

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/greyhound-racing-adoption-breeders-11675883649>

## Want a Pet Greyhound? Good Luck.

Retired racing dogs have long made beloved pets, but regulation of the sport means fewer people are breeding them. It could change the dogs forever.

*By Tove Danovich / Photography by Peter Fisher for WSJ. Magazine*

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Carl Viener has been finding homes for former racing dogs for more than 40 years. Yet his nonprofit, Adopt a Greyhound Atlanta, has never seen demand like this before.

“There’s way more people wanting greyhounds than there are greyhounds,” Mr. Viener said.

As regulators and humane organizations look to stamp out dog racing for good, greyhounds as we know them—those spindly speed demons—have become a dying breed. Retired racing greyhounds have made popular pets for decades, but these days anyone looking to adopt the dogs will end up on an extensive wait list. Some are spoken for while they’re still on the track.

While racing itself is a subject of great debate, greyhound owners fear the breed will become the next Frenchie or goldendoodle—that breeding for looks will change the breed forever, introducing health and temperament issues.

“When they voted to end dog racing in Florida, I cried,” said Lori Petta, 46. The state was the sport’s last legal stronghold in America until 2018, when voters passed an amendment to end dog-racing by the end of 2020.



Greyhounds, beloved by the nobility, popped up in works by Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Ms. Petta lives in North Carolina with four retired greyhounds: Sunny, Daddy, Survivor and Seven. At the start of the year, she had only two. Now every time she leaves the room or even goes to the bathroom, she's followed by a pack of greyhounds who want to know what she's up to. They rarely leave her side unless it's to do something important—like chasing squirrels in the backyard.

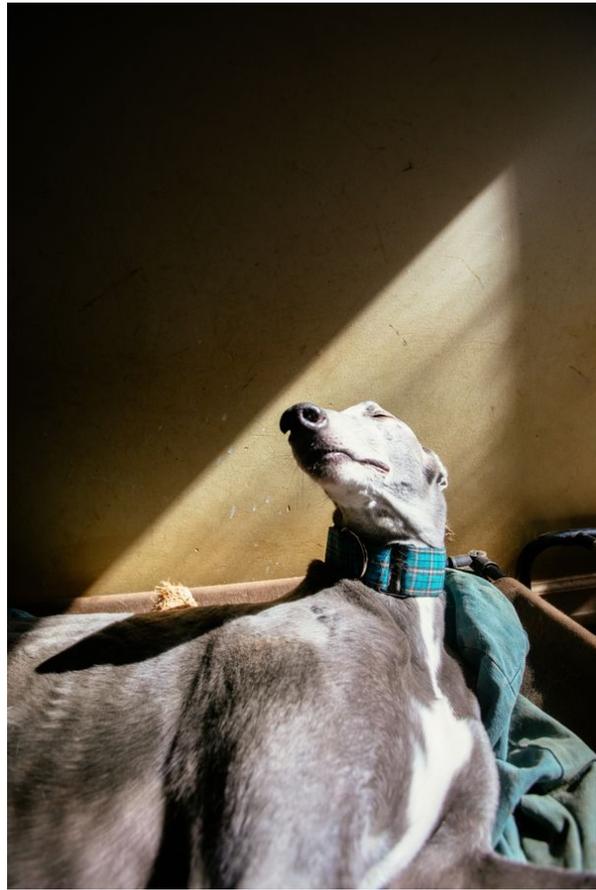
“What I’m basically doing is stocking up,” Ms. Petta said, even if it means being outnumbered by dogs in her 1,100-square-foot house.

Soon, greyhound lovers like her may be out of luck.

The dogs are among the oldest breeds, and their relationship with humankind dates back 8,000 years, according to Cynthia Branigan, author of “The Reign of the Greyhound” and the founder of a greyhound rescue.

“The appeal was their hunting ability,” Ms. Branigan said. “They could go into a field, bring down a rabbit, and there was your dinner.”

The dogs became so beloved by the nobility that they appeared in family crests, tapestries, paintings and sculptures. Chaucer and Shakespeare both wrote about greyhounds. In Act 3 Scene I of “Henry V,” the title character’s “once more unto the breach” speech includes the lines “I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,/ Straining upon the start. The game’s afoot;/ Follow your spirit: and upon this charge,/ Cry — God for Harry! England and Saint George!”



The nonprofit Adopt a Greyhound Atlanta says it is seeing unprecedented demand for the breed.

