

Letters to the Editor

The Issue: Closing the Studbook

A DISCUSSION OF GREYHOUND "CORRECTNESS":

AND LURE COURSING

AS AN IMPERFECT MODEL FOR HUNTING

by Linda Carlson, Heronry

The following was originally published as a part of an on-line discussion. Please give it a little consideration. I do [lure] course my dogs. I have ever since I found my first greyhound abandoned in a park in Portland, OR, over 20 years ago. I enjoy letting my dogs run, I enjoy visiting with friends that I would not otherwise see much. But not for a single moment do I think that it is a true measure of an individual dog's correctness or even their ability to hunt—to course—game.

With the exception of there being something for the dogs to chase, the process of truly coursing is just not there. If, rather than penalizing a dog for looking at the other dogs running, we could see that they were assessing the actions of the pack; if we could assess the ability of the dog to anticipate the movement of the lure and to influence the prey's course, if we could evaluate the duo or trio of dogs and their concerted efforts to catch and succumb their prey,

then it would be a true trial of the dogs' abilities in coursing. As things stand in coursing, it is merely a chance to see how well an individual dog can chase a lure. It requires the dog to suspend disbelief enough to be willing to chase a truly ridiculous "prey". Some of my very best hunters have been totally unwilling to chase a plastic bag—what's the point?

I chose not to include the rather horrible descriptions of my dogs' pursuit and succumbing of various prey, either in my back pasture or in the woods of the Olympic Peninsula—all kinds of prey, from squirrels to deer, even pheasants on my family's farm. It is not something that I rejoice in, but something that I accept as part and parcel of who they are—hunting dogs with amazing instincts and abilities to work together toward a common goal—the death of their chosen prey.

In all the recent discussions of form and function—of what is the "correct" greyhound—there seems to

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be missing a clear look at what greyhounds do in the hunt. They are not a solitary hunter. They hunt in packs and "course" their prey, or direct it to its eventual demise. The prey could be anything from a rabbit to a stag (much bigger and more formidable than the American deer). This is clearly shown in historical records. From etchings and paintings from centuries past it is clear that greyhounds were used not just for rabbits, but for a great range of prey. Especially for the larger prey; this requires real teamwork—the hunting by a pack that concert their various strengths and talents to overcome that prey.

I would suggest we think of it as a team... say a basketball team. You have your smaller, but nimble, point guard directing the play. You have your big center, your forwards with strengths to take the ball to the hoop, and your guards with their defensive talents. Every player has his strengths that contribute to the winning of a game. So it is with a pack of hounds. In my pack I have some big males, some nimble females... some thinkers, some doers... and each can do something the others cannot. So the "correct" dog is going to be different for different situations. Yes, they absolutely must be fit to run down a deer, for example. Their bodies must be balanced and "correct" as far as an ability to run is concerned. Yes, they must learn how to use their bodies and their minds—those

things we certainly can help them to learn, and should.

I previously worked in the opera field. If you want to talk about a diverse group of people, size-wise, you could not find a better example. And there was a place for each and every one. You would have little, wispy sopranos that could wake up in the morning and sing as they would in a performance. These you could think of as the Ferraris of singers. But, on the other end of the scale, so to speak, you would have the Wagnerians... yes, the ones with the breastplates and helmets... that, as one of them used to say, had to be built to "go a few rounds". These are the Mack trucks of the opera world, but necessarily so. It is not uncommon for one of these singers to lose as much as 15 pounds in a single night, just from the sheer physical demands of this kind of performance. In greyhounds we have a similar situation—the necessity for a diverse population to fit diverse jobs/prey.

I would like to believe that the greyhound standard was written in such an open way to reflect the need for and to allow a great variety in the breed—to allow all the different "players" on the team. As long as a greyhound is sound, is not a caricature of the breed, then it probably has its place in the big picture.

Lure coursing certainly can help a dog to find its body, but it is by no means a true reflection of what the dogs

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were meant to do. They are scored on follow... they should not follow, they should be trying to direct the lure. Last fall I was at a trial where Sheryl Bartel ran one of her dogs. I remember so distinctly one particular part of a lure course where he, though he missed a particular turn, had regained sight of the lure and was clearly doing his part, keeping both the lure and my dogs in sight. Had it been a real rabbit, he would, indeed, have been instrumental in catching it. Instead he was perhaps penalized for his earlier difficulty.

