



RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Breeder's Education Pack

Unit One – Getting Started

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Racing and Wagering Western Australia
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1 Getting Started

So You Think You Want to Breed a Litter of Greyhounds

Many people who get into the sport of greyhound racing consider breeding a litter at some stage. Some may have had a successful race bitch who they have now retired and hope that she will be able to pass on her talent to her offspring; others might see it as a way to have involvement throughout their racing dog's life. Unfortunately, many people decide to breed in the mistaken idea that they might be able to re-coup some money from a bitch that might not have been a great performer on the track.

Most new breeders are unaware of the amount of time, effort and money that goes into successfully producing a litter of pups. Breeding a litter takes a lot of thought and preparation. There is the extra care and supervision of the bitch, followed by the enormous amount of work when the puppies arrive.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, then start to think about, and prepare for the whole process well before the breeding is to take place.

Breeding is not a cheap exercise. Costs include the stud fee, vet fees (especially if you choose to inseminate the bitch using frozen semen), increased feed costs, registration, vaccination, worming, not to mention the surprise costs that can occur when things go wrong (such as when a pup gets sick, or the bitch needs a caesarean to whelp). Add to this the enormous amount of time and labour that goes into caring for the litter, and you start to see that breeding a litter is quite a costly exercise.

You need to think about both expected and unexpected costs when breeding a litter before you decide to commit to breeding a litter of pups.

Every step of the way, you need to 'get it right' to ensure your pups can reach their genetic potential. Growing pups need the benefit of the best possible food, the right amount

of handling and exercise, and close monitoring if they are to develop into athletes. Taking short cuts with pups is false economy as you are only reducing the likelihood of your pups making it to the track.

You also need to think about what you plan to do with the pups you breed. Will you sell all or some of them? Or, will you be retaining them for yourself. If your bitch has a large litter, it may be impractical to keep all the pups and you will have to decide which you are going to keep. Unfortunately some breeders end up keeping too many dogs because they are worried they might accidentally sell the 'big winner'. Suddenly they are cutting corners on feeding and rearing the pups and all they end up doing is ruining any chances they had of success.

Remember: Having more dogs does not increase your chances of winning if all you are doing is cutting corners. You are better focussing on one or two pups and really doing everything right.

You also need to think about what will happen to those dogs that do not make the track. Not every puppy you produce will be a race winner. In fact, statistics tell us that almost half of the dogs that are bred never make the track at all. Greyhounds are fantastic dogs, and many make great pets. Understanding the Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) and what is required can help you prepare any pups that are not going to make it as race dogs for a second chance at life.

Remember: Under the Rules of Greyhound Racing you are responsible for the greyhounds you own and you are required to think and act in a mature way when considering the future of your greyhounds if and when they retire as racing or breeding greyhounds.

Finding a Mentor

If you are seriously considering breeding, the first thing to do is to find yourself a suitable mentor. Mentors are people who have been in the industry over a long period of time and who have had success over a number of years, not just one or two good dogs. They should be knowledgeable in all facets of the industry with a good understanding of genetics, anatomy, and breeding. Look for someone who is well respected and has a good reputation within the industry.

A good mentor is worth their weight in gold. They are a source of information that is not going to be found in books or on the internet. Ask lots of questions and listen to their answers. Discuss your breeding plans with them and ask for their opinions. Assisting your mentor with their whelpings and helping them with the care of their pups is also a good way to get some experience and to see if breeding is for you.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about finding a mentor - well before the breeding is to take place

Finding a Veterinarian

Having a good relationship with a veterinarian is also important. If you are planning to use frozen semen on your bitch, you will have to use one of the approved frozen semen facilities registered with the various state authorities. If you are close to one of these facilities, it may be that you use these vets throughout your breeding career, but if they are further a field, you are going to have to establish a relationship with your local greyhound vet.

Discussing your litter with your vet is also a good idea as they can help advise you about nutrition and care of the pregnant bitch, along with what to do when things go wrong. They are also the one who is likely to be woken at three in the morning when your bitch needs a caesarean.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about finding and establishing a good working relationship with a veterinarian well before the breeding takes place .

Understanding the Paperwork Requirements

Throughout the breeding process it is a requirement under the Rules of Greyhound Racing that various forms are submitted to RWWA. It is important that you understand which forms need to be submitted and when. That way you will be prepared, and there will be no hold-ups when it comes time to sell your pups.

