

**Supplementary
Submission
No 996a**

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

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From: Bruce Teague

To: greyhoundracing

Subject: Supplementary Information

I had not imagined the inquiry would delve into the question of track design as much as it has and so I write to expand on or correct what has been said or claimed – often emotionally.

I am able to do this because for over 20 years we have been maintaining an Australia-wide database of racing information which was required to underpin our (Greybase) computer form analysis programs formerly sold to the public. I say “formerly” because in recent times the customer profile has changed radically from those who like to study form – ie punters - to those who access tipsters or make wild guesses (ie mug gamblers). The business is pretty well dead now but I maintain my personal interest.

I have also been able to inspect and walk around some 40 tracks in the three eastern states and Tasmania to amplify my knowledge. Therefore, what you read here is reasonably objective and without bias.

1. In short, greyhound track design is an amateur process. It has to be as no-one responsible in the field has ever bothered to conduct sufficient or any studies to determine what works and what doesn't. Everything is based on opinion, or occasionally a bad experience. Analysis of results is obviously non-existent, as evidenced by the fact that errors are repeated during re-builds.
2. Debating grass v loam surface is a non event. Grass is no longer acceptable, partly because of its variability and maintenance issues but mostly because of its unreliability in adverse weather and resultant meeting cancellations.
3. Circle v horseshoe (or one-turn) tracks is not a question of either-or. Of the greyhound population, some do better on one, some on the other, primarily as a function of their personal characteristics – mainly size. Both are of value to the industry, and to the preservation of the breed.
4. There are almost no well-designed tracks in Australia. Issues with box positions, turn radii, track camber, and lure type all vary from one spot to another, normally producing conflicting outcomes. High interference – ie higher than necessary – is the norm. Exceptions to the rule occur at Hobart, Mandurah, Northam and, to a lesser extent, Devonport. In NSW, only the Grafton 407m trip is worthy of consideration in this respect. As some submissions have indicated, disruptive bend starts are common and are still being built (including in Victoria, contrary to some evidence you have heard). One reason for this is that greyhound officials are besotted with the practice of locating starting boxes on the track proper, as opposed to siting them in a mini-shute with a straight-in approach, much as occurs at the gallops. A greyhound's hearing is quite good and its sight is superior, factors emerging from its unique 6,000 year history.

5. Of interest in the current hearings is the status of The Gardens track. It has been poor on several counts since it was built – albeit designed and built by “experts” according to advice to me from the NCA at the time. I was critical of the location of 413m starting boxes right at the outset, only to be rebuffed. Some months later some \$50,000 was spent shifting them to the current 400m location, which is still a poor compromise. Separately, the 515m first turn is always disruptive, the home turn is too flat and the 600m start is still located on a bend. These are no more than simple design matters. It all makes good punting impossible and increases the risk of injuries.

6. The pleas about Cessnock are also a bit misleading. First, this grass track, and its kikuyu, was well known for its stalks and holes and resultant minor injuries to runners. But overall, the facilities were a disaster from a public viewpoint. GRA took forever to come to a decision but it was correct in de-licensing Cessnock in favour of the nearby Maitland (which is itself is no bed of roses) which is much better positioned from a customer angle to service a population of a half million people. Two of the same made no economic or operational sense. Further, any comments about the high legal cost of Cessnock appealing the GRA decision should be disregarded. I have no great opinion of GRA but it had spent years debating the subject and engaged in several efforts to obtain a range of views. It even hired a Newcastle consultant (close to the then Minister) to report on the matter. It could be expected to do no more so the Cessnock club was always going to waste its money – money it never had. It had dubious legal advice.

7. Millions of dollars have gone into track works, not only in NSW, based on a wing and a prayer. Faults have emerged on numerous occasions, including at Wentworth Park where changes to the turns in 2001 caused even more severe disruptions than previously existed. This is mainly why the country’s biggest breeder, _____, orders his trainers never to go there (perhaps barring big prize money events). Similar changes were made to Maitland’s first turn – after the track was recently rebuilt – using the same cutaway turn technique as was applied to Wentworth Park. This was on the stated basis, according to the GRNSW CEO, that “experience elsewhere had been successful”. There is no evidence of that, rather the contrary as such changes have been shown to cause either more track bias or more interference, or both (Bulli, Launceston, Cannington and The Meadows). Other NSW problems are evident following track works at Dapto, Richmond and Bathurst.

These comments are derived from massive ongoing analysis of race dividends, race times, fall and interference rates, winning box percentages and observations of thousands of races over 20-odd years. That is what we do.

Unfortunately, none of this work enables us to develop adequate solutions, only to point out where the problems occur, and sometimes why. A proper result could be achieved only following an extensive scientific review of the subject by an independent panel, which I have proposed many times to all racing authorities.

In this respect, greyhound racing compares poorly with the other two codes, both of which have devoted considerable resources to the effort, on one occasion with the help of a Commonwealth grant.

In contrast, greyhound authorities and many clubs continue to maintain a “we know best” attitude, regardless of the facts. Indeed, since I publicly pointed out the error in the Maitland reasoning, I no longer am able to get acknowledgement or responses to queries to the

GRNSW CEO. I have been censored by them and also, a bit oddly, by an apparently sympathetic Greyhound Recorder (which is/was NCA-owned).

For the last few years, I have been writing regular twice weekly columns for the website australianracinggreyhound.com (my earlier submission attached copies of several articles) and have written for a number of greyhound publications over the last 20 years. Two of those sacked me because bosses did not like some of my suggestions while the others have all folded.

Please let me know if you have any queries.

Bruce N. Teague