

Disciplinary Committee Inquiries

The Disciplinary Committee of the GBGB were in attendance at a meeting held on 19 January 2012:-

Mr J Akerman (in the chair)

Mr R Coughlan

Mr A Hunt

Mr K Salmon

Dr A J Higgins (observing)

1. Nottingham Stadium – ARR VERSASE / CAMPBELLTOWN / TOUPE JOE – Professional Trainer Mrs J Houfton

MRS J A HOUFTON

The Chairman of the Committee referred to the three cases under consideration, all of which related to greyhounds in the care of Mrs Jane Houfton that had vomited on separate occasions during 2011. The case papers contained some documentation common to all three cases, and also included evidence specific to each case that required them to be considered on an individual basis.

The GBGB Director of Regulation on behalf of GRB was represented by Counsel, Mr Louis Weston.

Mrs Houfton was in attendance at the enquiry, represented by her solicitor Mr Julian Lee, and accompanied by her husband, Mr D Houfton, and Kennel Manager Mr M Livesey.

Oral evidence was provided at the inquiry by Miss R Corden, Dr A German, Mr S Gower, Mr J Robinson, Mr D Houfton, Mr M Livesey, and Miss N McEllistrim.

The Committee had received written advice from Mr S Gower (GBGB Veterinary Director), on the digestive process in a greyhound, in particular the 'Gastric Emptying Rate', which is the speed with which substances leave the stomach after ingestion.

The Committee received written evidence from Dr AJ German MRCVS, Senior Lecturer at the Small Animal Teaching Hospital, University of Liverpool, who is recognised by the RCVS as a specialist in small animal internal medicine, and who has a special interest in companion animal gastroenterology.

Dr German stated that gastric emptying is typically a gradual process, and that it would normally be expected that the majority of food should have left the stomach by 8 hours post-feeding in a normal dog. However, gastric emptying times can be highly variable amongst different dogs and different circumstances, and longer digestion times, although unusual, would not be impossible in some circumstances. This makes it difficult to be definitive about what represents the maximum expected gastric emptying time in a typical normal dog. Furthermore, various factors can influence the speed of

emptying, including particle size, water content, fat and fibre content, and 'physiological stress'. Added to that, a number of pathological processes can also affect gastric emptying times.

Mrs Houfton had submitted a letter from Mr R Torr MRCVS, indicating possible causes of canine vomiting and delayed gastric emptying, mainly associated with pathological processes, low grade gastritis or other low grade infections. It was stated that these factors could cause gastric emptying times in excess of 12 hours, and up to 20 hours in rare cases. The letter did not specifically address any of the three cases under consideration Mrs Houfton also provided research documents, indicating possible causes of canine vomiting and delayed gastric emptying.

The Committee noted a statement from Mr J Robinson, Area Stipendiary Steward, showing an analysis, between greyhound trainers, of the 52 greyhounds that had vomited in the Nottingham Stadium race kennels after trials or races between January 2010 and September 2011. Twenty three of the greyhounds (44%) were trained by Mrs Houfton.

Dr German provided a statistical analysis of the sickness survey, and had concluded in his opinion that it was highly unlikely that the increased number of greyhound vomiting cases seen with dogs under the charge of Mrs Houfton would have occurred by chance.

ARR VERSASE

The Disciplinary Committee considered the circumstances of the greyhound ARR VERSASE vomiting 0.4kg of raw, undigested meat after it had run at Nottingham Stadium at 11.34am on 18 January 2011. ARR VERSASE started at 5/1 and finished fifth, beaten 6 lengths, after being crowded at the fourth bend.

On 18 January ARR VERSASE weighed slightly lower than in his previous two races. No unusual betting patterns had been reported on the race in question and the greyhound's performance was broadly consistent with its previous races and trials.

The Committee received evidence from Miss R Corden (Promoter), Professional Trainer Mrs J A Houfton, the track Veterinary Surgeon, and the Senior Paddock Steward.

The Committee heard that ARR VERSASE was given a main feed of 'Alpha Racer' at 2pm on 17 January 2011. It was stated that it was not known if this had been supplemented with raw meat, although this may have been the case if the greyhound's weight was down. On a race day, the feed would normally be restricted to a breakfast comprising muesli and powdered milk.

Mrs Houfton did not know the feeding regime for ARR VERSASE on 18 January 2011. She travelled alone with the greyhound to Nottingham Stadium on that day. ARR VERSASE was clinically normal pre-race. The vomitus was discovered by the Paddock Steward approximately 20 minutes after the race. Mrs Houfton stated that ARR VERSASE subsequently suffered from bouts of diarrhoea and was reported off colour later the same day.

ARR VERSASE had been recorded by the Paddock Stewards at Nottingham Stadium as producing small amounts of post-trial vomitus on two occasions, in November and December 2010. The current trainer of ARR VERSASE stated that the greyhound produces a small amount of bile or saliva after races or trials. He opined that this may be caused by water given after its runs. The Racing Manager at Sheffield Stadium, where ARR VERSASE had been running since 9 March 2011, stated that in six trials and four races, it had not been reported with any sickness problems either before or after its runs.

