

Caring for Your Lure Coursing Hound

There are many ways in which we can ensure the well being of our hounds on the lure coursing field. A few measures can be taken on the field but most occur well before the event day.

Here is, I hope, some helpful information that can help your dog stay fit and healthy whilst competing.

Make sure your hound is 'fit for purpose'

Don't let your hound be a 'weekend athlete': A hound that is inactive all week and then put onto the sporting field at the weekend in the expectation that because it is a certain breed it is automatically fit and able to perform at the top of its physical game...an instant athlete!!

Such a hound will have poor muscle mass and tone, poor joint stabilisation, undeveloped lung and heart capacity, undeveloped vascular support to the muscles, poor proprioception, poor spacial awareness, and physical effort will cause unbelievable mechanical stress on joints and tissues inevitably leading to injury.

Ask any Vet... 'weekend athlete' vet bills are huge!!!

Look at what you are expecting your hound to do on the sporting field. Build that into your hounds weekly experience. For example....Free running or track training for speed development, hills for building power, woodland runs or agility training to build spacial and proprioceptive abilities....

All time exerted doing these types of activities regularly will naturally develop the heart, lungs, muscle fibres, and nervous system of your hound into a well balanced, efficient and dynamic running delight.

How long does your hounds body take to change from all this effort? At least two months for a generally fit dog to be at its performing best. A 'weekend athlete' 3 to 6 months (depending on general health and age). This is steady training development to reach a fitness level that would ensure the hound could perform well without undue risk of injury from being not 'fit for purpose'.

Food

A highly manufactured diet does not have the bio-vitality and nutrients needed to support the bodies tissues to offer extreme physical performance without injury.

Anything from a good quality dry food (made of 'real meat' or 'meat meal' offers far better nutritional value than those cheaper varieties containing only meat and fish derivatives) through fresh cooked meat veg and grains to a grain free raw diet. Each hounds needs is individual, not all diets suit all, so find a nutritious diet that suits and stick to it.

Parasites

A hound suffering from unwanted parasitic friends can cause them to be off their game, be weaker than normal, slow their responses causing them to get clumsy, stumble etc. and hence risk injury.

Just before the Slips

Not 'waking up' your hounds system effectively before competing. If the body is not awake enough it is not alert enough to respond to the demands suddenly put upon it.

Mo Farrah used to run 5km to warm up directly before his 5km race...this allows his lungs heart and vascular system to be able to respond healthily and effectively to extreme effort of the race.

Our hounds would greatly benefit from this same approach. Massage, stretches, embrocations and liniments can be beneficial but alone will not 'wake up' the body to be able to perform without risk of injury.

Trotting your hound for 10/15 minutes before a run will. Effectively waking up the lungs, heart, getting the blood flowing through the muscle (warming them up from the inside out) and limbering up the whole system.

The Rub Down

All sorts of animal embrocations and linaments can be used, normally having a "moving" effect within the surface of the superficial muscles created by the evaporation of the fluid applied. Used with a general all body rub down this

can start to invigorate the superficial muscle tissues and help prepare your hound for their run.

The Stretch

More complicated to get right than a massage! Stretching your hound effectively without doing too little, or too much ending in pain and adverse effects in the muscle fibres, is an art form and a true skill.

Over stretching muscle fibres causes the fibres to contract and lock up ie. inducing “the beginnings of injury” as detailed below.

The book “The Healthy Way to Stretch your Dog” by Sasha and Ashley Foster has superb detailed explanations and pictures showing how to safely and effectively stretch your hound.

Just after the finish line

After intense exertion there needs to be a cooling down period, effectively ‘walking out’ the hound so that the elevated circulation and lungs settle down / heart rate and breathing normalises before putting back in the crate / car to rest, and rehydrate (drink).

Hydration

There are many ideas about what to give your hound to hydrate and energise them before, and after exertion... ranging from racing greyhound hydration liquid, goats milk with water and honey, simple water alone, and many others ...ask around, find what works best for your hound and stick to that.

Professional help

Before an event have your hound checked for injuries by a reputable and capable person; Physical therapists can check for weaknesses or imbalances in the bio-mechanical structure of your dog. These imbalances are not injuries, but stresses in the structure that if not remedied will likely become an injury when put under sporting stress.

For example, weakness may consist of a repetitive strain injury that has healed and shows no pain response and is therefore easily missed. The affected tissues create a dynamic imbalance and are weaker than the same muscles, ligaments or tendons on the other side of the hound.

So, is your hound sound?

Sound healthy muscle tissue should feel firm, resilient, springy, and with a smooth even texture in the belly of the muscle, firming slightly near attachment points where the tissue thickens to become tendons.

The beginnings of injury often appears as a localised area of muscle that has either extreme excessive muscle tone (a harder or tighter area of muscle compared to its twin on the other side of the hound), or as an area of inflammation characterised by a change in consistency, thickness or tone of the muscle.

These changes are extremely common and more severe muscle injuries could well be avoided if these anomalies are detected and treated appropriately.

In racing greyhound circles it is well believed that it would be extremely unusual for any hound to have two runs behind the lure without developing these types of muscle abnormalities.

These abnormalities may not noticeably affect the gait of your hound other than causing a slight reduction in speed or an intermittent striking of limb on limb, causing slight bruising, or cuts from nail strikes.

An injury becoming serious when the muscle is interrupted by minor tears in the muscle sheath characterised by a distinct hole in the muscle sheath, or a separation between two muscle sheaths or fascias at a point where they should be connected.

To the touch these appear as a subtle hollow or fine striations in the affected muscle tissue, there may be puffiness, swelling, fluid, and maybe pain.

If there is fluid or swelling, ice or cold pack twice daily until the swelling is relieved before any other treatment is undertaken. *Seek advice from your Vet and other healthcare professionals.*

These more serious muscle injuries cannot occur if the abnormalities in muscle tone and texture detailed above had been addressed efficiently. Therapies such as massage, Bowen etc help return the muscles involved back to ones capable of moving properly so as to avoid stress tears developing.

Too little too late extreme muscle injuries consists of damage to a muscle that includes the tearing of the muscle sheath and the disruption of the muscle fibres within the muscle bundle. Muscles often present as severed, often a deep hollow adjacent to a bulge can be seen, as they lose one of their anchor points which means the muscle can no longer function. There is often resultant haemorrhaging and swelling.

The severity of these muscle injuries will require some surgical intervention by a Veterinarian and a long rehabilitation period.

If in doubt DO NOT run your dog and seek advice from your Vet

Return to good performance and avoid injury recurrence

So the worst has happened, your hound has had surgical intervention to tie its muscles back together and is in rehabilitation.

The following is essential to help prevent re-injury. Once the muscle structure of an injury has been healed it now needs to be as fit and as sound as the rest of the hound before competing again to prevent re-injury.

For instance, if a coursing Whippet has been competing at a distance of 450 yards, its main body may be fit enough to run over 450 - 600 yards again, but the area of recent injury is probably only fit enough to run 200 or 250 yards.

Time taken over incremental training to increase first walking distance then running distance, frequency and intensity of exercise until the injured area has had a chance to catch up with the rest of the body is essential.

Tens machines, laser therapy, hydrotherapy treadmill, massage, Bowen and other therapies can also help recover the muscle tissues to race fitness.

Regular physical therapy sessions during this period can help enormously to help prevent re-injury whilst getting fit again; through the observation of tissue development to guide training intensity, treatment of compensation patterns, and aid fast efficient recovery.

Taking shortcuts in recovery will result in re-injury or ensuring your hound never performs well or at all again. It pays to be wise, enjoy happy running!!

Jen Walker - Physical Therapist 2018

