

A Trip to the Farms

Written by Nicola Mohr, DVM, and used with permission from *Greyhounds Pets of America-Northern California (GPA-NC) /Greyhound Adoption California (GACA) Newsletter*, Winter 2012.

Nicola Mohr, long-time greyhound owner and practicing veterinarian (Santa Cruz Veterinary Hospital, Santa Cruz, CA) and her husband Michael made the trip to Oklahoma to adopt their Shadow — a sweet, senior, brood mom. Nicola reports that Shadow has been the easiest dog ever and that she would take another senior mom (or dad) any day, next time they are ready to adopt. She would like to encourage people to consider these wonderful, level-headed, older hounds for pets. Here is her story about the visit to the greyhound farms.

In 2009, we had the opportunity to tour several Greyhound farms that breed, raise, and train Greyhounds in Oklahoma. We met Teddy Palmer of Halfway Home Greyhound Adoption who showed us around and was a wealth of information. We had completely unhindered access to these farms and were invited to peek into any corner, meet the dogs and workers, take as many photos as we liked, and ask any questions. What we saw was very informative and interesting.

Puppies are whelped in special facilities, air conditioned and equipped to take care of several mothers and their newborns. There were the usual whelping boxes, with lots of room for the mother to lie down and nurse the neonates, as well as space away from the litter to relieve herself or to eat. The moms were happy to see us, even with puppies attached and nursing. None showed protective aggression or reluctance to have us join her in her space – quite amazing for any dog! We were allowed to handle the tiny puppies and admire them – it is not often to see a Greyhound this little and immature – they look like any other pup at 2 weeks of age. The long, sleek limbs are far away yet!





After staying with their moms until weaning, the litters are moved to a large outdoor pen with shelter and allowed to play, dig, and roll in the red Oklahoma dirt all day long, for several weeks. Meals consist of a huge supply of softened food, and everyone comes running and jumping at the sight of that wonderful person carrying the feeding bucket several times a day. Otherwise, there are no rules. Total excitement rules when either a dog is walked by the pen or a person appears at the perimeter – and each is greeted with enthusiasm and tumbling over each other trying to reach that visitor/ passerby.



Next, the youngsters are moved in pairs or small groups into very long outdoor runs. These are fenced in and many run parallel to each other – so as to allow these teenagers to see each other and stay socially connected, and to allow them to chase each other along the fence for several hundred feet – no encouragement needed, as we watched them do so several times. Sprint with the neighbor, retreat to the shade, drink some water, relax – and, in 15 minutes, do it all over again. We could see the future chase instinct emerging. These dogs obviously love to run! It makes them develop a very fit body, and it is apparent that there is a lot of energy to be burnt.



Just before moving to the race tracks, the dogs are housed in individual kennels, either indoors or outside. They are now officially trained to run in an oval, after a lure. In between, they rest in their personal kennel but are always taken outside as a group; we saw 30 or more at a time hanging out during these turnouts. They wear muzzles during these times to prevent jostling or other disagreements ending in injuries between dogs. We always saw them very relaxed when outside, and seemingly happy to socialize, but as every Greyhound owner knows, it doesn't take much to injure their thin skin. The group mills about for half an hour while the kennels are cleaned and resupplied with shredded paper, and when the word comes, everyone charges inside ready to check on their home – few needed assistance finding their places. The muzzles come off, and everyone settles down, ready for a nap. There were usually only 1 or 2 dogs barking; the workers seemed to know those well, and mostly were able to quiet those with a whistle. We were allowed to take several hounds out of their kennels, and again were amazed at the friendly excitement they showed us; no one shied away from our hands, all were eager to be petted and rubbed. Most are ready to move to the tracks by 18 months of age – and the ones we saw were in superb condition. They virtually brim with energy and strength, charged for running. It made us middle-aged, well-fed humans feel quite out of shape!





The last group we saw was older dogs - mostly breeding males and females. Both have their individual kennels in separate locations. Perhaps the most special to see were some of the former dogs of fame; when older and greyed, they seemed so sweet and grateful for attention. Some live out their retirement on the farms and remain special to their humans. Some will eventually be offered for outside adoption – although not an easy thing, as most adopters are drawn to the young and pretty ones.



During our visits to these farms, we met many wonderful Greyhounds and welcoming people. They took hours out of their day to show us around and seemed delighted to share their operations and dogs with us. What struck us the most was the excitement by the Greyhounds of all ages to meet us and be petted. All seemed ready to do whatever we might want to do with them. Although they don't sleep on people's beds (yet), these Greyhounds are obviously used to humans and are treated well enough to think of people as fun and exciting. No wonder they are willing and able to make the adjustment to our home environments and to trust us so completely. And to become our Best Friends!