

# THE COURSING HOUND

*"As when the impatient Greyhound, slipped from far  
Bounds o'er the glade to course the fearful hare,  
She in her speed doth all her safety lie.  
And he with double speed pursues his prey  
O'erruns her at the sitting turns,  
But licks his chops in vain;  
She seeks the shelter which the neighboring covert gives.  
And, gaining it, she doubts if yet she lives."*

This verse, penned by the Roman poet Ovid in the First Century A.D., describes the very essence of the Greyhound breed. The importance of coursing to the maintenance of true breed type cannot be overemphasized. Whether a hound is destined to a life in the show ring or on the coursing field is immaterial; he must still possess the attributes of the coursing hound.

Organized coursing in America is available today in two major forms:

OPEN FIELD COURSING is the pursuit of live game under actual field conditions. Open to all sighthound breeds, the National Open Field Coursing Association is the governing body, and Coursing Champion and Courser of Merit are the titles awarded. The Jackrabbit is the accepted quarry, though often (particularly in the Midwest) fox and coyote are raised. To complete the requirements for a Coursing Championship, hounds must earn points in both breed and mixed breed competition, and must have an unassisted "take" (kill) or two assisted "takes."

At actual field trials, hounds are placed in braces or trios by random draw. As the individual heats are called up, hounds are walked through the fields until game is sighted. The Huntmaster determines the suitability of the quarry, and allows the hare sufficient lead before the hounds are "slipped," or released simultaneously. Courses are run until a kill is made, or the hounds lose the quarry. Few hounds are as well conditioned as the average jackrabbit, which is capable of spinning on a dime and accelerating at speeds in excess of 40 miles per hour; coupled with the fact that the hare is running on familiar ground, it takes an exceptional hound to consistently take game.

LURE FIELD COURSING is coursing under actual field conditions, but after an artificial lure electronically controlled over a system of cables and pulleys. Also open to all sighthound breeds, the American Sighthound Field Association is the governing body and the Field Champion and Lure Courser of Merit titles are awarded. Lure coursing is popular throughout the nation, particularly in areas where suitable live quarry is not accessible. Lure Field Trials are run in much the same manner as open field trials, with the exception that dogs are always slipped from the same stationary point. Dogs in lure coursing are often muzzled; this is because hounds are more easily distracted and more apt to quarrel when after artificial quarry. While often lacking the intensity of the open field hunt, lure coursing has the advantage that the length, difficulty, and speed can be controlled to better test the capabilities of the hounds.

To earn the title of Field Champion, hounds must earn the required number of points in breed competition, with at least two first places, or one first place and two second places.

In organized coursing, hounds are judged on their proficiency in speed, endurance, agility, follow, enthusiasm, and overall coursing style. Though neither N.O.F.C.A. nor A.S.F.A. titles are recognized by the AKC, many of the larger sighthound Parent Clubs are actively involved in promoting coursing in some form.

In some areas of the country where rabbits and coyote pose a hazard to crops and livestock, many individuals engage in sport coursing. Coyotes are a significant threat in several parts of the Midwest, and occasionally bounties are offered as incentive for their removal. The coyote of the Midwestern plains is a significantly larger animal (40-55 lbs.) than his Western counterpart (30-40 lbs.), and as a result, they are often hunted with a mixed breed pack — Greyhounds for the chase, and heavier boned hounds for the ensuing battle and the kill.

No one can truly evaluate the Greyhound until he has seen him in his natural state — in full flight in the open field. It is only by judging the Greyhound as a working hound that we can continue to preserve the breed as it was intended to be. The following pictures of hounds in the field will help to give the uninitiated some understanding of why the Greyhound is structured as it is, and increase our appreciation for this marvel of efficiency in the chase.

