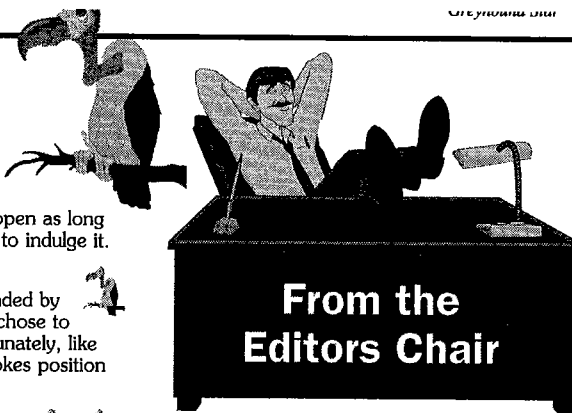


HOW SAFE IS YOUR TRACK?

Greyhound tracks close, or remain open for a variety of reasons: location, profitability, political importance to name but three. Here is a personal view as to the likely fortunes of the current NGRC tracks but I would be delighted to hear from any promoter who think I have it wrong.



From the Editors Chair

BELLE VUE

Made £1.8m profit in 2006 and £1.2m last year making it the GRA's best earner. The land is covered by a protecting covenant – not impossible to oppose – but costly and time consuming. Besides, the area is already well catered for in terms of huge retail outlets.

COVENTRY

Sits on a huge valuable site that will in the medium term, will surely be developed for housing. The bigger problems are in the short term. Unable to race on Fridays throughout the speedway season and loses the first Saturday of each month to the more lucrative stock cars. No BAGS contract, and struggling to break even. Successful businessmen, even dog enthusiasts like promoter Avtar Sandu, tend not to like losing money long term.

CRAYFORD

You couldn't get much more dog track for your money than the tiny Kent track. Well run stadium with a lucrative BAGS contract and keeps owners Ladbroke's at the table in all off-course betting discussions.

DONCASTER

Had its ups and downs as 'Stainy' but under good enthusiastic ownership is more than holding its own. Decent crowds, very popular with trainers and no immediate blots on the horizon.

HALL GREEN

Good profitable track but, despite common local myth, is apparently wide open to future housing development – indeed part of the original site is already housing. If the GRA is broken up, its land values will dwarf what is otherwise a profitable and well run stadium.

HARLOW

Sits on a valuable site which has already come under offer. Already running close to capacity at weekends, and buoyed by the closure of nearby Walthamstow, promoter Dave Barclay is looking to extend the grandstand upwards. Promises that if another mega bucks offer forces a sale, he will build a new stadium first – and we believe him.

HENLOW

Has already closed on more than one occasion. Current promoter Kevin Boothby has done marvels, with very little assistance from the BGRF. The place currently stands at a metaphorical crossroads. It needs to expand quickly with even better facilities or may one day become part of the housing boom that is already engulfing Lower Standon.

HOVE

Despite the shrewd sale of the cheap side a decade ago, it remains one of the country's biggest stadia. The land is extremely valuable, but planning wouldn't be simple. Its greatest guarantee is its continued benefit to the Corals off-course trade.

HULL

The eternal phoenix of a track re-opened with a more modern outlook on marketing greyhound racing. Seems to be heading in the right direction. Well run with decent crowds, but it will take a while for the clouds of uncertainty to drift away.

KINSLEY

While flaps all around struggled, one of their former number continued to invest in new facilities including the recent £600,000 restaurant extension. With a BAGS contract and facilities way beyond most people's expectation for a dog track in a small mining village, looks to be among the safest tracks in the country.

MILDENHALL

The most isolated of all NGRC tracks, its greyhound operation takes the role of winter groundsman for the more lucrative speedway and stockcar. Suffered from a series of ill-chosen greyhound

promoters, the place will remain open as long as the wealthy Waters family care to indulge it.

MONMORE

Professionally run stadium surrounded by industrial units. If Ladbroke's ever chose to sell, would go like hot cakes. Fortunately, like Crayford, it helps maintain Ladbroke's position as a power broker.

NEWCASTLE

An old stadium whose age partially defies the best efforts of its owners to upgrade its facilities. If it wasn't bookmaker owned would be on the endangered species list.

