

Racing South African style

During the late 1940's, all forms of dog racing were banned in South Africa. This was mainly due to unscrupulous track and dog owners who used the sport as a base for rigged gambling.



At the time there was no control and these people set up tracks and races around the mines where they could “rob” a miner from his week's income, every Friday.

They did such a good job they created a big enough socio-economic problem for the government to notice.

This, coupled with the fact South Africa at the time was extremely conservative and gambling was seen as a deadly sin, helped the government easily pass a law that banned dog racing.

The only reason horse racing did not follow the same route was because it was well-controlled and paying huge taxes.

This ban continues today. Greyhound racing is illegal in South Africa.

Directly after the ban, racing went underground and continued for some years until the sport eventually fizzled and died. During the late 60s to early 70s a small group of enthusiasts started racing their dogs against

each other. These events became more and more regular and the sport grew.

The South African Amateur Greyhound Union (SAAGU) was created.

Racing now takes place by using a loophole in the laws, as proclaimed, in the Freestate Province.

The Freestate Provincial Ordinance defines a dog race in such a manner that it can only be considered an illegal dog race if there are spectators present.

Obviously this has a huge effect on the growth of the sport. No spectators, no money, but this did not prevent a second group, the United Greyhound Racing and Breeders Society (UGRABS) forming during the late 90s.

The difference between SAAGU and UGRABS is one group lobbies for amateur racing to be allowed, while UGRABS lobby for a greyhound racing industry similar to the rest of the world.

Both work together toward legalisation. So, where do we stand in 2004?

Stadia

Stadium is the wrong word. Racetracks would be more accurate as there is no sense in building a stadium if no spectators are allowed.

Almost all these tracks are situated in the Freestate province due to the law there. Racing on both oval and straight tracks. Straight tracks are cheaper to develop and as such are allowed, for the sake of the growth of the sport.

Some owners race only oval, some only straight, but most have dogs for both.

Currently there is three oval tracks and four to six straight tracks. One oval track is in the

planning.

One oval track is in development. Two straight tracks are in development.



Program

Racing just about every Saturday of the month, all year long.

A heat and a final on the same day.

Adult greyhounds (older than 18 months) the bitches and dogs race separately.

Junior races are male and female together and divided by age in three month increments:

* Under 9 months (not allowed in races longer than 200m)

* Under 12 months (not allowed in races longer than 250m)

* Under 15 months (not allowed in races longer than 350m)

* Under 18 months (no limit on distance)

No greyhound is allowed to race more than 1000m on a given day.

* Straight track distances: 200m, 250m, 300m, 350m, 400m, 450m, 500m, and 525m.

* Oval track distances: 200m, 300m, 400m, 500m, and 700m.

Structure:

Although dog racing is illegal, it is not seen as a serious offence under our laws. If found guilty of illegal gambling you face a massive fine and even the possibility of a long jail term.

This means there is no gambling involved. No gambling, no huge amounts of money available. Furthermore, as stated, we cannot allow spectators. No paying spectators, no huge amounts of money available.

Due to this unique situation, the sport is structured more along the lines of human amateur athletics competitions and meetings. There are clubs reporting to the national governing body. Club level races and national level races take place.

On raceday, the dogs will be expected to participate in a heat.

The top dogs from these heats qualify for the final run on the same day.

The longer heats are first up on the program, allowing for more rest period before the finals.

The dogs race for a certificate in the heats and a medal or trophy in the finals.

Various competitions exist throughout the year and these are usually decided on a points system (win = 5, second = 3, third = 2).

Titles to be won are:

* Greyhound of the Year.

* Dog of the Year.

* Bitch of the Year.

* Long Distance Dog/Bitch of the Year.

* Middle Distance Dog/Bitch of the Year.

* Short Distance Dog/Bitch of the Year.

* Fastest Greyhound of the Year.

* Trainer of the Year