If the greyhound checks out alright and is trialing well but is not doing well in races, then it may be that you look for 'weaker' company, such as moving to a track where the form is not so strong or testing the dog interstate. Victorian racing tends to be the strongest of any state in Australia, with the city tracks attracting the best performers. It is better to have your greyhound winning on a country track, rather than being regularly beaten by stronger dogs on a city track.

This is where training becomes an art - picking the right track, distance and company to ensure the greyhound has the best chances of success and making any necessary minor changes to its schedule to ensure it is presented in peak condition and free from injury and soreness. Good trainers pay close attention to all small details and are generally rewarded with race success. You cannot expect to train every greyhound in the same way and at the same pace. It is the small differences that can really make or break a dog's chances. This is what separates the good trainers from the average ones.

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