

World Greyhound Racing Federation

2000 Conference - Sydney

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Greyhound Racing and Technology

TOPIC: 'Application of **New Technologies** to Greyhound Racing Management'

DATE & TIME: Day 2 - Saturday 11th November 2000 9.10 - 9.40am

PROFILE OF SPEAKER AND SYNOPSIS

ORGANISATION Consultant to Sports & Entertainment Services - Vietnam

Superintendent, Belmont Veterinary Hospital

BIOGRAPHY

Practising Veterinary Surgeon for 21 years with a special interest in the racing greyhound. Attended as course veterinarian at Beaumont Park (Newcastle NSW) for 19 years and has extensive racetrack experience. At present the only veterinarian in NSW registered with the Greyhound Racing Authority NSW for Frozen semen processing (using the Camelot Forms techniques). AQIS accredited for live greyhound export (Macau, Vietnam, China, and Sweden). Consultant to Sports & Entertainment Services (Vietnam) for health & welfare issues, greyhound farm management and tropical greyhound medicine and soundness in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Has a special interest in Computers, Multimedia and Web Design and their application to the greyhound industry. (Visit the greyhound section at www.belmontvet.com.au).

SYNOPSIS

Application of new Computer technologies to Greyhound Racing Administration and Management - Micro chipping debate and Plasma-Gas Info Stations.

It is time we considered the move from the traditionally accepted methods of identifying our racing greyhounds, to embrace an accurate technology that minimises subjective human input. Ear branding is at times poorly done and 30% are difficult to read and characters difficult to distinguish. Many times ear brands are only determined by association offer the benefit of looking at the papers for a guide as to what it might be. Is this satisfactory today? We will review the need; methods and technology of establishing a microchip database and see how this applies in a closed racing system such as Vietnam and its extension to open racing systems.

Plasma gas technology display devices and authoring software such as Info Channel provides on on-track television studio for information and reporting. Eye-catching portrait monitors can be employed to grab the attention whilst standard scripts can be modified for tracks around the world.

Speaker Pmfiles and Papers

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Application of New Technologies to Greyhound Racing Management

- Microchips
- Plasma Gas Display Stations

Too often new technologies are ignored to the detriment of many businesses. Some technologies were developed specifically for other uses but apply well to organisations whose efficiency security or image is enhanced by their adoption. Today we will consider some of those technologies and look at the impact present and potential - on the greyhound industry.

Microchip Identification - Is it Time?

History & Colourful Characters

The sport of greyhound racing has a long contemporary history with its roots extending back over thousands of years. The greyhound has been held in high regard by royalty throughout history. Egyptian tombs are adorned with their etchings indicating their importance even four thousand years ago. Soon after 1000AD a royal decree stated that only noblemen could own and hunt with greyhounds. The sport of coursing arose in England from the recreational indulgences of the aristocracy and rules were soon formulated to control the organised events on which many pounds were subsequently wagered.

As coursing became more accessible to the common man therein arose a roguery associated with the manipulation of the greyhound's ability or identity. These swindles were held with a degree of reverence by commoner contemporaries, who were not financially disadvantaged by the schemes. Colourful characters emerged associated with the sport from these early days and their infamy seems destined to always be linked to greyhound racing.

With the advent of mechanical lure racing in the early 1900's, the methods of rorting the system were little different to those with live hare coursing. A system of weight recording was put in place to detect malicious stomach overload thereby reducing athletic ability. A system of ear branding was commenced to ensure proper identity of nominated greyhounds. As the pharmaceutical industry developed, a plethora of drugs and substances became available and all were enlisted to see if they made the greyhound run faster or slower.

Sophisticated swabbing procedures now protect what has grown as a multimillion dollar industry and the dynamics of this vigilance is constant as new drug combinations are tried by these colourful characters = (now) criminals, to assess if they enhance or deter performance. As gambling pools and networks

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increase the potential rewards for manipulating these pools are enormous. So then, in our diligence to protect and scrutinise the sport we employ technologies of the time to ensure the best advantage in combating criminal interference. However, in the case of establishing and confirming a greyhound's identity in the year 2000, we still rely on a ninety year old system that has many weaknesses.

Ear Brands - Observations & Difficulties

During eighteen years as course Veterinarian at Beaumont Park (Newcastle NSW Australia) the legibility of ear brands came into question at every meeting. At times the identification was established by autosuggestion, given the benefit of what is marked on the papers and comparing the ear to what it might be, rather than by empirical assessment of the ear brand itself. In Australia the identification steward is often a retired individual with less than perfect eyesight, making reliance on the papers even more so. Pre-race kennelling is usually completed in a large kennel block with lighting levels not adequate for optimum close vision.

As an AQIS accredited Veterinarian I regularly check ear brands as greyhounds are prepared for export to Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Macau and Sweden. About 20% of these ear brands are difficult to read and confirmation is clearly made only after consulting the papers.

Importantly then ear brand identification is a very subjective assessment. Subjective because of the limitations mentioned above and also subjective because of the potential for external influences to affect the identification process - bribery and corruption - the identification relies on the integrity of the operator.

Vietnam - Employing Today's Technology - Microchips

During the development decisions in setting the operational model for Sports

Entertainment Services (Vietnam), Phil Bell sought my opinion as to the workability of microchip identification for racing greyhounds. We were both aware of the purported and unproven negatives to micro chipping but the positives seemed to outweigh these and so the decision was made to microchip all racing greyhounds before importation to Saigon.

Microchip implantation provided a vital first stage to the program. I considered it imperative that a race day administration software was created to fully utilize the potential of the technology available to us today. This software contains the details, and photos if required, of a database of available dogs for empirical electronic (and visual) identification. This identification is written to an electronic record and is used to re-verify identity at the time of rugging-up so no mix-ups (inadvertent or intended) could result in greyhound substitutions. Resultant hard copy reports are available to verify the integrity of the racing program in an archival sense.