*(In sporting circles, the term "hounds" normally connotes scent or pack hounds. Here, however, I have referred to coursing dogs as "hounds," in this case meaning sighthounds. —Ed.)*





**THE FULLY CONTRACTED POSITION (above)**

photo by Rbt. Percy

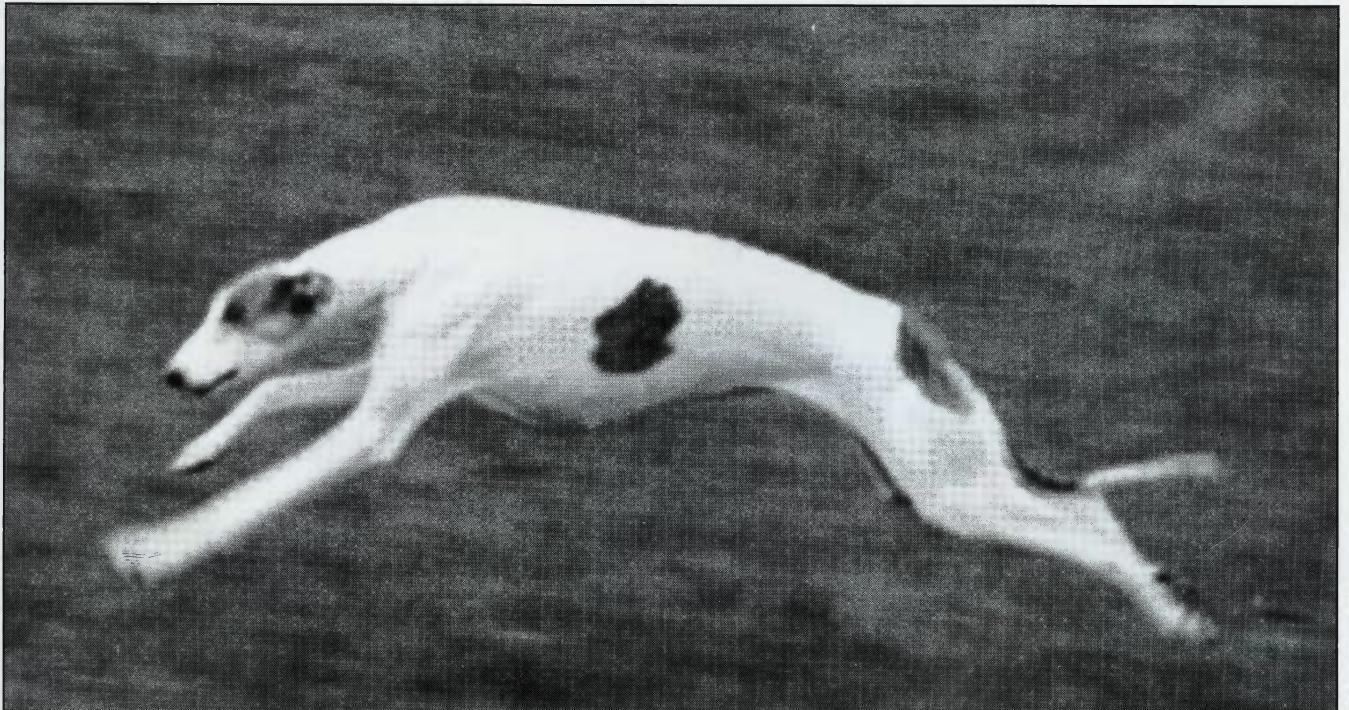
This photo illustrates the function of the correctly placed topline and tail relating to the Greyhound's running ability. Note the placement and flexibility of the vertebrae and the position of the head and neck.

