



HISTORY OF GREYHOUND RACING IN TEXAS

Overview

There is currently one dog track conducting live greyhound racing in Texas: Gulf Greyhound Park in La Marque. A second dog track, Valley Park in Harlingen, conducted live races as recently as of March 2009. However, in late 2009 Valley Park announced that it was indefinitely suspending live dog racing, and will become a simulcasting-only facility.¹



A third track, Corpus Christi Greyhound Racetrack, opened in 1990 but closed after the final race on December 30, 2007. The track suffered annual losses in excess of \$3.5 million with an overall loss of more than \$35 million for the entirety of its operation. The track had hoped to remain open with a shorter racing schedule or with the addition of slots or video poker; however, the Texas Racing Commission denied the track's petition for a short racing schedule.² In 2009, Corpus Christi reopened, but shortly thereafter announced that it would only offer simulcast wagering.

The Texas Racing Commission determines the racing schedule for the tracks. According to the commission's schedule, the year 2008 featured more than 5,500 dog races run at the two dog tracks open at that time.³

Humane Issues

- **August 1990**

Texas A & M University announces a research study, funded by three Texas greyhound tracks, to map the greyhound gene. Dr. Demarious Frey, a Texas Racing Commissioner and Corpus Christi veterinarian, says the purpose is to prevent overproduction of racing dogs. "There is the image of live lures and putting losers to sleep," Frey tells a local newspaper. "We need fewer animals wasted. I think it [the genetic mapping] is vital to improve the image of the sport."⁴

- **August 1994**

Fifty-one greyhounds perish at a farm near Lubbock after an air conditioning malfunction in the training room where the dogs are kept.⁵

- **May 1994**

Animal control officers discover sixty-five starving greyhounds, many near death, at a breeding farm near Ballinger. Many of the crowded kennels are filled with feces and the skeletal remains of other dogs.⁶

1 Gulf Greyhound to be only track with live racing, *Galveston Daily News*, September 18, 2009

2 Dan Kelley, Dog track losses total \$35.5 million, *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, November 1, 2007.

3 Texas Racing Commission, on line at <http://www.txrc.state.tx.us/racetacks/racedates.php>, last consulted on October 6, 2009.

4 Mark Smith, Genetics map quest for 'supergreyhound', *Houston Chronicle*, August 10, 1990.

5 Gina Howard, *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, August 23, 1994.

- **August 1996**

Ten starving greyhounds are rescued from the property of a Texas man who claimed to be starting a dog farm.⁷

- **July 2004**

A disease thought to be a virulent form of kennel cough claims the lives of eight greyhounds at the Gulf and Corpus Christi tracks in addition to causing cancellation of several races. The highly contagious cough sickens hundreds of dogs. The disease, which had spread from adjacent states, causes high fever. A secondary infection causes the deaths of three dogs at Corpus Christi and five at Gulf.⁸



Gulf Greyhound Park, Texas 2009

- **September 2005**

A highly infectious respiratory illness infects greyhounds at tracks nationwide, including those in Texas. Although at first the disease is identified as kennel cough, Dr. Cynda Crawford, an immunologist at the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine, states after an investigation that she believes it to be an entirely new illness. "This is a newly emerged pathogen, and we have very little information to make predictions about it," she says. "But I think the fatality rate is between 1 and 10 percent." She adds that because dogs have no natural immunity to the virus, virtually every animal exposed will become infected, and about eighty percent of dogs that are infected will develop some symptoms.

The disease spreads most easily where dogs are housed together, but it can also be passed on the street, in dog runs or even by human handlers.

Crawford first began investigating greyhound deaths at a racetrack in Jacksonville, Fla., in January 2004, where eight of the twenty-four greyhounds who contracted the virus died.⁹

Significant outbreaks of illness occur at Gulf Greyhound Park in 1992, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2004, and 2005.¹⁰

- **March 2007**

The West Virginia Racing Commission begins an investigation into forged health certificates for Texas-bred dogs racing in West Virginia. The certificates were purported to be signed by a Texas veterinarian, who denied treating the dogs or signing the certificates.¹¹

6 Andy Smith, Sixty-five greyhounds are seized from runnels county farm, *San Angelo Standard Time/Fort Worth Star-Telegram/Associated Press*, May 4, 1994.

7 Wes Swift, *Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1996.

8 *Associated Press*, July 23, 2004.

9 Donald G. McNeil, Jr. & Carin Rubenstein, Highly contagious dog flu spreads at kennels, racetracks, *San Francisco Chronicle/New York Times*, September 22, 2005.

10 James Fremont, Kennel cough hindering race schedule at GGP, *Galveston Daily News*, April 17, 2005.

11 Jerry Echemann, Dog breeders under investigation, *State Journal*, March 12, 2007.

- **2008**

According to state records, nearly 350 greyhound injuries are reported at Gulf Greyhound Park (321) and Valley Park (21) in 2008. Reported injuries include broken legs, muscle tears, a broken back, dislocations and an amputation. Twenty-eight dogs are reported to have suffered multiple injuries, including a dog named Oh Susana, who fractured her leg twice, once in August and once in November, and was euthanized.¹²

Laws & Regulations: How Dog Racing is Regulated in Texas

Greyhound racing in the state of Texas is governed by the Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes, Art. 179e of 1986. The Texas Racing Act was further amended in 1991 and 1997.

The Act consists of eighteen Articles establishing the Texas Racing Commission, granting powers to the commission, establishing licensing for breeders and tracks, and setting wagering rules. Article 14 of the Act codifies criminal penalties related to wagering and licensing fraud. There are no criminal penalties for animal mistreatment, however.

The state's felony animal cruelty statute, TX PENAL § 42.09 *et seq*, does apply to greyhounds, but acts must be "intentional or knowing." Negligent conduct is not punishable.

Article 10 of the Act specifically addresses greyhounds. This Article governs the number of racing days and the types of kennels each track must maintain. The most recent amendment to the Act appears not to focus upon the welfare of the animals as much as to encourage the breeding of greyhounds within the State of Texas.

As with all other states, the Act empowers a commission to establish rules and oversee both thoroughbred horse and greyhound racing. The Texas Racing Commission has promulgated rules to govern racing as found in the Administrative Procedure Act, Texas Govt. Code, Chapter 2001.

An earlier version of the Texas Racing Commission was formed in 1933 pursuant to House 12 Bill, 1st Called Session. This three-person, underfunded commission seems to have only existed until 1937. The current commission, as authorized by the 1986 Act, (and first approved by statewide referendum in 1987, as amended in 1997), has six members: two general public appointees, two members who have special expertise on animal racing, and two ex-officio (governmental) members. The commission is funded through fees levied on the racing industry.

Recently the Racing Commission has sustained severe budget shortfalls. In February 2009, the commission experienced a shortfall of almost \$700,000, prompting a petition to the governor for additional funds. Charla Ann King, the Executive Director of the Texas Racing Commission, noted, "[t]he industry is on the edge of the end."¹³

GREY2K USA would like to thank paralegal Colleen Holiday for her contributions to this fact sheet.

¹² Texas Racing Commission; GREY2K USA.

¹³ Emily Ramshaw, Texas racing commission faces shortfall, seeks emergency funds from governor, *Dallas Morning News*, February 27, 2009.