Transferring the Brood Bitch into Your Name

If you are not already the owner of the brood bitch, she must be transferred into your name. Alternatively, if you are just leasing a bitch, then an 'Authority to Register a Service or Litter (Form B) must be submitted. this way you will be listed as the breeder of the litter, and you will receive all of the necessary paperwork by mail.

DNA Testing

If this is your bitch's first litter, she will have to be DNA fingerprinted. Ideally this should occur well before she is inseminated - but it must occur prior to pups being registered. The DNA test can take 6-8 weeks to come back, so it is a good idea to get this done early so that registrations are not held up. The required forms can be obtained by visiting the Greyhounds Australasia website (www.galtd.org.au). The test (which only needs to be performed once) is a simple mouth swab which is done by a veterinarian.

Notification of Service

RWWA must be notified that your bitch has been served. This form is submitted by the studmaster in the case of a natural mating or AI using fresh or chilled semen, or the inseminating veterinarian will submit the form with the fee in the case of frozen semen. It is a requirement that the form is submitted within 14 days of the service occurring.

Transfer of Ownership of a Breeding Unit

If you plan to use frozen semen, you will need to have the breeding unit(s) that you intend to use transferred into your name prior to using them. Any transfer of Breeding Units needs to be notified within 14 days of the transfer with the person selling the unit submitting a form, and you as the new owner also submitting a form.

Notification of Mating Result

Once your bitch has whelped, you are required to notify RWWA of the number of pups of each sex in the litter, along with their colours. If your bitch misses, or nil whelps (that is, she fails to whelp any live pups) then you must notify RWWA that she has missed. This form needs to be lodged within 14 days of the whelping date, or in the case of a nil whelp, within 14 days of the expected whelping date.

Litter Registration

Once the mating result has been submitted, RWWA will provide you with the Registration of Litter Form (Form E) and the microchips for implantation in the pups. After the pups have been microchipped they will need to be ear branded by the RWWA Stewards. After ear branding the Form E should then include all the required details and will be returned to RWWA on your behalf by the Stewards. You will also need to provide proof to RWWA that all the pups have been vaccinated, as vaccination of all pups with the minimum of a C3 vaccine is compulsory under the Rules of Racing. 16 weeks of age.

Sale of Pups

When you sell a pup, it is a requirement that you provide the pup's registration papers to the new owner, along with written information about the keep and care of greyhounds (as per the Code of Practice for the Greyhound Industry). You will also have to notify RWWA that you have sold the pup.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about understanding the paperwork requirements - well before the breeding is to take place

Starting a Breeding Program

The first step to starting a breeding program is to learn everything you can about greyhounds, greyhound racing and breeding. It may be that you attend seminars, read books or search the internet for information. There are also a number of chat sites dedicated to Greyhounds, but remember anyone can be an expert online.

The more you know about greyhounds and racing, the better the choices you will make. Study pedigrees of dogs that you admire, and dogs that perform well. You will probably notice that there are definite trends and families that do better than others. If you are going to purchase a brood bitch, try to get the best bitch that you can afford and have your mentor help advise you on suitable bitches. Remember: pedigrees are helpful but the racing form of the bitch you purchase is more important than anything on paper.

Next you will need to select a stud dog that will complement your bitch and any faults she might have. Maybe you are looking for a little more early speed, maybe for a little more strength or endurance. Discuss the list of potential mates with your mentor. Your aim should be to use the sire that is best for your bitch, not just the dog down the road that belongs to a friend and is convenient to access.

Becoming a successful breeder often takes time. It also requires critical analysis of your own actions. In this regard when have raised a litter, be critical of what you have managed to achieve - where could you have improved or done things better? You should aim to get better at breeding each time you have a litter - this is the hallmark of a successful breeder.



Basic Breeding Principles

Many breeders find the actual science of genetics very daunting. There are many good references that can help breeders better understand genetics and how dogs inherit traits from their parents. A list of references is located at the back of Section Four.

Many breeders will use terms such as 'Line-breeding' or 'Out-crossing' without really understanding what they mean. There are many ideas about the 'right' way to breed dogs, with many of them contradicting each other.

