



Rescuing the Racers

By Deborah Brightstar

In the mid-1980's a movement began to rescue greyhounds, who had completed their racing careers, from being euthanized or inhumanely killed. Until the greyhound rescue movement began, greyhounds were considered a commodity. They were not viewed as a suitable companion pet. When they were no longer winning races they were disposed of after they had served their purpose. They were either euthanized, inhumanely killed or sent off to research labs.

Greyhound rescues began with small pockets of individuals around the United States who started realizing what wonderful, gentle companions these ex-racers were. The rescue movement started with a few interested and committed people who could not tolerate allowing these sweet ex-athletes to be so inhumanely disposed of any longer.

“Even now, with approximately 300 greyhound rescue organizations throughout America, with the sheer volume of greyhounds that have been bred to race, eight to twelve thousand greyhounds are still being euthanized each and every year because there is nowhere for them to go. In other countries, rescue attempts are even more difficult”, reported Mary Freeman, the current president of Arizona Greyhound Rescue (AGR) for the past three and a half years, here in Tucson.

In 1992, Joan and Steve Randles wanted to adopt some greyhounds from the Tucson Greyhound Park but, they were told that was not possible. Greyhounds after they raced and were no longer useful as money making machines were taken to Pima Animal Care Center (PACC) where they were euthanized. Many more died of alternative and less humane methods.

During that same year PACC finally told the Randles that they could take dogs. With the help of friends, large crates were donated and four hounds came home for the first time. In 1994, the Randles incorporated Arizona Greyhound Rescue (AGR) and in 1995 received non-profit status. For the next five years, a handful of volunteers placed about five dogs a month in permanent homes.

Arizona Greyhound Rescue is a non-profit, all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) corporation committed to the belief that every greyhound deserves a loving, permanent and responsible home. AGR seeks to promote the adoption of greyhounds through programs designed to:

1. Educate the public about greyhounds' unique qualities that make them suitable as companion animals.
2. Provide shelter, food and medical care to greyhounds awaiting adoption.

3. Find loving, permanent and responsible homes for all greyhounds in our care.
4. Offer support and resources for greyhound adopters.
5. Make the public aware of the causes of and the need for greyhound adoption efforts.
6. Work with other greyhound and animal rescue groups to achieve these goals.

There are many ways one can get involved and help the rescue and adoption efforts. Anything from fostering or adopting a greyhound to volunteering at the adoption meet and greets at the local pet stores to working with the dogs at the kennels to help socialize them helps.

Mary Freeman points out that, “Greyhounds are different from other pure breeds in many ways. For example, most other breeds as puppies are raised in a home whereas greyhounds have never seen a home until they are adopted.” Therefore, they have to learn about their strange new environment as an adult. Such things as tile floors and stairs, navigating furniture and not being crated when they aren’t racing are strange experiences for them to adjust too.

“Greyhounds are cat like”, says Mary, an admitted cat person turned greyhound rescue advocate. She goes on to say, “They are a quiet breed that rarely bark and can not be counted on to be a watch dog. They are independent thinkers, which mean they are not the most compliant or easy to train. And, because of their skeletal-muscular structure many of them are not able to sit.”

As site hounds, they have a “high prey” or “chase instinct” that requires profiling of each and every greyhound to see which ones are safe with small animals and which ones are not safe to placed in homes with cats and small dogs. Three quarters of them can live with small dogs and half of them are safe with cats. They are also a very social and emotionally intelligent breed. They are used to being handled and having contact with people and are typically not abused at the tracks.

Mary also clears up some myths and misconceptions about greyhounds that perhaps have caused some fear or bad press about these 45 mph coach potatoes. “Despite the fact that they are the fastest domesticated animal on the planet, they are actually quite mellow, easy-going and gentle creatures. Perhaps it would even be safe to accuse them of being lazy. Even during their racing days they were only raced every 3-4 days. And, because they are often muzzled people may have concluded that they are vicious and aggressive. When in fact, the purpose of muzzling them is for their own protection since they have no body fat and very thin skin, they are very vulnerable to wounds that other dogs would not be subject too.”

If you would like to know more about greyhound rescues and what you can do or how you can help please visit AGR’s website at www.azgreyhoundrescue.org. The national rescue organizations are Greyhound Pets of America, Greyhound Protection League, and Greyhound Network News. Please contact one of these groups to learn more about these retired racers and find out how you can be involved.