

Subtle differences in Ireland



General Manager

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GREYHOUND racing doesn't differ much the world over ... or does it? I have just returned from a short holiday trip to Ireland and got the opportunity to take in racing at a couple of venues in the home of the greyhound.

In Australia we have the perception that greyhound racing in Ireland is booming ... prizemoney is fantastic, the tracks and facilities now superb etc etc.

But the reality of greyhound racing in Ireland, in my opinion, is inferior to the industry at home. I'll explain myself.

As we all know, Ireland and the UK have six-dog races, and outside here. It appeared to me that the lure was a considerable distance in front of the lead dog, compared to Australian racing, which caused a number of runners to lose sight.

Seeded box draws opened up racing so much that of the many races I saw, widely drawn dogs won most of them. The on-track handlers are required to race across the in-field to the area in the back straight where the dogs are caught. This is done while the dogs are waiting in the starting boxes.

There is no catching pen. Generally a box was put over the lure when it stopped and the dogs just waited by it before being caught by their handlers. Some aspects of pre-race security seemed to me to be lax. Swabbing procedures as a rule are, two dogs are

swabbed per night with the dogs to be swabbed chosen by a trainer in the presence of a steward in a marble draw system.

This is done prior to the race meeting and everyone then knows the two dogs to be swabbed for the night.

The racing surfaces at Clonmel, Cork and Shelbourne Park are excellent, with very little banking on the turns, but with only six runners, there is minimal interference.

The lure run-up can sometimes be 20 seconds.

Facilities for patrons on-course at Shelbourne (in Dublin) and at Cork are excellent. And racing is to an almost packed house each night. This is the case due to both clubs providing a first class menu, the most modern of surrounds, with a 15 minute gap between the 10 races. There is virtually no inter-track betting. Betting shops are closed by 6pm and there is no telephone betting facilities.

Their meetings are not covered by a Sky Channel type service. If you want to see a greyhound race or bet on a greyhound race, you have to be at the track.

All greyhound race meetings in Ireland are at night time. There are no afternoon or twilight meetings.

They also have the luxury of conducting race meetings on a Friday and Saturday night, prime time for attracting patrons ... something we do not have.

Stakes in Ireland, we are told, have gone through the roof in recent years. The reality is a nomination fee varying between \$A16 to \$80 for a feature race must be paid for every runner. Prizemoney averages about \$500 for a normal race. All races are graded on times.

The night I visited Shelbourne Park, the heats of the Shelbourne Tote Gold Cup were run. Entry fee was \$80, with heat winner to receive \$160. There was no mention of any of the unplaced heats runners receiving prizemoney. However, the racebook stipulated unplaced semi-finalists would receive \$800.

The final prizemoney breakdown was: 1st \$50,000, 2nd \$10,000, 3rd \$5000 with all unplaced finalists to receive \$2500.

My visit also took in the three-day coursing carnival at Clonmel. It was highlighted by the scratching of one of the two Derby finalists, a heavily backed runner.

The rules stipulate the bookmakers must pay out half of the value of the winning ticket on both finalists, even the one that was scratched.

It would appear the Irish took this is their stride. I was also lucky enough to visit a few greyhound studs, those run by Richie O'Reagan and Sean Bourke, both of which have outstanding facilities. I must say that the standard of racoinmg in Ireland and their facilities have come a long way in the

10 years since I last visited the country.

I felt it is my duty to thank Neil Brown, the outgoing CEO of Greyhounds Australasia. He has been in the position since 2000 and I have found him always helpful and approachable and a real ambassador for the greyhound industry. I wish Neil all the best for his future endeavours.