So I would ask people to use a little more imagination or to think a bit more globally about what greyhounds are about, physically. They are not track dogs... they are not solitary hunters. Picture them chasing a stag through the woods... twisting, turning, jumping—always pushing that animal to the direction that they want it to follow. Maybe as the stag turns the smaller, more agile ones cut it off, forcing it back toward the big bruisers on its tail. You make up your own story. But allow for the diversity that is so much a part of this breed.

Ah, but fitness... Lucy, we need to go for a run. ■

DEAR MAUREEN:

In response to your request that I give a brief synopsis of the track dog/GCA problem, I must begin by saying "Mea culpa," because it was I who initiated the issue.

A good 35 or more years ago there was an average of 60-odd greyhounds per annum being registered in the AKC stud book. Sixty dogs in the entire country! The few importations were exclusively from England and were invariably related to our established domestic stock.

The late Joseph Zane Batten, one of the most successful greyhound breeders of the 20th century and a man justly venerated for his knowl-

edge of, and interest in, the breed, was greatly worried about the limitations of the gene pool and the problems inherent therewith. He reasoned that if an occasional judicious outcross were available to a carefully selected and especially typey track dog the breed would benefit from hybrid vigor and the extension of the gene pool.

Mr. Batten asked me to make the motion to open the AKC stud book to NGA dogs (then NCA) at the GCA meeting, and I did so. It was accepted at once, both as an affirmation of the faith all breeders had in Mr. Batten's wisdom and in the supposition that such crosses would be occasional if not rare. Continuity of type was neither questioned nor anticipated, and proliferation of this cross never entered anyone's mind.

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Keep in mind that at that time greyhound racing was in its infancy in this country. There was no Re-gap or any other agency seeking to place unwanted dogs, and track dog breeders disposed of such animals quietly and privately.

It is generally conceded that, for whatever reason, the NGA dog and the AKC greyhound have evolved into separate breeds. For that reason alone continued crossbreeding threatens to destroy a breed that has remained constant over the centuries.

But the emergence of several pro-active groups whose sole mission is to "rescue" any unwanted track dog and place it in a private home, often with a registration cer-

tificate but without the requirement of spaying or neutering (which all responsible rescue organizations demand), has thrown our case into crisis proportion.

As the one who proposed that the AKC stud book be opened to NGA dogs, let me now, seeing the monster I have created, fervently plead that it be closed.

And at once.

*Respectfully submitted,
Stanley D. Petter, Jr.*



DEAR SIRs:

Time has come for GCA to consider carefully the issue of registration of dogs of NGA breeding. Years ago when the decision was made to open the Stud Book to include NGA dogs, the Greyhound world was very different than it is today. Twenty-seven years ago, when Bob and I got our first Greyhound, one never saw the breed except at a dog show or a race-track. Now in any town of any size, the rescue population is booming and Greyhounds are a common sight. Just in our area of North Carolina, a state that does not have racing, there are half a dozen rescue groups. Some are independent, others have links to the NGA and receive funding from it.

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Two of the rescue groups in this area release Greyhounds that have

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not already been neutered. If you clench your teeth on reading that, you are right, as litters have resulted from the "rescue" dogs that were supposed to be "saved". And two of the litters were mixed breed. Even more dogs to rescue and save.

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Bob and I are staunch supporters of rescue. We spend hours on the phone trying to help people with advice, phone numbers and resources. We've been to Florida to pick up track dogs. We believe you can be vehemently anti-racing while still feeling compelled to help the victims of racing—the excess dogs that are essentially the racing industry's cash crop. But rescue and showing are different endeavors. The dogs the racing industry dumps as no longer profitable often happen to fit within the boundaries of our very open and very generous standard. These racing dogs were not bred to fit the AKC standard. Often the fact that they are being disposed of means they didn't even meet their own standard—that of performance.