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Brief Technical Discussion - enter at your own Risk!

A microchip is the implanted component of a radio frequency identification system (RFID). The microchip is a passive transponder which, when excited by a scanner, transmits a code to that scanner. For our use in Vietnam we connected a handheld scanner via a cable to a Com port, completing a RS232 interface connection. Some compatibility problems had to be overcome as not all RS232 connections are compatible (even though they're supposed to be). Software requirements need to be compatible with the destination machine - exe files require certain DLL's that are not always present in Windows versions installed on laptop computers or on older terminals. The details of these technical considerations are beyond the scope of this presentation but once set up on a modern computer the scanning and software is performing trouble free.

Microchips - Problems Addressed

"Microchips are no good in Greyhounds - their active lifestyle will cause them to migrate"

We have 230 greyhounds with microchips and only two of these have moved down the shoulder and are still easy to scan.

"Microchips are a risk as they can be excited by other radio frequency and disturb the Greyhound"

The frequency to stimulate is so low and the response by the microchip so minimal that no detrimental effect is afforded to the greyhound

"Microchips are a risk as they can be surgically removed and swapped to another greyhound

Ear brands have been manipulated in the post and papers changed

The complementary computer software provides a linked security check. We have made the decision not to ear brand our pups bred in Vietnam - They are micro chipped at 12 weeks to be added to the database at breaking-in.

The security of the microchip supply is ensured bearing a particular greyhound and country code, should micro chipping extend to open racing systems, A particular number range would be allocated to each authority and it becomes their responsibility to ensure accountability of issued chips.

"Microchips are difficult to insert"

Only 5% of greyhounds micro chipped for Vietnam showed resentment at insertion. It is a much easier technique and less messy than ear branding, and the resultant clearly defined identity is far superior to a smudged ear brand.

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General Discussion

In closed racing systems, wherein a company owns a group of greyhounds and controls their management and training, Microchip technology offers many advantages for easy, accurate and reliable identification. When combined with our Raceday Administration Software it provides a secure identification process that removes the operator from subjective decisions. In countries where wages are low, the temptation may sometimes be placed to a track employee to effect a "ring-in". This computer-linked system does not allow that to happen particularly when linked to a digital visual of the greyhound to further affirm identity.

The time is not to dwell on recent indiscretions in the security of our industry here in NSW but it is interesting to note that a "ring-in" may not have occurred had visual confirmation been acknowledged. An astute Veterinarian, who identified a greyhound correctly visually, was told by the trainer that it was "not that bitch", but in fact it was the bitch that the Vet had identified but the trainer presented with a different identity. Visual identification as a secondary confirmatory step is now not difficult with digital technology. Photo licenses were thought impossible ten years ago but are now common place.

Microchip technology has a place not only in closed racing systems but also in systems controlled by state and country regulatory authorities. 1-low much longer will we persist with the problems and security risks that ear brands offer?

We are currently defining with manufacturers the requirements of walk-by and walk-thru scanners. These are placed at the entry to the kennels and as a greyhound walks in its details are recorded on the computer and its digital photo displayed. The only manual input is the weight but this too could be automated in the future.

Today's Decisions and a Compatible Future

The future can only be ignored for so long. It soon becomes the present and if not provided for can become a difficult path. It is important that the Federation consider the question of microchipping and make policy decisions now that allow for uniformity in the future. Compatibility issues with chip type - Iso or non Iso and scanners etc should be agreed upon. It should not be allowed to grow independently worldwide like the Railway system in Australia last century when the trains came to the border they had to stop because the rails were different widths in each state. It is not to say the microchip identification needs to be implemented universally forthwith - but the agreed procedures and methods need to be in place to allow for compatibility as each racing location embraces the technology and allow for easy identifiable movement between these locations in the future.

Asia is a large growth area in our industry. Before this decade has passed an inter-Asian series between Vietnam - Cambodia - Macau - China will be a reality as betting networks expand - An identification protocol needs to be in place for this to happen smoothly at the chosen venue.

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Breeding in a Tropical Climate

Present indications are that greyhounds can be bred successfully in Vietnam. The details of this would occupy another paper in itself but we have a seaside location with good breezes and facilities to rear them to Australian standards. The prime limiting factor to the expansion of the Greyhound industry in Asia is the availability of dogs. With the development of the Saigon track and the Cambodia facility with projected racing three nights a week, an additional 1200 greyhounds will be required within 18 months. These are unlikely to be supplied in total from Australia, and the local breeding provides an essential supplement. Pups are microchipped at 12 weeks and racing papers recorded at 12 months. *No ear branding is envisaged to be done!*

Plasma Gas Display Devices

NEC is at the forefront of plasma monitor technology. Their involvement with the W&RF conference is greatly appreciated, enabling us to look to the future and utilize its technologies today.

Whether as a stand-alone unit or part of a multiscreen application the clarity and brilliance is unsurpassed.

New display technologies provide opportunities for new vibrant information kiosks. Resolution and functionality is superior to television monitors and their location in member's areas and how to bet stations is ideal. They are not intended to replace the standard tote monitors but are dynamic when used as infotainment stations. These devices can accept multiple feeds from computer, C1), DVD, Digital and analogue sources allowing tracks to in effect have their own on course television utilizing technology such as Scala ~ in addition to standard race replays. This allows for advertorial and promotional input to be mixed with the informative aspects of the presentation.

The specifications and features of the range of monitors are available in brochures from the NEC representatives. Screen sizes of 42" and 5W are available with special technology giving excellent brightness in all lighting levels.

A picture is worth a thousand words - be sure to view the NEC Plasma Gas Display Devices on display at the conference.

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