NOTTINGHAM

Council owned site and part of a big leisure facility. Traditional 'friend' of the off-course betting industry and has never struggled for BAGS recognition. Well run, profitable and just about as safe as houses.

OXFORD

Big money was spent on improved facilities but has had regular changes of management and has never approached the success of Belle Vue or Hall Green. Not a particularly lucrative site, might still have a future privately owned if GRA is ever broken up.

PELAW GRANGE

The last independent to join the NGRC ranks; it must have been a close call as to whether it was financially prudent to do so. Well run family business. Under no immediate threat in terms of land values. Should be around for a long time.

PERRY BARR

Sitting on GRA's only leased site, it is surrounded by major roads and would appear to be a planner's nightmare in terms of future development. Lucrative BAGS contract and would seem to have a future as a greyhound stadium

PETERBOROUGH

In many ways, greyhound racing's greatest success story of the last 25 years. A family run model of great marketing and expansion through profitability, it must rate as the most successful stadium without a BAGS contract. The only thing that prevents it being recognised as a great stadium, from a 'dog man's' view is the racing circuit.

POOLE

The jewel in Stadia UK's crown. Though expensive to build, it remains a profitable and vibrant modern stadium with speedway and car boot sales adding to the coffers. Would fare even better with a BAGS contract but wouldn't have a large enough race strength.

PORTSMOUTH

Probably the most decrepit NGRC stadia in the industry and under a medium term threat of demolition. Given previous uncertainties, locals are viewing 'a guaranteed two year's plus' as an extra life.

READING

With the council promising to reclaim the site in the late autumn, the writing is on the wall for a track that was almost closed through health and safety issues before Stadia UK took it over. Suggestions of plans to build a replacement are met by synchronised eye rolling by the locals.

ROMFORD

Looks safe for a variety of reasons. Firstly, its value to owners Corals for their betting shops. Secondly, it will undoubtedly benefit, to some extent, by the closure of Walthamstow. Thirdly, although the site would be valuable, access would present major planning issues. One can imagine the locals electing to keep the stadium given its minimal disruption to neighbouring houses.

SHAWFIELD

Greyhound racing's equivalent of Keith Richard. The years haven't been kind. It was once a fine stadium – of its time and type. Realistically it will probably remain open and long as Billy King's good health and enthusiasm continue. Beyond that – no hope.

SHEFFIELD

One of the most profitable stadia in the industry, it gets good scores in all the columns that define a successful stadium. Given its occasionally precarious history, and its age, the future has seldom looked healthier.

SITTINGBOURNE

Put a greyhound track around a football pitch and you create a business, though they are far from ideal partners. Although tightly run, there probably isn't a lot of margin for error and that BAGS season probably swings it.

SUNDERLAND

Would stand on its own feet even if it wasn't bookmaker owned and with a BAGS contract. Probably the most advanced 'night club' style greyhound stadium in the country. Might not have the location of Newcastle but in a different league as a business. Could teach others a few lessons.

SWINDON

Locals are panicking over the planned relocation of a new stadium two hundred yards from the present track. It's known as the 'Milton Keynes' effect! Realistically, the old stadium is past saving. The plans are for a modern new style of stadium. Keep the faith!

WALSTOW

The signs were everywhere that the end was nigh, but there had been so many 'cry wolf' stories that everyone's wits were blunted. Some city types were even claiming that the place was sold last year and was being leased back, though there is no evidence to back that up. It could have been saved, but the project should have got underway 15 years ago with the sale of the cheap side and a gradually re-modelled stadium. Give it Sunderland's facilities and Peterborough's marketing team. . . .sob!

WIMBLEDON

If it wasn't for a multitude of complications, GRA's jewel would have been developed long ago. All sorts of issues exist, contaminated land, an electricity substation, planning issues between two different boroughs etc etc. There are two options – one involves selling part of the site, the other involves big blokes and bulldozers. Timing? Now that is the £35m question.

YARMOUTH

Quite how much the success of Peterborough influenced the Franklin family's decision to re-invest in their facility is anyone's guess. The new restaurant gives the traditional summer season business, year round earning opportunities. The BAGS contract keeps the bank manager smiling. *Haven't the shanty tracks done well Jarvis?*