AKC Greyhounds are in a unique situation in all of dogs. There is a rescue population unrelated to us now for many decades, that is numerically so huge, it towers over us. Many of the breeders and exhibitors now in the AKC show ring had a track Greyhound first. Isn't it interesting that the door doesn't seem to swing both ways? More than a few people start out with a track dog and end up with

AKC Greyhounds. The reverse doesn't seem to be true. The last half dozen times I've helped strangers arrange to get another Greyhound have all fit this scenario.

Wonderful people who have had an NGA Greyhound or two, after an experience with bone cancer, tick illnesses, or even a bad experience with a rescue group, come to want an AKC Greyhound. One woman who had 2 consecutive track dogs die of bone cancer told me, "I'll always have a Greyhound, I'll just never have another track dog." We can still help the endless stream of track dogs that will always be the residue from an industry built on the blood of the dogs who fuel it. We can help people find pleasure in lure coursing, obedience, tracking and agility with their ILP Greyhounds of track breeding. Ask some AKC Greyhound people how many times they've had inquiries for stud service from their champion male on an NGA bitch. There's another door that only goes one way. Know anyone with a champion AKC Greyhound bitch who wants to breed her to an NGA dog? The NGA does not accept Greyhounds of AKC breeding into their registries for racing or breeding.

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GCA is not the parent club of racing Greyhounds—the NGA is.

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They adamantly maintain the two kinds of Greyhounds are completely separate and should stay that way. It is time for us to join them in seeing the truth in that policy.

Each breed of dog in the AKC has a parent club which has written the standard that defines the breed and that breeders strive to uphold.

Most numerous of the competitive events held under AKC rules are dog shows. At these, the accent is on conformation. Judges examine the dogs and place them in accordance with how close (in the judge's opinion) they measure up to the ideal called for in the official standards of their breeds. ...For each breed recognized by AKC, there is a national parent club. The parent clubs have a unique and vital responsibility. They are the custodians of the official standards of their breed.

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If the people who prefer the NGA Greyhound wish to start a separate breed and registration, that is an option available to them. Starting with writing a standard that defines and describes their own kind of Greyhound, and is not co-incidentally sometimes covered by ours. The enthusiasts of NGA-bred dogs could channel their zeal into establishing The American Racing Dog with the AKC. Their standard could reflect a wider dog with lower center of gravity, and thicker muscles, thereby describing a dog bred for the express purpose of a short burst of explosive speed. The racing Greyhound is a specialist, and a modern invention produced to do one thing—burn up the track going in one direction after an artificial lure for a short distance. This is very different than the myriad skills needed to hunt differing types and sizes of live game over variable surfaces on strong feet, twisting and turning and redirecting with flexible bod-

ies and lithe muscles, sometimes for long distances and just as importantly, with the ability and mind set of a pack hound to work together with other dogs with similar or different abilities. Racing is not hunting. AKC is not NGA.

Certainly at some point long gone our histories merge. But the present is of more concern.

Take a moment and read the histories and standards of Norfolk and Norwich Terriers. Both go back to the Jones Terrier. But now, according to the AKC's *Complete Dog Book*, "visually there appears to be a difference between the two breeds, resulting in two slightly different breed standards." They are similar and they are separate.

One reason pointed to in the past for having the Stud Book open was that in event that a new genetic health problem turned up in the AKC Greyhound population, we would have a new gene pool available to us in the form of the NGA dogs. That this ancient breed will suddenly develop a new problem after centuries of remaining admirably free of heritable problems is quite a stretch. And that the track population would be the answer is unlikely, since the vast majority of the dogs from the racing population have met early deaths and therefore long-term health information has not been widely known. How much more predictable, dependable and useful it would be these days to utilize the newer and increasingly available resources of chilled or frozen semen from show-bred Greyhound populations from other countries to expand our American gene pool if we needed to do so. A quick scan of any catalog from a good size show entry will reveal the ever increasing multi-national scope of Greyhounds in the American show ring these days.

We should all have the kind of Greyhound we prefer and love. This is not about one Greyhound being right and one wrong.

To continue to have the Stud Book open to dogs of NGA breeding is to risk having the AKC dog be a tiny minority in its own world.

Maureen Lucas
Lochinvar ■