

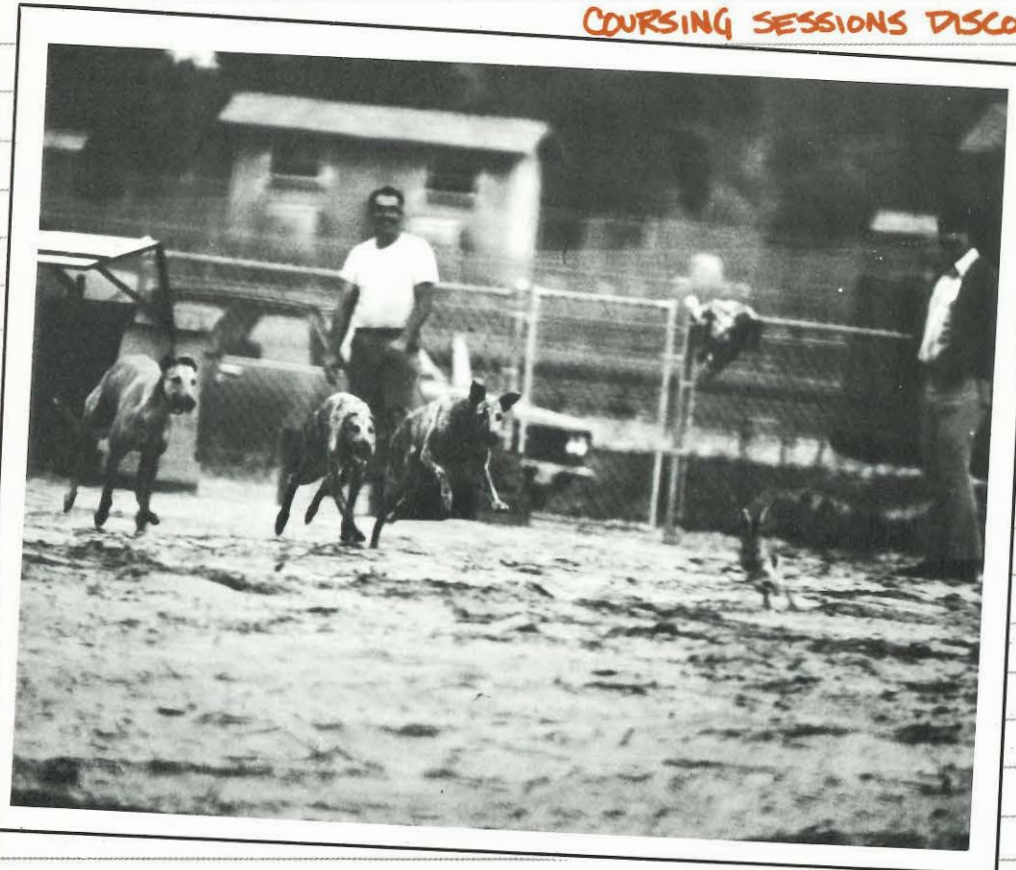
The Scream of a Rabbit

A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Greyhound Training

By Bernard M. Weller, HSUS Gulf States Field Representative

THE SCENE: A GREYHOUND TRAINING TRACK NEAR LUBBOCK, TEXAS, AT THE END OF THE FOURTH RACE. TWO BOYS, PERHAPS 10 OR 11 YEARS OLD, DRAG A SCREAMING RABBIT FROM THE MOUTHS OF 3 VICIOUS GREYHOUNDS. ONE OF THE BOYS HELD THE MANGLED RABBIT BY ITS HIND LEGS, DRIPPING BLOOD BEFORE HIM, THEN DROPPED THE ANIMAL ON THE GROUND AND WALKED AWAY NONCHALANTLY. I STOOD THERE SPEECHLESS AND UNBELIEVING OF WHAT I HAD JUST WITNESSED—CHILDREN BEING EXPOSED TO THE ABOMINABLY CRUEL PRACTICE OF A TRAINING SESSION FOR DOG RACING CALLED "COURSING."

IT WAS EARLY EVENING WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE COURSING TRACK JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS OF LUBBOCK. MY PRESENCE AT THE TRACK, WHICH TRAINS GREYHOUNDS FOR DOG RACING IN STATES OUTSIDE TEXAS, WAS LOOKED UPON BY SEVERAL PEOPLE THERE AS UNEVENTFUL. I FELT MORE THAN A LITTLE NERVOUS THOUGH, AFTER SEEING SEVERAL HANDGUNS AND RIFLES LYING ABOUT IN TRUCKS AND DOG TRAILERS IN THE PARKING AREA. FROM MY PAST INVESTIGATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH HSUS, I KNEW MY LIFE WOULD BE IN DANGER IF ANY ONE OF THE APPROXIMATELY 20 DOG OWNERS PARTICIPATING IN THE COURSING SESSIONS DISCOVERED MY IDENTITY.



I WALKED INTO THE TRACK AREA AND DISCOVERED TWO RACETRACKS THAT WERE BRIGHTLY ILLUMINATED BY FLOODLIGHTS. ONE WAS A COURSING TRACK IN WHICH DOGS CHASE AND KILL FREE-RUNNING RABBITS. THE OTHER WAS A STANDARD OVAL TRACK USED BY PROFESSIONAL GREYHOUND RACERS. THE WELL-GROOMED TRACKS WERE COVERED WITH SOFT, SANDY LOAM THAT GIVES OPTIMUM TRACTION FOR RUNNING DOGS. THERE

PHOTOS DEPICT TYPICAL COURSING SESSION.

