

# Greyhounds

Clarrie Neal

*Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information given by Shirley and Barry Allison, Les Teale and John Stacey, September 1999. Also from the Windsor Gazette, and from an interview between Lance Strachan and Rosemary Phillis, December 1994. Apologies to the dog men I have failed to mention.*

The breeding and training of greyhounds (once known as kangaroo dogs) has always been a popular pastime in Riverstone and surrounding districts. In the early part of this century there were no dog tracks as we know them today, only live hare coursing at such tracks as Woodstock at Rooty Hill. There were only two dogs in a race and they would chase a hare up a hill - if the hare was fast enough he could make an exit through a gap in the fence. The race was judged as the dogs crossed an imaginary line across the course but dogs could also score points if they made the hare change direction. Sometimes the hare was caught by the dogs and it was this action that led to the sport being banned c1947 on the grounds of cruelty.

Some of the older residents of Riverstone who trained dogs at this time were Sid and Ted Jarrett, who the *Gazette* reported in March 1914 won a NSW Derby with *Jet D'Ean* and an Oaks with *Joy Bell*. 'Pilty' Marlin won a Waterloo Cup - another of the Blue Ribbon events of live hare coursing with *Waterford Lad*, a dog he trained for Sir Mark Foy. Other trainers of the day included Perce Allen, Reg Ford and Bede Freeman who the *Gazette* reported on 21st March 1903 caused much excitement when he gave his two greyhounds a rabbit chase in Mr Richard's paddock.

The mechanical hare was used to replace the live hare and as a result greyhound tracks were built in many country towns. Tracks that were frequented by the locals included Moss Vale, Goulburn, Lithgow, Bathurst, Gosford, Wyong and Londonderry.

In the days before cars became popular, the only way to get to these country tracks was by rail. If there were enough patrons the railways provided special dog carriages, with one side of the carriage fitted out with kennels and the other side with seats for the owners and trainers. Cards were played to pass the time away on the longer trips. It is interesting to note that before the dog was allowed on the train a ticket had to be purchased for the dog.

During the 1940s and 50s many Riverstone identities became involved with greyhounds, some of their names and their dogs are: Reg 'Dodger' Stanford - best known for *Pretty Secret* which won a string of long distance races at Harold Park and Wentworth Park. Perce Allen and his sons Howard and Ron had many successes between them: *Our Noreen* won 13 consecutive races at various country tracks and they also trained *Blonde Glen*, which was to hold the Harold Park record for many years being the first dog to ever break 27 seconds for the 500 yards.

Dick Stacey (senior) owned many good dogs including *Ida Thelma* (named after his wife), *Jean O'Joy* (named after his two girls), *Debenture*, *Bright Souvenir*, *Major Whirl*, *Chief Escape* and *Apache Boy*, with Lance Strachan doing most of the training. However training was a real family affair with all members of the Staceys likely to be seen at times out walking the dogs with Lance. Dick Stacey (junior) also became involved with dogs, owning *Miss Whippa* which won 10 races on the Sydney tracks; another good dog was *The Black Don*, both were trained by Gordon 'Gudgeon' Alderton. Dick also won several races with *Dessick*, a dog he part owned with Dessie Cartwright.

Mavis and Ronnie Brown were a family who had a lifetime involvement with the sport. They shared many successes with *Shy Search* and the 'Moss' dogs. The Connolly family in Clarke Street, also had a lot of successes with the 'Moss' dogs. Norm Shields was another who teamed up with Ronnie Brown and won many races with *Bill Moss*, *Molly Moss* and *Gold Stockade*. Johnny Brookes trained *Misty Issue* which won many races and held a track record at Bathurst. Les Teale won 18 races at the country tracks with *Glen Amber*.

Barry Allison and his wife Shirley have had many successes in a lifetime involvement with the sport. Names that come to mind are *Swift Dream*, *Get Lost*, *Im Lost*, *Dominant Miss* which won 14 races in 12 months and held a track record at Moss Vale. Barry and Shirley are still very involved with dogs and currently train *Bingara Echo* which won 20 races in 1998/99.

