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Winds of a speedy recovery

By CARL HAHN LIFE staff

In the dog-racing world, every now and then a special runner comes along that's worth a mint. But beyond those few, **greyhounds** are dime-a-dozen; some of the world's most disposable dogs.

Unlike race horses, **greyhounds** are inexpensive to breed, so the racing industry churns out loads of puppies looking for the next great sprinter. The rest, to a racing trainer, simply aren't worth the cost to feed them.

"Most **greyhounds** are done (racing) by the time they're three," says Colleen Patience, the Red Deer adoption representative for the



Photo by Randy Fiedler/Advocate staff

Colleen Patience lavishes love on her nine-year-old rescued greyhound Sidney, left, while Zack and Brook, a pair of rescued dogs awaiting adoption, anticipate their treats.

Chinook Winds **Greyhound** Rescue Foundation. "There are a lot of **greyhound** farms."

Patience is one of a group of volunteers who try to find a better life for castoffs from the track - the dogs too slow or too old to chase down plump purses. The non-profit group operates in Alberta, placing former racers in adoptive homes around Western Canada.

While Chinook Winds will come to the aid of any **greyhound**, the dog racing industry accounts for the vast majority of their adoptees. A truckload of 11 more arrived last week to enter temporary foster homes - with nine already claimed for adoption.

Chinook Winds uses an established group of volunteers to help socialize the new dogs, acclimatizing them to the home environment. That takes at least 10 days, Patience says.

While they're treated as well as athletes at the track, they live lives unlike any normal pet.

The dogs are trained to run on sand for a set distance, turning only one direction, in pursuit of a dummy rabbit. They're only around other **greyhounds** and their handlers, and see nothing of the rest of the world.

When they're put up for adoption, the dogs may never have seen grass, hardwood floors, carpeting, children, small dogs - anything found in a typical home. Even a window presents a risk: if a **greyhound** that likes to chase small animals sees a squirrel run by outside, the dog could try to go right through the window to chase it.

Patience, her husband Curtis, and their children Claire and Daniel make up one of those foster families. Along with a household of people, the new dogs also get to meet Rocky the bulldog and Sidney, the **greyhound** they adopted from Chinook Winds in May 2002.

The fostering period is also an important opportunity to observe the dogs. Each **greyhound** is very individual, so the foster family can learn if the adoptee likes kids or other pets, or even determine how active it is.

Greyhounds are surprisingly inactive, Patience points out. People often have the false

impression that the racing athlete has boundless energy and is high maintenance, but she says they're sprinters, not marathon runners. For "a full-grown **greyhound**, half-hour walk once a day is sufficient."

They'll spend most of their day happily lounging around on cushions. Sidney has created his own race track in the back yard, but after three or four minutes of tearing around it, he's ready to come back inside and lie down.

"They're like big cats," she says with a smile.

Between fostering, babysitting and forwarding adoptees to their "forever homes," Patience estimates she's had 50 **greyhounds** stay in her home since she became a full-fledged volunteer for the foundation in November 2002.

The most at one time was four **greyhounds** and their bulldog over a Christmas season.

"I like them because they're easy maintenance," she says. "They're kind-hearted. They want to please you. They want to be your friend for life.

"If you want to go for a walk, great. If you want to sit on the couch and watch TV, that's totally fine with them too."

There are some drawbacks, of course. Potential owners need a four-foot fence around their yards, and can't ever let their dog off leash. If a **greyhound** decides it's going to run, nobody can keep up with it.

"They get to the point that they're so far away that they don't know where they came from," Patience says.

But there are offsetting benefits. Along with an easy-going temperament, the dogs have short coats with no undercoat, so maintenance is easy. And since they're bred to be athletes, they tend to be extremely healthy dogs.

The foundation provides further benefits. Along with information and some basic necessities, the foundation provides babysitting services for new owners when they have to go away.

"We would rather have it in a home over the holidays or your trip than in a kennel, because they don't kennel well."

If the match doesn't work out, the foundation will take the dog back and move it to a new home. There seems little problem finding good homes for the sleek racers. The organization placed 105 dogs last year, in Winnipeg, Vancouver and several places in Alberta.

"Most of our **greyhounds** get adopted within three weeks of coming off the track."

The foundation also helped get a new **greyhound** walking club off the ground in Red Deer.

The walking club operates separately, however, since it is open to any sighthounds in the area. A sighthound is a breed that hunts primarily with sight, instead of smell, such as whippets or Afghans.

The organization also holds meet-and-greets at pet stores, so people can go nose-to-muzzle with the amiable pooches. The next one in Red Deer is Sat. Feb. 25 from 1-3 p.m. at PetSmart.

And each dog comes with an ID tag bearing a 1-800 number for the foundation, so anyone finding a lost adoptee can call for free to get the dog back to its home.

For more information, check the foundation's website at www.chinookwindsgreyhounds.org.