

# **WGRF International Conference**

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### **Irish Breeding Scene**

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In order to advise visitors to the Conference as to the current state of breeding in Ireland, it is necessary to look back at some of the things which have happened in Ireland in recent years. Visitors to the 1994 Conference in Dublin, who have returned to this year's Conference in Cork, will find some very significant changes in the Irish Greyhound scene since they last visited these shores.

Thanks primarily to a succession of Governments whose Ministers of Finance and Agriculture were favourably disposed to supporting both the Horse Racing and Greyhound Racing Industries by way of a much needed injection of funds, over a period of years, the Greyhound Industry, in particular has flourished.

Now under the administration of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, whose Minister, John O'Donoghue, addressed us earlier, I am pleased to report that a similar level of support exists under his leadership.

It is important to understand that there is a new generation of young people 'going to the dogs' in this Country. Thanks to the Exchequer support, magnificent new facilities are now in place on most of Ireland's greyhound tracks. You will have an opportunity to judge for yourself when you visit the new stadium at Curraheen Park.

As a direct consequence of the Irish Greyhound Board's strategy in providing these new facilities, one could now bring anybody to their local track to sample the fare. For many, it was a first time experience.

A sizeable number of those who, in recent years, have gone greyhound racing, liked what they saw. They chose to get involved. Many became members of syndicates. Syndication brought a lot of new faces to the game. It also brought a fresh demand for promising young greyhounds.

At the same time, increased prize money played a huge part in convincing previously disillusioned breeders that there might be a chance to recoup some of their losses, which they had sustained in previous years through very low prices.

Bearing in mind that it takes approximately two years to see the fruits of ones labours in the breeding department, the change that has taken place in seven years, as far as breeders are concerned, is truly remarkable.

Irish breeders now receive 10% of the winner's prize money when the winners prize is in excess of €2,000.

Trainers receive a similar percentage on all prize money. So three key areas have benefitted substantially since the Irish Greyhound Board started to dispose of funds given to them by the various Governments.

What all of this has done is really to breath new life into the game.

As far as breeding is concerned, a study of the figures on page 4 will show that we are currently showing a 6.87% rise in litters, a 12.93% rise in namings and a .55% rise in transfers of ownership

These figures, I suggest, speak louder than any words of mine.

There is a very strong market for greyhounds in this Country. I would go so far as to say that a good dog will fetch more money here than anywhere in the World, because prize money is so good.

Traditionally, the U.K. was always our best customer. Unfortunately times have changed over there and not for the better, as far as selling greyhounds is concerned. One has only to study recent U.K. sales returns to see what I mean, or speak to the many Irish vendors who regularly provide entries for those sales.

The simple truth of the matter is that they cannot hope to compete in view of the difference in prize money in particular to graded racing.

Many of the top greyhounds racing here are owned by English people and some are trained by U.K. trainers who have moved over here on a permanent basis.

A strong U.K. market is in the interest of everybody. Irish breeders, owners and trainers need outlets for their stock. Competition is needed, in particular, for the lower end of the market, which affects most of the people who may venture into ownership.

While there has been a huge rise in the price of well bred pups and saplings, there has also been a very substantial rise in the price of stud dogs.

The old saying that water finds its own level might well be applied to the current scene in the stud dog sector, when you see the top dogs at a range of fees from €1000 to €2000.

One can also note that there are now 310 stud dogs registered in Ireland, down from the 1993 total when the figure was 479. In other words, substantially less stud dogs are mating more bitches.

It is a highly competitive market and only the fittest will survive. Irish breeders have never had it so good. There is a superb offering of really good stud dogs available to meet all tastes and pockets too!

Which brings us to the Australian stud dogs and their influence on the Irish breeding scene.

Quite simply, it has been huge. Some might say rather overpowering. Breeders are fickle creatures and so are stud keepers. It is not so long ago since I heard top men in the Industry saying that Frightful Flash would not make it! Others, before the real invasion of imports took place, were complaining that we were only getting the cast offs! They are now bringing in stud dogs!

Have these so called “cast offs” been good for Irish Breeding? Yes.

They were welcome because they provided a much needed outcross. Some of them, notably Top Honcho, who has proven to be outstanding and maybe considered to be a freak he is so good, have made a lot of money. Other have languished in mid-division.

In terms of travel, the World has become a small place. In terms of information it has become even smaller. The advances made in the IT sector in the last seven years are staggering.

I think that Irish greyhound racing can now be seen live in practically any Country in the World that wishes to receive it. It is not only remarkable, but also a huge boost for Irish breeding.

Obviously, with an increase in our breeding statistics, there is a danger of overproduction if breeders are not careful. New markets are difficult to find. The cost of transporting greyhounds from this Country to possible new outlets in the Far East, is much too expensive to make that area a viable option.

With a number of the traditional U.K. outlets now closed that used to take the lower priced greyhounds from Ireland, one must view that situation with some concern.

We continue to await the implementation of the proposed legislation covering the use of frozen semen in this Country. There is a market for it as we can see by reports emanating from the U.K. It would also appear likely that straws would be exported from some of our Irish stud dogs to America and Australia, etc.

In moments of prosperity which this Country has enjoyed for the past five years, it is so easy to become complacent and assume that ‘never again shall we see a rainy day’. That outlook could be a major mistake for breeders who should always remember their experiences in the early nineties.

It is extremely important that we carefully monitor the matings and do not overbreed.