## THE TOPLINE

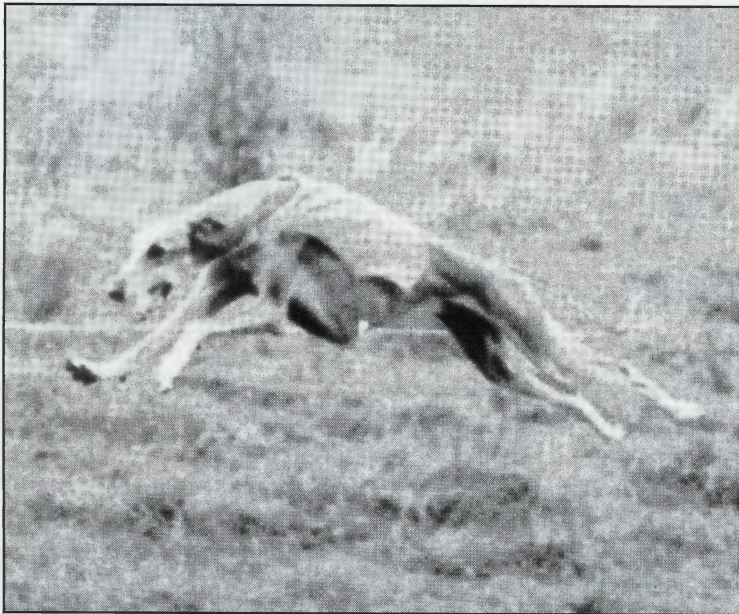
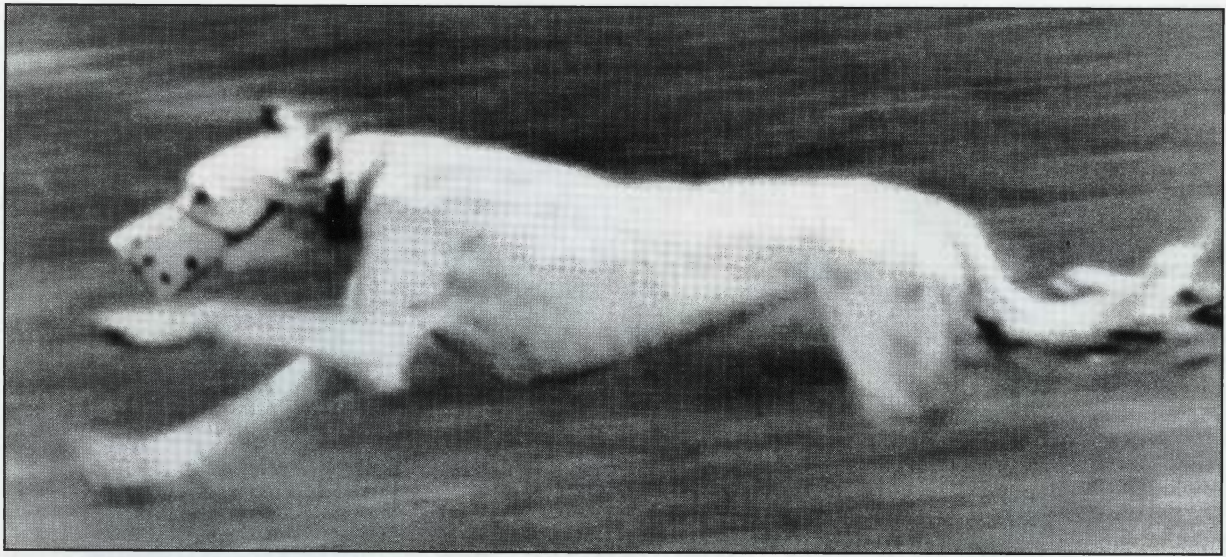
**THE FULLY EXTENDED POSITION (below)**