Other owners / trainers in the district who bred and raced dogs with varying degrees of success include - 'Prince' Greentree, Alec Matthews, Gordon Martin, Bert Kobler, Clarrie Neal, Kevin 'Stumpy' Byrnes (*Miss Nigalong*), Siddie Clark (*Little Chance*), Chris Becke (*No Place*), and 'Possum' Perrott, Ted Sutton and his two boys Kevin and Alan, Frank Johnstone and son Harold (*My John Son*), Charlie Wells (*Court Ruler*), Jack Pearce, Bobbie Johnstone, Reggie and Johnny Johnson, Mick Sullivan, Reg Barron, Norm Schoffel, Reg and Norm Schofields, Alby Matson, Les Aberley, Stella Withers, Norm Brown, and Snowy Sullivan.

Many of these dog men worked at the Meatworks and often of a Monday morning after the races at the weekend, they would get together to discuss the results. The discussion would be "a certainty beaten", "unlucky", "will win next week", and sometimes "it was a great win". If these talks continued for any length of time their workmates would start a chorus of barking or howling, indicating they had heard enough dog talk for the day. If this failed they would start scratching themselves to show how bad the fleas were, these actions usually bringing the discussion to an abrupt end.

I can recall going on the train with my father to the dogs at Goulburn and at Lithgow and remember it being a long day, having to leave early in the morning, walk to the station, catch the steam train to Strathfield and there board the train to Goulburn. The days I travelled there was no special dog carriage so we travelled in the guards van with the dog on a rug on the floor and I remember watching the card games the men played to pass the time.

Because the main training track 'Bowcocks' on Briens Road at Westmead involved a train trip and a fair walk from the station the dog men would often use a 400 yard straight track that was supposed to be Loftus Street in Riverstone. This was alongside Swifts paddock, also known as Grantham Farm. We could give the dogs a 'hand gallop' there. Dad waited at the top of the track and Ron or myself walked the dog to the other end and when Dad gave a signal we would release the dog.

Many of the dog men trialled their dogs there and at one stage they used a modified bike frame to drag a stuffed rabbit skin along the track as a lure. I also remember the large blackberry bush near the track that was home to a lot of rabbits, sometimes the greyhounds would career off the straight and narrow and chase these rabbits instead of completing their trial.

Mick Sullivan had an interesting theory on his dogs at this track - instead of waiting at the top of the track, Mick would wait at the telegraph post some 80 yards down the track from the finish. When the signal was given to release the dog, Mick would start running and if he beat the dog to the finish line the dog was classed as a failure.

Although the prizemoney offered at Harold and Wentworth Parks was good, that offered at the country tracks was poor. Because dog racing was so popular in those days you had to race at the country tracks to prove the dog was good enough to race in the city. Some of the maiden races at these tracks offered a winner's prize of just 4 pounds, with 1 pound for 2nd and 10 shillings for 3rd.

To get increased attendances at the city tracks various innovations have been tried, perhaps the most novel was when they held special races using monkeys as jockeys. The monkeys made very good jockeys and as one old timer said "he never ever remembered one to fall off", but then they knew what to expect if they did fall off.

Another measure that was tried was racing over the hurdles, but these were never really successful because some of the dogs would lose sight of the lure as it passed through the hurdles.

Many dogs failed to make it to the racetrack and if the owner ignored such freely given advice as "take it out into the bush and run away from it" the dog could be given to a farmer to chase rabbits on his farm or property. Les Teale recalls travelling to North Richmond on the 'Pansy' along with Reggie Johnson and Kevin Sutton and their two greyhounds, and chasing rabbits in the paddocks surrounding Phillip Charley's castle, now known as the St. John of God Hospital. In those days the rabbits were in plague proportions and wherever you looked you would see them, the dogs not knowing which rabbit to start chasing first.