Some basic concepts:

- All puppies get half of their genes from their mother and half from their father.
- The genes can be thought of as the 'Instructions' for building a racing greyhound.
- The actual assortment of genes each puppy receives from each parent is random, with some puppies getting more of the 'good genes' than others. No two littermates have the exact same genes (unless they are twins), even though they come from the same parents.
- Because all dogs carry some 'good' genes and some 'bad' genes, no matter how good the parents are on the racetrack they will all produce some inferior puppies.
- Certain traits are more likely to be passed on - they have what is called 'high heritability'. Other traits may have a low heritability.
- Temperament traits (i.e. aggression or fearfulness) are HIGHLY heritable - this means if you use a bitch that is aggressive you are more likely to produce puppies that are aggressive.
- 'Line-bred' animals have a common ancestor behind each parent within the first 3-4 generations. The aim of line-breeding is to try to stabilize desirable traits by increasing the frequency of the desired genes in the pups.
- 'In-breeding' is the mating of closely related animals such as brother-sister, mother-son etc. Inbreeding is best avoided by inexperienced breeders as it can lead to 'doubling-up' on problem genes, and depression of fertility.
- An 'Out-cross' is a mating of two basically unrelated animals. This means that they do not have any common ancestors for at least 6 generations. The two individual dogs may still be line-bred themselves; they are just not related to each other. Out-crossing is generally done to introduce a desirable trait, or to try to increase 'hybrid vigour'.
- A 'pedigree' is a list of ancestors for a particular individual. Although all the dogs in the pedigree have some input into the individual, the first 2-3 generations are the most important and influential. For example, a dog appearing in the 6th generation may only contribute 1% of the genetics for the pup in question. Even if a dog appears a number of times in the 5th or 6th generation it still might only have a small influence (might increase to 2%) on the genetics of the pup.

- ‘Progeny records’ are a list of the offspring from an individual. They are by far the most important indicator of a dog or bitch’s ability to produce successful pups.
- The genes form the dog’s ‘genetic potential’, this is then influenced by other things such as nutrition, exercise and handling. A well bred dog can be ruined by poor nutrition and care and never actually reach its full potential. Conversely, all the good food and care in the world is not going to turn a poorly bred dog into an athlete.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about understanding basic breeding principles - well before the breeding is to take place

Selecting a Foundation Bitch

Starting off with the best bitch that you can should be a priority. Why start with a lesser bitch and spend two or three generations to get to where you could have started.

A city winning bitch with a good pedigree (lots of city winners in the first few generations) is certainly the ideal starting point. Not everyone can start here, but you should certainly look at the bitch’s form. If she has been mated previously check the form of her offspring before deciding if you think she has the potential to produce good quality dogs. If she has not managed to produce any winners within one or two litters, it is very unlikely that she will suddenly produce a good dog.

Because temperament is more highly heritable than many other traits, avoid bitches who are non-chasers, or who are ‘fighters’. You are also probably best to avoid bitches who are extremely fearful or shy.

Unless there are problems with the male’s fertility, it is actually the bitch who determines litter size based on the number of eggs produced. Look for a bitch who has come from a large litter herself, rather than one who came from a small litter. Smaller litters are more likely to lead to problems such as the need for caesarean section, and of course the costs of the litter are spread over fewer pups. Ask the previous owner for as much information as possible about the bitch’s reproductive cycle – when she was last on season, how she cycles, the day(s) she was mated etc. The more information you have the better.

A dam’s litter size is usually fairly constant over time, although older bitches tend to have fewer pups. The bitch’s mothering skills are also important. Select a bitch that comes from a line of good mothers, and avoid bitches that have been hand raised themselves. Having a litter is hard enough without having to bottle feed 10 puppies because the mother won’t feed them!!

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, try to make sure that you find a good foundation bitch to start with - well before the breeding is to take place

Selecting a Stud Dog

Selection of a suitable sire for your bitch is a very hard decision. There are glossy adverts, varying stud fees, and ‘popular’ sires to consider. How do you find the dog that is right for your bitch? You should not just use the popular stud of the day, or the dog that seems to have done the most winning, it is far more important to seek out the sire that actually produces the traits that your desire in their progeny, and one that compliments your bitch.

Although the cost of the stud fee may be a factor, don’t just use the cheapest dog, or the one that is located conveniently close to home thinking you will save money. The cost of the stud fee is only a small part of the cost of whelping and raising a litter - it costs just as much to whelp and raise lesser quality pups as it does good quality pups!

The first step in selecting a suitable sire should be to list your bitch’s strengths and weaknesses. Once you have these, you need to prioritise the things you would like to improve. This then becomes your ‘shopping list’ as you consider each sire. When considering a sire, remember you do not want to double up on faults or weaknesses.