WAS A 2-ACRE ALFAIFA ENCLOSURE USED AS A HOLDING PEN FOR RABBITS, WHERE SEVERAL MEN WERE CATCHING RABBITS FOR THE UPCOMING RUNS. THEY LOADED THE RABBITS INTO WOOD CONTAINERS AND PLACED THEM NEAR THE ENTRANCE OF THE TRACK.



Photos by the St. Petersburg Times

WHILE WAITING FOR THE FIRST RACE I TALKED WITH THE TRACK OWNER, WHO INFORMED ME THAT COURSING SESSIONS WERE HELD TWICE A WEEK ON A YEAR-ROUND BASIS. HE SAID AFTER THE DOGS ARE TRAINED AT THE TRACK THEY ARE SENT TO ONE OF 9 STATES THAT LEGALLY SANCTION DOG RACING IN THE U.S. HE BOASTED THAT PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE STATE HAD COME TO HIS TRACK TO TRAIN THEIR DOGS.

THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST SESSION WAS SIGNALLED BY THE CROWD OF SPECTATORS WHO PRESSED THEMSELVES EAGERLY AGAINST A CHAIN-LINK FENCE THAT LINED THE FRINGE OF THE DOG TRACK. SUDDENLY, A RABBIT WAS RELEASED. TWO GREYHOUNDS WERE SET FREE ON ITS TRAIL AS THE DOGS NEARED THE RABBIT, IT TURNED BACK TOWARD THE ENTRANCE OF THE TRACK, LOOKING FOR AN ESCAPE. THE CROWD ON BOTH SIDES OF THE TRACK ROARED AT THE RABBIT TO SCARE IT BACK IN THE DIRECTION OF THE DOGS. THE RABBIT RAN BACK AND FORTH, DESPERATELY TRYING TO ELUDE THE DOGS. I CHEERED INSIDE MYSELF WHEN THE DOGS BECAME EXHAUSTED AND COULD NOT KEEP UP WITH THE RABBIT. BUT MY ELATION WAS SHORT-LIVED, AS A THIRD GREYHOUND WAS RELEASED ONTO THE TRACK. THE FRESH GREYHOUND DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME, WITHIN SECONDS IT GRABBED THE RABBIT. A BLOODCURDLING SCREAM FROM THE HELPLESS CREATURE PIERCED THE AIR. THE RABBIT'S WAILING INCREASED AS ALL THREE DOGS BEGAN TEARING IT APART.

AFTER THE DOGS HAD MAULED THE RABBIT FOR A FEW MINUTES, SEVERAL YOUNG CHILDREN WERE SENT ONTO THE TRACK TO RETRIEVE IT. ONE YOUNGSTER GRABBED THE RABBIT FROM THE MOUTH OF A DOG AND DISCOVERED THAT IT WAS STILL ALIVE. HE THREW THE ANIMAL ON THE GROUND AND STOMPED HIS BOOT HEEL

A TRACK ATTENDANT
DISPOSES OF DEAD RABBITS
AFTER A COURSING SESSION.



ON THE RABBIT'S HEAD FIVE OR SIX TIMES. THE RABBIT CONTINUED TO MAKE LOW SQUEALING SOUNDS OF LIFE. AS A LAST RESORT, THE CHILD PICKED THE ANIMAL UP BY ITS HIND LEGS AND SLAMMED ITS HEAD AGAINST A STEEL FENCE POLE WHILE OTHER YOUNGSTERS DUCKED THE SPATTERING OF FLYING BLOOD.

THIS GORY SCENE WAS REPEATED WITH LITTLE VARIATION DURING EACH OF EIGHT COURSING SESSIONS THAT EVENING. THERE WERE ALSO SEVERAL RACES HELD ON THE FULL-SIZE TRACK EQUIPPED WITH A MECHANICAL LURE. IN THESE RACES, A RABBIT THAT HAD BEEN KILLED DURING THE COURSING SESSIONS WAS CUT IN HALF, TIED TO THE LURE, AND SWUNG AROUND THE TRACK WITH THE DOGS IN HOT PURSUIT. THE LURE HAD A NOISEMAKER ATTACHED TO IT THAT SIMULATED THE SQUEAL OF A WOUNDED RABBIT. WHEN THESE RACES ENDED THE DOGS WERE ALLOWED TO BITE THE BLEEDING CARCASS.

WALKING TO MY CAR FOLLOWING THE LAST RACE, I SAW CHILDREN ABOUT 4 OR 5 YEARS OF AGE SITTING BEHIND A PICKUP TRUCK PLAYING WITH A DEAD RABBIT. THEY WERE TOSSING THE CARCASS INTO THE AIR, SWINGING IT IN CIRCLES, AND THROWING IT AGAINST THE TRUCK.

AS I DROVE AWAY I COULD NOT HELP BUT THINK OF THE CHILDREN, THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF THEIR PARENTS' SADISTIC ACTS TOWARD ANIMALS. I ASKED MYSELF WHAT KIND OF HUMAN BEINGS COULD ALLOW THEIR YOUNG TO VIEW AND PARTICIPATE IN SUCH CRUELTY. I AM AT A LOSS TO UNDERSTAND THEM.

Editors Note: HSUS has determined that activities observed by Weller violate state civil and criminal anti-cruelty laws. The HSUS Legal Department is attempting to assemble an ironclad case of cruelty to animals against the track owner. HSUS hopes to convince the county attorney's office that it has no alternative under the law except to proceed with prosecution.