



The race is on as the nine greyhounds streak around the track in pursuit of Rusty, the mechanical rabbit.

Backstage at the greyhound races



Trainer Billie Jarvis helps one of her charges out of the kennel truck.

The first glimpse most people get of the dogs at Murray Kemp Greyhound Park is when nine white-uniformed grooms lead the blanketed animals from the paddock to the starting box minutes before each race.

But for the 99 greyhounds who run in 11 races each night during the annual Multnomah Kennel Club meeting, the racing evening starts much earlier.

At about 5 p.m. each day, greyhound trainers drive their kennel trucks through a guarded gate and park in a large compound on the north side of the track. Here the muzzled greyhounds are unloaded, leashed and exercised around a "cooling-off" yard.

"The trainers generally use this area after the race to get the dogs ready to go back in the truck for the trip home," says Walt Zornado, an ex-Multnomah County deputy sheriff who runs the paddock and probably has more to do with the greyhounds than anyone except their trainers.

From the compound, the trainers lead their animals up to the paddock. The dogs are issued large brass tags denoting their race and box position. The draws for each race are made two days in advance. After their trainers call out their race and box numbers, the dogs are tagged and checked off by one of Zornado's paddock assistants.

Next the dogs walk up a ramp to a platform where they are checked for the first time by state veterinarian Walt Hardy. Hardy looks in each dog's eyes, runs his hands down their legs and examines their hindquarters. He'll look at their feet later, just before they go out on the track.

"I check for general sickness and for any body soreness," says Hardy, who performs a similar function at Portland Meadows during horse racing season.

The next stop is the scale room. The dogs are weighed, again in the presence of a state racing commission official. Each dog has a weight that is registered at the beginning of the racing season and must be within two pounds of its registered weight. If it isn't, the dog is scratched from the race.

After they've been tagged, examined and weighed, the dogs are led by grooms, clad at this time in street clothes, into a holding area to await their race.

Music — of the type one would hear in an elevator or supermarket — is piped into the holding kennel. "It's to keep the dogs calmed down," Zornado says, although initially the 99

caged dogs put up a cacophonous din.

Zornado says the fiberglass boxes are a big improvement over what was once used to house the dogs until race time. "The boxes used to be made of wood," he says. "The dogs would paw away at it and get splinters in their toes and have to be taken out of the race. The fiberglass boxes have a smooth surface that the dogs can't dig into."

The holding kennels are cleaned, fumigated and inspected daily.

By 7 p.m., the piped-in music has done its job and the dogs in the holding kennel are relatively quiet. Some have even laid down for a nap before going out to the track. It is now time to prepare for the first race.

The dogs are walked around a large room adjacent to the holding kennel. Here Hardy makes his final examination, running his fingers through each dog's toes to make sure there is nothing between them that will hinder the dog or injure it while it is running. Hardy also checks that the dog hasn't any broken toenails.