Sires are advertised in publications such as The Greyhound Recorder, or National Greyhound Form, and other greyhound publications. Advertisements often list the achievements of the sire during his racing career, along with the contact details of the studmaster. Don’t be fooled by clever advertising – read carefully the information supplied. All studmasters are going to highlight the best things about their stud dog, and not mention anything negative. Just because a sire is well advertised, does not mean that he is a good sire.

Next, you need to list each of the available sires and decide which of these sires has the desired traits that you are seeking, and which don’t. You will also need to look at the progeny he has already produced to ensure that he passes these traits on to his offspring as well. Progeny data is probably the most important information as this tells you what the dog actually produces.

There are many good racing dogs who have failed to produce winning puppies when they have stood at stud. Take a good look at the progeny a stud dog has produced before deciding whether or not he is likely to produce winners for you.

A good place to start is to look at the ‘Top Ranking’ sires lists that compare the number of winners for each sire. Remember, these lists do not tell you how many pups were produced to reach these totals, so you are not necessarily comparing apples to apples. Obviously, if two sires have both produced 15 city winners each and are equally ranked in the ‘Top Sires’ lists based on winning progeny, the sire who has sired 150 litters is nowhere near as efficient at producing winners as the sire who has sired 30 litters to achieve the same result.

Knowing when a sire started his career is also important. If the sire is in his first or second season, he probably will not have many of his pups racing as they will be too young. This will influence the amount of progeny data that is available, and he may appear lower on the ranking list.

If possible, look at the performance of any offspring from bitches that are related to yours as this will give you the best idea of whether the two dogs are likely to mesh well. Remember when looking at progeny, you need to look at the average over all progeny, not just the feats of one or two exceptional offspring. More progeny data can be obtained from www.greyhound-data.com. This is a very valuable resource with incredible amounts of information for those who are eager to study pedigrees.

As we know, each pup in a litter gets slightly different genes. This means that mating your bitch to the brother of a top sire is not the same as mating her to him. The lesser brother is probably that way because he does not have quite so many of the 'good' genes, and hence he will not have them to pass along to his offspring.

Once you have decided on the stud dog, it is time to contact the studmaster. He will want to know when your bitch is next due on season, so that he/she can know when to expect your bitch. Remember that stud dogs are limited to the number of bitches that they can serve each quarter.

You will also need to discuss with the studmaster the costs associated with the mating and any conditions of service (conditions of a return service, refunds - should your bitch fail to produce pups). It is best to have a written contract listing exactly what is expected and what is included.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about understanding stud dog selection and the conditions of a stud service - well before the breeding is to take place

Things to Ask the Studmaster:

Aside from the stud fee, are there other costs involved?

Additional costs may include progesterone testing (a blood test that indicates when your bitch should be inseminated), AI using fresh semen, or boarding costs. If you are buying frozen semen, where is it stored? You may need to ship the straw(s) of frozen semen to your facility of choice and there will be a fee to do this.

Are there any requirements prior to mating?

Some studmasters insist that the bitch has a swab (veterinary test for infection) done prior to mating, and if so, you will have to find out when they would like it done. It is normal for the swab to come back indicating some bacteria - the healthy reproductive tract has a normal population of 'good' bacteria. If your bitch has unusual levels of 'bad' bacteria, she may need a course of antibiotics prior to mating, but it is important not to use antibiotics unless they are needed as they also kill the 'good' bacteria, which can then pre-dispose the bitch to more serious infections developing.

What happens if the bitch does not get in whelp?

Some studmasters will offer a 'free return' meaning you can bring your bitch back the following season and try again. If this is offered are there any limitations? This might include a time limit, or might specify that the free return is only to be used on the bitch specified. Some studmasters will refund part of the stud fee instead of offering a free return, others will not offer anything.

These days it is strongly advised that you insist that the studmaster uses progesterone testing to determine the correct time to mate your bitch, even if the mating is to be a natural one. If the mating occurs at the wrong time, and the bitch misses, it is going to mean that you have to wait another 6-12 months before you have another opportunity to breed her. The cost of a few blood tests is only small when compared to the feed and care costs whilst waiting for another chance to mate your brood bitch.

It is important that you are totally clear about what you are getting for your money. It is too late after the bitch has been served to start arguing about what you thought you were getting for your service fee. As it is a private contract between you and the studmaster, the various state greyhound racing authorities will not get involved if there is a dispute.

Remember: If you are seriously considering breeding, start to think about preparing your bitch and giving her the best chances to whelp a healthy litter of pups - well before the breeding is to take place



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