photo by Ashbey

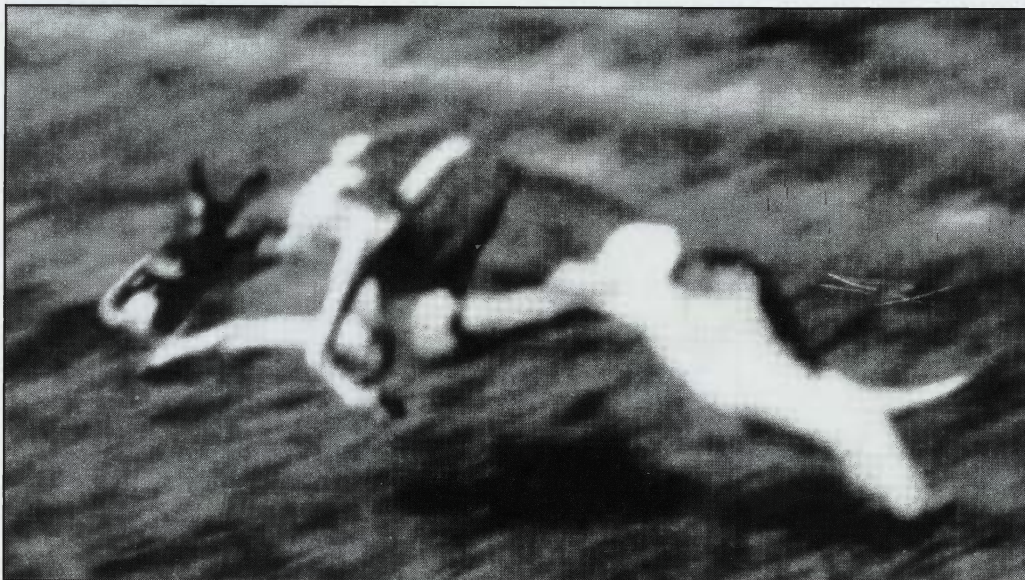
Again, note the extension of legs and continuity of topline. The Greyhound is a "drop dog," designed to drop to its prey. Note the position of the head; the ability of the head and neck to drop from the shoulder is dramatically illustrated in this position. A Greyhound should never be penalized for width between the shoulder blades (at the withers) as this enables the hound to extend the neck to its prey. As a rule of thumb, even a small bitch should have the width of three fingers between the shoulder blades at the point of the withers.







Contrast the topline and head position of the fully extended Saluki (above) with the fully extended Greyhounds (below and left). Again, the head and neck on the Greyhounds drop directly from the shoulder; the topline retains its continuity, and the tail functions significantly as a stabilizer and rudder. As a rule, the Greyhound extends its rear angulation more fully than the Saluki in this position. The Saluki is primarily an endurance dog, whereas the Greyhound is designed for speed, and the ability to turn and kill, hence the Greyhound's more flexible topline and slightly more compact foot.







## THE TURN

Photo by Papin

These photos illustrate the Greyhound beginning to turn in the extended position (above) and in the contracted position (below). Note the significant use of the tail as a rudder, and the position of the head and neck. In both cases one can see the intensity with which the Greyhound sights its game. Note also the flexibility of topline necessary for this wrenching, high-speed direction change; also the importance of correct substance and oval bone to absorb shock. The most common field injuries usually involve muscle strains and sprains; Greyhounds with correct bone type rarely sustain serious injury no matter how grueling the course.

Photo by Morson







Photo by M. H. Salmon

A side view of the Greyhound forcing a turn on live game. Again, note the significant role the tail plays in steering and stabilizing this high speed shift in direction. In the photo above, the Greyhound forces a turn on a white-tailed Jackrabbit just prior to the kill. In the photo below, the bitch was responding to a direction change initiated by the Jack, a situation frequently encountered in areas of uneven terrain offering numerous escape routes for the rabbit. Both dogs exhibit excellent "follow," or ability to sight, and remain sighted, on game.

Photo by Papin







Photo by M. H. Salmon

## THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

The Greyhound (above) closes in on a white-tailed Jackrabbit on a hunt in the Mid-West. This particular course ran well over a mile at speeds in excess of 40 mph.

Greyhounds (below) participating in an official coursing meet. A Greyhound exhibiting aggression on the field is immediately disqualified; the prey must engage the sighthound's complete and total attention.

Photo by R. Pearcy

