

GREYHOUND HISTORY AND INTERESTING FACTS

Greyhounds are the oldest purebred dog, dating to the time of the Pharaohs. The first records of greyhound type dogs appear about 8,000 years ago. In ancient Egypt, greyhounds were revered as gods, and only royalty were allowed to own them.



All sight hounds that we know today (dogs that hunt by sight rather than scent) were descended from the ancient greyhound.



This likeness of an ancient greyhound type dog was found in an Egyptian tomb dating to around 3,000 BC

The origin of the name “greyhound” is lost in antiquity, but it almost certainly does not refer to the color of the dog. Grey colored greyhounds are rare, and are not referred to as grey, but as “blue”. Regardless of their name, greyhounds are valued for what they can do, admired for the way they look, and loved for the way they are.

The greyhound is the only breed of dog mentioned by name in the Bible: Proverbs, 30:29-31.

Greyhounds appear in both Greek and Roman mythology. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the only one who recognized Odysseus after his 20-year absence was his faithful greyhound, Argus.

Throughout history, greyhounds have been prized and revered. During the Dark Ages, a time of disease and famine, greyhounds were saved from extinction by priests who bred them for noblemen. Until around 1700, owning a greyhound was the exclusive right of the nobility.

Greyhounds became the first European dog in the New World when they accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second expedition, which set sail from Spain in September 1493.

Both Chaucer and Shakespeare immortalized greyhounds in literature. In the 14th Century in Chaucer's "*Canterbury Tales*", the greyhound was the first breed of dog that Chaucer wrote about. Shakespeare mentions greyhounds in *Henry V*.

During the Renaissance, coursing greyhounds were a favorite of royalty, including Queen Elizabeth I of England. In the 19th Century, HRH Prince Albert of Germany brought with him his beloved greyhound, Eos, when he left for England to wed Queen Victoria in 1840. Sir Edwin Landseer painted a beautiful portrait of Eos, which is shown below.



Another fancier of greyhounds was General George Custer. He spent many hours breeding and training his prized pets. He coursed his pack of 14 greyhounds the night before the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Three United States Presidents have owned greyhounds: George Washington (Cornwallis), Rutherford B. Hayes (Grim) and Woodrow Wilson (Mountain Boy.)

It is generally agreed that today's greyhound breed was developed in England, where a Stud Book was established in 1882. Every racing greyhound alive today

can trace its lineage back to one dog, King Cob, whelped in England in 1839. King Cob was the first successful stud dog. During 3 years at stud, he sired over 1,000 offspring.

King Cob's most famous son was Master McGrath. He was an Irish greyhound who won the Waterloo Cup, the premier event for coursing, three times. There was even a poem written about him. He was a plain looking black male, weighing in at only 54 pounds.



King Cob, forefather of the racing greyhound



Master McGrath, winner of the Waterloo Cup 3 times

Greyhounds were recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1885, with 19 dogs registered. A rift developed between coursing and show enthusiasts and two different types of greyhounds emerged. Show greyhounds are bred to adhere to an exact breed standard, while racing greyhounds may be of any size, height, color, or build, and are bred solely for speed, stamina, courage and disposition. Although the two types of greyhounds look much alike, there are noted differences.

The National Greyhound Association is the registry for all racing greyhounds in the United States. Show greyhounds registered by the AKC account for only a tiny fraction of greyhounds in this country. Since greyhound racing has ended here, many of our greyhounds now come to us from Ireland, where greyhound racing is still quite popular. All Irish greyhounds are registered with Greyhound Racing Ireland (GRI).

Greyhounds became popular in frontier America in the early 1800's, arriving with English and Irish settlers. During this period, Mid-Western farmers whose farms were over run with jackrabbits, utilized the greyhound to rid their farms of the jackrabbits.

In 1912, Owen Patrick Smith, an engineer, developed and patented a mechanical lure in North America that would run around an oval track, and the sport of greyhound racing was born. At first, greyhound racing was held in conjunction with horse racing. In 1923 the Miami Kennel Club in Hialeah, Florida, became the first greyhound race track to use Mr. Owen's mechanical lure. Because Florida has flat land, sandy soil and good weather all year, it became the prime state for greyhound racing. The St. Petersburg Kennel Club, known as Derby Lane, opened in 1925. It is the only greyhound track that was in continuous operation until the end of 2020, when greyhound racing was banned in Florida.



Greyhounds racing at Derby Lane

The greyhound adoption movement started in 1982 when Ron Walsek, a race track employee at Derby Lane, founded an organization he called REGAP (Retired Greyhounds as Pets), to find homes for greyhounds that could no longer compete at the track. Since then, adoption groups have found homes for thousands of greyhounds. Because of their gentle, docile and easy going temperaments, greyhounds were so revered as pets that hundreds of adoption organizations for greyhounds emerged----more than for any other individual breed.

Since greyhound racing in Florida ended in December of 2020, there are only two tracks in the United States, both in West Virginia. Other than at those tracks, there are no greyhounds available. Our greyhounds now come to us from Ireland through the Irish Greyhound Trust (IGT), the main adoption group in Ireland. These greyhounds are just as sweet, gentle, and loving as our American greyhounds.
