Slipping Track Usage and Exercise Guide

Slipping a dog, is a originally a coursing term that refers to the action of letting a dog run free, and running is something that greyhounds naturally love to do.

Whether a racing dog or pet, exercise plays an important role in keeping greyhounds healthy but it is important that it is always fun and enjoyable.

As the second fastest land animal in the world, clocked at speeds in excess of 70kmh, in many parts of the world greyhounds are not allowed off leash unless being raced, coursed, exercised or trained on private land such as racing tracks and private training facilities.

Facilities called Slipping Tracks (a fully enclosed straight track of more than 300m) have been provided for owners of both racing and pet greyhounds to legally and safely exercise their dogs in a controlled environment.

Slipping tracks provide an excellent alternative form of exercise to daily walks but unlike walking or running in the backyard, exercising on a slipping track is much more intense.

The human equivalent of running on a slipping track is sprint training, and as with the intensity of interval work, with this intense form of training comes a greater risk of injury.

Dogs being prepared to race are brought to peak fitness slowly and progressively to allow the body to adjust to the different work load and avoid injury. Any properly designed training program and workload should take into account factors such the phase of the training program, pre-existing injuries, the age of the dog and intended race distances.

For anyone thinking of exercising their pet greyhound at a slipping track it is vital for owners to consider the same range of factors, however the major difference is that a pet greyhound is a pet for a sound reasons. It has been retired because of injury, age, lack of interest in running or it was deemed “a little off the pace” required to be competitive.

Greyhounds are not retired to be put in cotton wool but it is vital owners understand they are no longer race dogs and there is no reason for them to be exercised like they are competitive dogs in full training.

Slipping tracks are meant to be places to have fun and do some controlled running and they can be, if some simple rules are followed:

* A slipping track should be fun for all greyhounds, so NEVER exercise a dog with an injury or soreness.
* If you are contemplating taking your greyhound to the slipping track do not feed them beforehand and wait a good hour after exercise before giving them food. The risks could be a simple vomiting or death inducing bloat.
* Greyhounds generate enormous amounts of heat when they run and can overheat very quickly and die, convulse or suffer acidosis. So it is best to exercise a dog on a slipping track in the cool of the morning and never use a slipping track once the mercury hits 20 plus degrees.
* Logically it follows to never exercise your dog with its coat or rug on.
* Take your greyhound for a gentle walk before exercise and/or muscle rub across the back and thighs to help minimise soreness or injury. Greyhounds must be emptied (toileted) prior to exercise.
* Before using the slipping track make sure the fences are intact and all gates are securely closed **a**ndalways check the track for faeces and debris and remove any offending items.
* Exercising on a slipping track is to be enjoyable and fun for the dogs whether they free gallop regularly and have a good level of fitness, or if they are they couch potatoes who only regularly go for a walk and who want to check out every weemail.
* In determining how much exercise is appropriate for a retired dog it is important to always be conservative.
* Never exercise more than two greyhounds at a time and always exercise dogs of similar age, fitness and ability together.
* While dogs are naturally competitive, it is NOT meant to be racing.
* Owners should be careful with dogs of a super competitive nature as they can actually encourage other dogs to exercise beyond their limits.
* When multiple greyhounds run/play off leash and the adrenaline is flowing, even dogs who happily snooze together on the couch at home can become over excited. So whether your greyhound has a GAP green collar or not, ALWAYS exercise dogs with a muzzle on.
* For unfit or elderly dogs running the entire slipping track may be too much and they should be slipped from half way. If they run, wonderful, if they have no interest and just wander around that is also totally acceptable. It is their time and it is their choice to run or not.
* At the other end of the fitness spectrum for young, keen and fit dogs, two complete passes of the slipping track at speed would be more than enough exercise and should terminate the session
* The aim of retiring race dogs is to socialize them with small dogs, so never use a drag lure to encourage retired dogs to race or over exercise. Use a drag lure is not only counter productive in that encourages dogs to chase, but it also multiplies the risk of injury and is actually illegal on a public slipping track.
* Due to the intensity of the exercise and the need to fully recover, a slipping track is not the place for daily exercise or even for exercising on consecutive days. Once or twice a week is ample and preferably with four days break and recovery between sessions.
* Always remember is the responsibility of the owner to prevent dogs from over exercising. IT IS NOT UP TO THE DOG TO DECIDE HOW MUCH EXERCISE IS TOO MUCH.
* Take jugs of clean fresh water with you to the track as well as towels, buckets and bowls. Use the water to thoroughly wash your greyhound's feet, wrists and hocks after using the slip track to remove sand and any other nasties that might lurk in the sand before they get in the car.
* Once the exercise session is over it is vital to immediately provide the dogs with fresh, clean water so they can begin to rehydration process.
* If it is on the warmer side or they have been running a bit, cool them down with the water over their backs, in their groins and on their bellies. Dry off with a towel rubbing the fur backwards to allow the circulation of air.
* Check your greyhound's hydration levels by performing the skin pinch test. Grab some loose skin on their back and pull up. The skin should drop back into place straight away.
* If there is a delay in the skin returning to place your greyhound is de-hydrated. Plenty of water or a good quality electrolyte solution like Recharge for Greyhounds mixed with water will help to get levels back to normal, along with rest.
* As with elite human athletes a cool down is essential to prevent soreness and aid recovery. A short, gentle walk can be beneficial and help flush lactic acid from tired muscles.
* Take dog home, wait at least 60 minutes before feeding and encourage them to rest.
* Monitor hydrations levels and look for the development of any soreness over following days.
* If the dog pulls up sore modify the exercise level to suit its fitness and gradually increase workload over the following weeks.