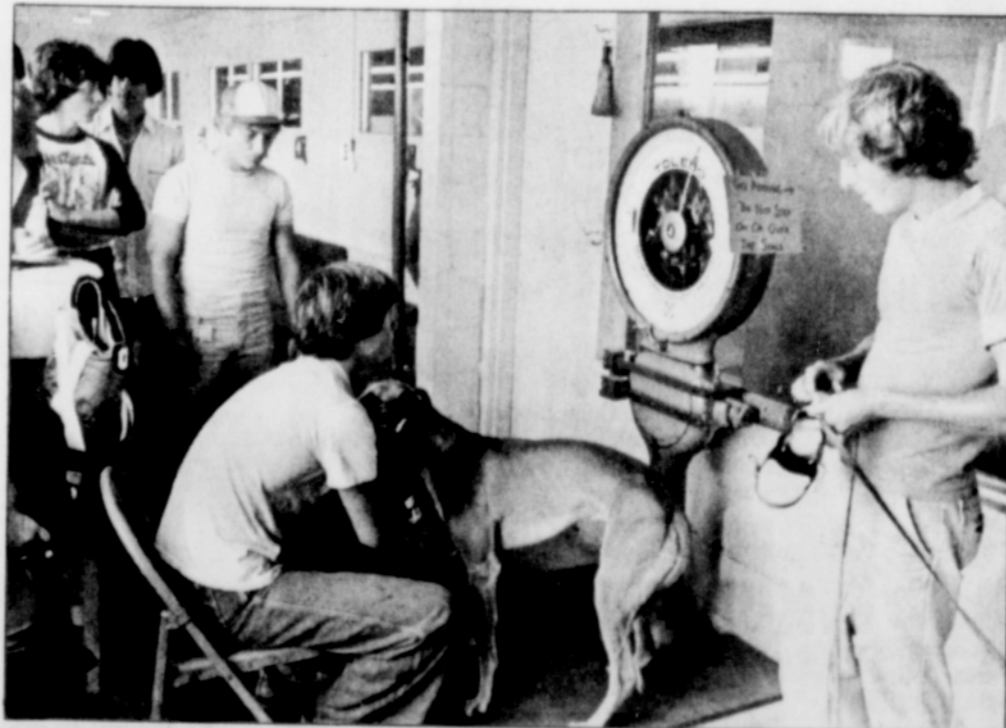
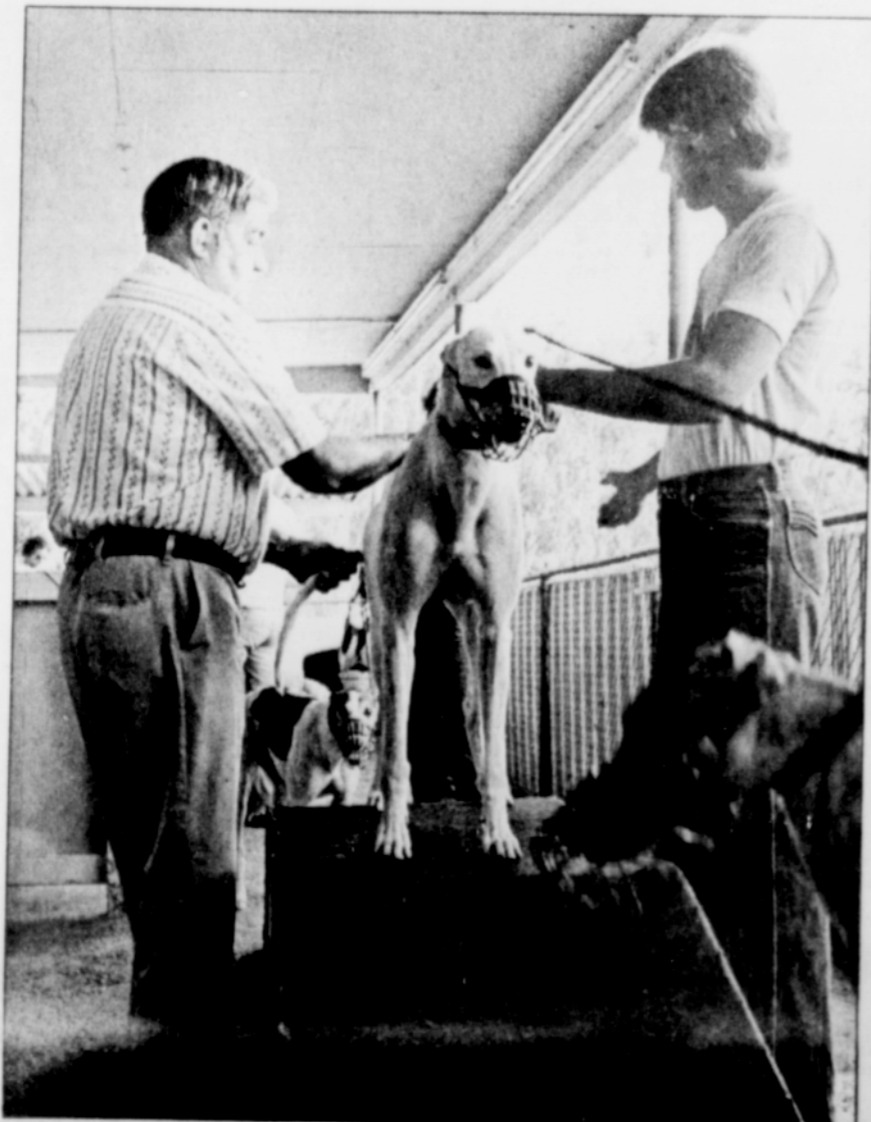
While this examination is occurring, a race official checks the dog's markings against those listed on an identification card. Each dog is tattooed with a registration number and these are checked also to ensure that the dog is actually the one listed on the racing form.

When this process is completed, the dogs are issued their numbered blankets and are lined up along a wall for a final check. The grooms then take them out on the track about 12 minutes before post time. They are put on a reviewing stand before the crowd, then are walked up and down the track.

"It's like you would do if you were a runner," Zornado says. "It's just a warm-up exercise before they get into the box."

Finally, a minute before post-time the dogs are put in the starting box, the doors close and the grooms run to the "rabbit house" in the escape turn near the finish line. This is where the lure disappears behind a cage and the dogs will stop running.

Now the familiar words come over the public address system. "The greyhounds are in the starting box . . . Rusty is ready . . . AND AWAY THEY GO!"



Two hours before race time, the dogs are tagged by a track official and examined by veterinarian Walt Hardy. When they're weighed in, the dogs are allowed only a two-pound variance from their registered weight. Finally, they enter a holding kennel where they rest until the call to the post.

photos by Kelly James
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