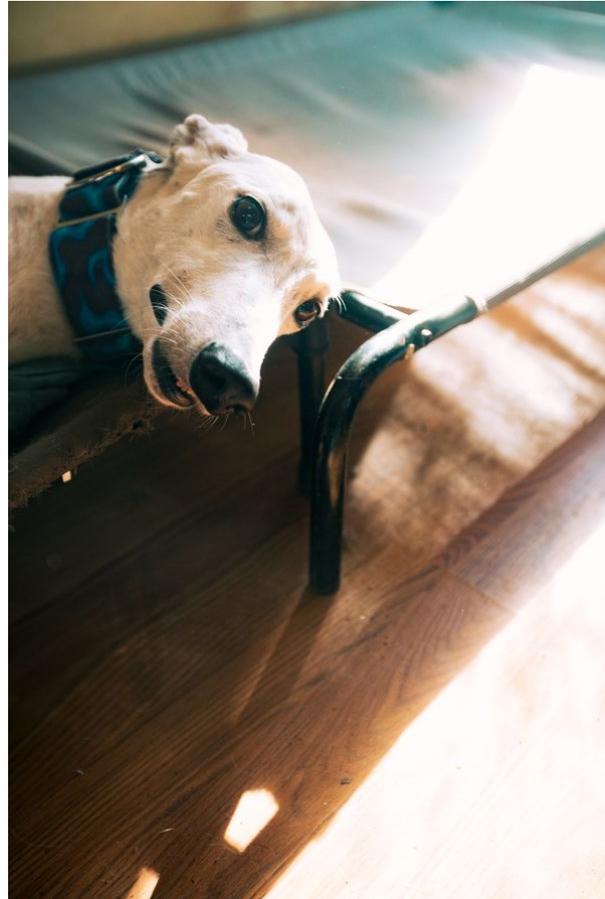
Now, instead of adopting one of a seemingly endless supply of retired racing dogs for a few hundred dollars, greyhound lovers will have to hope to get on a wait list for an American Kennel Club puppy, which can run close to \$4,000. Compared with the thousands of dogs produced by the racing industry, AKC breeders yield relatively few greyhounds. (The breed is the 132nd most popular out of 284 recognized by the AKC.)

Those show dogs may not resemble the racers that greyhound fans love. Subtle differences such as chest depth and neck and snout length are produced by breeding for show. The German shepherd, once a popular herding breed, now frequently suffers from issues like joint disorders and obesity after generations of breeders selecting for looks.

The first racetrack devoted to greyhounds opened in California in 1919. “The sport took off because the dogs took off,” Ms. Branigan said. But the end of a dog’s career (which could come as early as age 2) often meant the end of a dog’s life until an adoption movement for retired racers emerged in the 1980s.

“By the time they were on the right course, tracks were closing all over the country,” she said, and demand for racing dogs began to dwindle.

Still, the risks of breeding for show are nothing compared with the risks inherent in racing, animal-rights activists say. “Every major animal-protection group now is opposed to greyhound racing,” said Carey Theil, co-founder and executive director of greyhound-protection organization Grey2K. The sport, he said, subjects the dogs to serious injuries, including broken bones and paralysis.



The relationship between greyhounds and humans dates back 8,000 years.

On the pro-racing side, some say injuries are important to acknowledge but that the statistics are often taken out of context. “Absolutely far more dogs die daily under the wheels of automobiles in this country than were killed on tracks in five years,” said Kimberly Fritzler, an AKC greyhound breeder and co-owner of Windrock LLC in Wyoming.

Only two race tracks remain in the U.S., both of them in West Virginia. In 2019, the National Greyhound Association, a nonprofit racing registry for greyhounds, registered roughly 6,800 puppies, but that number has nearly halved every year as racetrack closures continue.

“We’ve had many breeders and people who have been in the business for years have just quit because there isn’t the need for it,” said Jim Gartland, executive director of the National Greyhound Association.

John Parker, 69, a greyhound enthusiast in Georgia who co-hosts the “Greyhound Nation” podcast, believes that a greyhound that doesn’t run is hardly a greyhound at all. In the show world, greyhounds that look like the breed standard go on to produce puppies, regardless of how fast they are.

The opposite has always been true in racing. Speed, he said, is “what defines the breed.”

Being bred to run has also given greyhounds “turbocharged blood,” with higher than usual red-blood-cell counts, said Heidi Houchen, the blood-bank director for VCA Northwest Veterinary Specialists. Dogs have more blood types than humans, which makes universal-negative blood important, and greyhounds are among the few breeds where the type is common.

“We can help more dogs with each unit of greyhound blood,” she said.



In centuries past, the dogs appeared in family crests, tapestries, paintings and sculptures.

Mr. Theil, for his part, isn’t worried about the future of the greyhound. The commercial racing industry is a century old, whereas the greyhound is ancient. “I do not think the fate of the greyhound breed and the racing industry are tied together,” he said. Racing dogs are now being brought to the U.S. from countries where racing remains legal.

Rebecca Nance, a volunteer with Greyhound Pet Adoption Northwest who lives in Oregon, currently cares for a retired racer named Judi, after Dame Judi Dench. “She’s a weirdo,” Ms. Nance says lovingly. Though Judi is a timid dog, she will approach any guest with long hair to give their locks a sniff.

Ms. Nance, 62, said that for all the special traits greyhounds possess, there’s one she prizes most: “They love the ones they’re with.” She has helped rescue and find homes for many

greyhounds, and has observed how they form new bonds.

“They want to know they have a person,” she says, “even if their person changes.”