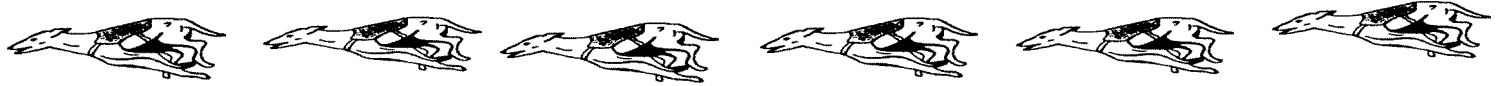




Running for their Lives!



Newsletter of Greyhound Action No. 23 Jan/Feb 2009

Racing industry in decline

Tracks face tough time in 2009

Good news for greyhounds – in Britain, Ireland and the USA

The pro-racing Greyhound Star has reported a dismal end to 2008 for the British greyhound racing industry and predicted that tracks would face an even tougher time in 2009.

Towards the end of last year, many greyhound stadiums recorded a decline in attendances in excess of 20%, with even the more profitable tracks, such as Sheffield and Nottingham, struggling with the credit crunch, along with Perry Barr, Newcastle, Romford, and Brighton & Hove.

An industry insider said: "There will be some tough decisions being made after Christmas. The general feeling is that many tracks will dispense with their midweek meetings altogether during the early part of 2009."

This proved to be true, with Peterborough taking the decision to close on Tuesday evenings throughout January with a possible extension through to February, Portsmouth announcing they were to drop their Tuesday meetings throughout January and February and Crayford also scrapping their midweek meeting.

Mike Hall, the Mildenhall racing manager, stated he was "dreading the start of the New Year" and they were discontinuing their Saturday meetings from the beginning of January. Harlow also scrapped its Thursday race meeting during January.

As expected, the GRA (Greyhound Racing Association) were forced to cut their losses and announced that Oxford would close on Tuesdays from January, claiming they were constantly losing money on the midweek meeting. Another of their stadiums, Birmingham's Perry Barr, also cut its midweek racing and a third, Belle Vue in Manchester, reduced the number of races it was staging at each meeting.



December – Weekly demo/leafleting at Belle Vue, where the number of races has been reduced



December – Demo outside Coventry Stadium Regular protests and leafleting have driven the dog track there to the brink of closure

The GRA, who also run Wimbledon, Portsmouth and Hall Green (Birmingham), are reported to be experiencing serious financial difficulties, with latest figures showing that the six tracks had collectively seen attendances drop by 10% and restaurant bookings down by 9.9% in 2007.

Their annual profits were barely positive at £174,000 (just 0.7% of money through the gate) and this was for the year to last March, before the credit crunch really hit.

GRA owners, Risk Capital, bought the company with a £52 million bank loan, which incurs a weekly £80,000 interest payment and has to be repaid by March. Normally they would refinance the loan, but this will be very difficult with banks slow to lend to anyone in the present climate.

All this adds up to the GRA surely looking to make drastic cutbacks, while waiting for property prices to rise again, in order to sell their tracks at a profit for house-building etc., and already there are rumours of large-scale redundancies at their stadiums.

According to information released by the National Greyhound Racing Club, of the 111 major tracks opened since commercial dog racing began in Britain in 1926, only 28 still remain.



Dog tracks in the **Irish Republic** are also experiencing financial problems and, according to a statement in the Racing Post: "The future of Kilkenny Greyhound Stadium is in doubt due to severe financial pressures at the track. It has been decided to suspend racing for a number of weeks with effect from January 30." More good news from Ireland is that the breeding of greyhounds there has gone down by 6.1%, meaning fewer dogs will be put to death after being discarded by the racing industry.

January – Weekly demo/leafleting at Birmingham's Hall Green Stadium Owners GRA are in serious financial trouble

Following the recent ban on commercial greyhound racing in Massachusetts, campaigners in the **USA** are setting their sites on abolishing the dog racing industry in New Hampshire. Looks like it may soon be gone from there anyway, however, after the state's Hinsdale track closed in December, due to bankruptcy, and its other two greyhound racing venues, Belmont and Seabrook, each announced more than \$1 million drops in revenue for 2008. Hinsdale pulled in \$5.9 million last year, a decline of \$2.6 million compared to 2007, and Joseph E. Sullivan III, the track's president and chief executive officer, said in a statement: "Unfortunately, our operating results have, for some time, reflected what's happening in the economy and in the gaming business nationally. Business was not good, but when gas prices spiked earlier this year, things went from bad to worse." Greyhound racing there had already been cut back to 50 days in 2008 "due to falling attendance".

Rick Newman, a lobbyist for The Lodge at Belmont, New Hampshire's largest greyhound stadium, stated that the amount of money the track makes from live races is "minuscule" - less than 1 percent of total revenue, and that wagering on dog races is on the decline, with internet gambling web sites being the biggest competition.

The state of Alabama once raked in millions from tax on pari-mutuel betting at its four greyhound tracks, but last year's proceeds dropped 10% over 2007, due to declining interest in dog racing.



Greyhound protection group Grey2K USA educating the public in Washington DC

In Wisconsin, Kenosha's Dairyland Greyhound Park was reported by the local newspaper to be "financially ailing" and losing "millions of dollars a year". Kennel operators at the track said they have found it increasingly difficult to make a living and, according to state officials, the amount of money wagered on races at Dairyland has been dropping. The dog track and related gaming facility estimated a \$2.8 million loss last year in information to Wisconsin's Department of Gaming. Florida's Pensacola Greyhound Park has laid off almost 100 people in recent months. Pensacola no longer offers live dog racing, but still screens races from tracks in South Florida for punters to bet on.



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January – Dalkeith, Scotland Flowers laid in memory of ex-racer Bushmills Major, who died two years ago, due to police negligence, after being abandoned at the local police station by his trainer