

# PUNTERS SHORT OF INFO

*By Bruce Teague*



“**The** beginning and end shake hands with each other”, according to an old German proverb. More directly, 2000 years ago the Roman poet Horace told us that “Well begun is half done”. I wonder if those guys were greyhound owners. So, are we paying enough attention to the first 100 metres of greyhound races?



Breeders probably do but punters may not be, or maybe they just can't. A check of a few hundred races at Albion Park reveals that Friday (Class 3) competitors are slower to the first mark than Monday and Thursday (Class 1) dogs - by between half a length and one length. That difference would be even greater if you removed some very quick youngsters from the figures - dogs such as Fools State and Khalia Keroma, for example, which started off on Friday before moving up through the classes.

I suppose that's not news to many people but it does highlight a major difference between good dogs and ordinary ones.

Other studies we have done show that the differences in first sectional times between low and high grade are usually equivalent to at least one length and account for much of the difference in overall times.

Very often, if they can't jump, they can't make money.

Overall, between 42% and 60% of sprint winners are those which also lead at the first turn. The wide 42-60% range is a function of the type of track and the distance to be covered.

Higher for 400m dashes and a bit lower for 500m-plus circle trips.

No wonder that the flying Head Honcho dominated

sires' statistics for so many years. Or, at the other end of the scale, that the moderate-beginning Worthy Reward appeared mostly in the breeding of distance race winners (although Worthy Reward, to his credit, held sprint records in his own right). But all that is after the event.

More importantly, can we predict what's going to happen before they jump?

Well, yes and no. Or, to varying degrees.

In some cases we have a very good idea of how the field is going to handle the run to the first turn. Based on public information, three areas in Australia offer lots of help.

In each of these cases comprehensive sectional data is published in formguides or in race results, or in both. The authority does it in WA, Tabform in Victoria, and the Brisbane Club for Albion Park.

Anywhere else in the country sectional information is sparse or non-existent.

Hobart does not even own a timer so it has nothing to publish anyway (it suffers from hand starts, too).

South Australia provides leader-only data for just two of its nine TAB tracks, and Queensland similarly at Ipswich and Gold Coast.

The NSW authority publishes no results of any kind - an appalling gap for Australia's largest greyhound state. The local clubs do clock the leaders at eight NSW tracks but some are erratic in publication of that data.

You might have to wait four or five days to learn about them. In fact, the two big Wentworth Park clubs never publish sectional times at all, leaving it instead to the weekly Greyhound Recorder to print them later.

Much of the Victorian data comes from video timers - a tough and lengthy job. It's also potentially misleading because you are then using two different timing systems to paint the same picture.

They need to be aligned and mistakes can be made doing that. But it's certainly better than nothing.

The wide use of Finishlynx systems gives a great many clubs the ability to generate sectional times. It's particularly easy to do at circle tracks where the first marker is usually the finishing post.

A few seconds at the Finishlynx computer and the job's done. Yet, strangely, none except those in WA and Albion Park (bless them) bother to do it.

Why is this so? The information is of such huge value to punters, trainers and breeders alike.

### **First Section Only**

Greyhounds generally go flat out all the way so all the sections, but particularly the first, tell some sort of story.

Not so much the second section or that often-popular figure, the run-home time.

Those last two are interesting for a chat in the bar after the race but we have found them of little statistical value in assessing future winners.

In practice, the first section and the overall time explain virtually all that there is to know.

Further, if you follow their career, you might find that a thundering run-home time does not reliably indicate the dog is capable of running a longer trip - the move up from 520m to 600m, for example. It might have done its dash and have nothing more left in the tank. Actually, the reverse often applies. The lead-all-the-way type over 520m can sometimes do the same job when tried over the longer trip.

Recent cases of first-up 600m winners at Albion Park are Downstream Key, the much travelled Alpha Street, Capishes Figlia and the northerner Keppel Commando (nearly so). Solid Skye and Bally Roan did it at their second try.

On top of that, there's the dog that can take advantage of a particular box - sometimes box eight, where it has

freedom to move, but more often box one. At Albion Park the dog in box one improves on his average sectional time by a full length.

Dogs are all different, of course, so predicting early times can never be an exact science.

For example, you have the dog that leaps out of the boxes, the one that comes out with them and then goes like the wind (Bogie Leigh), or those which have no early speed at all. And then there are the hit and miss types which you just can't predict.

As they move through their careers, and so long as you have enough figures, it quickly becomes clear what bracket each dog occupies.

I use the term "average time" because using a time achieved once in a blue moon can be very misleading.

For years, the fastest first section at Wentworth Park was recorded by Austwide, a very good galloper.

Yet he never repeated the effort. In fact, he never led any race before or after that run. Another with much the same background was Forest Fin, which actually held the Wenty track record for a while.

In that run he was a very handy second at the first turn but no-one expected him to be there very often. Nor was he.

Unfortunately, that's what you end up with if you have to rely on leader-only data.

It's a bit like showing only winning runs in the formguide and forgetting about the rest. So, to assess a dog's likely sectional performance a reasonable amount of history is essential.

The only way to get that is to time at least the first four or five dogs to the first marker in every race, as BGRC does, and then tell the world about it.

Incidentally, first sections for races with bend starts are a big problem.

The geometry means each dog is covering a different distance and the crashing around that goes on further affects the reliability of the time.

But for shorter or longer races, the first sectional is worth its weight in gold.