The Committee noted the statement of Mr S Race, the breeder of ARR VERSASE which indicated that most of the litter had suffered with vomiting in transit and after racing.

Mr Gower provided written advice that a dog's stomach is normally 75% empty four hours after a meal, which suggested that ARR VERSASE was likely to have been fed a substantial meal much nearer to the race than was the normal practice.

Dr German suggested that he would expect chunks of raw meat to take a significant time to clear from the stomach. However it was not known if ARR VERSASE had been fed raw meat prior to the race.

Dr German noted that, based upon the statements submitted, ARR VERSASE might have received his last main meal up to 22 hours prior to vomiting. He considered that this would represent an extremely long and unexpected gastric emptying period, although arguably, not impossible even in a normal dog. Such a retention time could instead be consistent with a pathological process although, in such circumstances, other episodes of vomiting or regurgitation would be expected to occur.

It was considered by Dr German that the statement provided by the current trainer of ARR VERSASE, could provide some, at least circumstantial, evidence of an underlying disease. However, the episodes referred to appeared to be somewhat different in nature, and associated signs (eg vomiting and/or diarrhoea) would usually be expected to be evident over a longer period if this was the case. Further investigations (X-ray, ultrasound and possibly endoscopy) would be required to confirm or refute this possibility, and no medical records had been presented to indicate that such a condition existed.

Dr German stated that, although the time to the vomiting post-feeding was extreme (if it was 22 hours), he was unable to find sufficient evidence that would conclusively prove that feed must have been given at a later time. Dr German stated that a gastric retention time of 22 hours would in his opinion be unlikely on the balance of probabilities, which was the threshold of proof that the Disciplinary Committee was required to consider when determining the case.

The Committee commented that it would have assisted the inquiry had the greyhound had been subjected to a veterinary examination, to establish whether there was an underlying pathological cause for the episodes of vomiting.

The Committee weighed the veterinary and expert advice, and took into account the circumstantial evidence, including the testimony of ARR VERSASE's breeder and its current trainer, and the records of previous bouts of vomiting by this greyhound at Nottingham Stadium. The Committee noted the lack of medical evidence to indicate the possibility of underlying disease.

Having considered the facts of the case and the evidence provided, the Committee concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that the greyhound ARR VERSASE had been administered an excess quantity of raw meat in close proximity to its race on 18 January 2011, for which no credible explanation had been provided.

The Committee found Mrs JA Houfton in breach of Rules 12 (i), 49 (iv), 152(i) and (ii) and 174(i)(a), as the vomiting was found to be caused by unexplained greyhound feeding practices which could have affected ARR VERSASE's performance and/or well being.

The Committee noted that, at the local enquiry, it had been revealed that the Greyhound was registered in the wrong ownership, in breach of Rule 12(i). Mrs Houfton was cautioned for this breach.

CAMPBELLTOWN

The Disciplinary Committee considered the circumstances of the Greyhound CAMPBELLTOWN vomiting 0.9kg of partially undigested food (appearing to be biscuit feed) after it had run at Nottingham Stadium at 1.33pm on 24 May 2011. CAMPBELLTOWN started at 6/1 and finished fifth, beaten 8.5 lengths, after being crowded at the first and fourth bends.

On 24 May 2011 CAMPBELLTOWN weighed 32.2kg pre-race, compared to its previous racing weights of 31.3kg on 14 May and 31.5kg on 30 April. No unusual betting patterns had been reported on the race in question.

The Committee received evidence from Miss R Corden (Promoter of Nottingham Stadium), Professional Trainer Mrs J A Houfton, the track Veterinary Surgeon, and the Senior Paddock Steward.

The Committee heard that Mrs Houfton was not present at Nottingham Stadium on 24 May. She was represented by two kennelhands. CAMPBELLTOWN was clinically normal pre-race. The vomitus was discovered by the Paddock Steward approximately 25 minutes after the race.

Mrs Houfton was informed of the feeding regime for CAMPBELLTOWN on 23 May by her staff, and had been advised that the greyhound did not eat much of his main feed at the normal time of 3pm, and that the remains (approx 0.55kg of dry feed) were offered again at 7pm, when it was eaten. He was given a normal breakfast on the morning of 24 May.

Mrs Houfton also stated that she had fed bones to her greyhounds which she suggested may have contributed to gastric complications. It was not known when CAMPBELLTOWN was last given a bone, and he had not been recorded as vomiting on any of his previous five visits to Nottingham Stadium.

Dr German noted that, based upon the statements submitted, (and noting the absence of accurate written records), it was unclear as to when food was actually given to CAMPBELLTOWN; the vomiting might have occurred any time between 6 and 23 hours after feeding (if the small morning meal was included). This range overlaps with the range for gastric emptying reported in scientific research papers.

The Committee noted that the vomit content did not appear to comprise the normal race day feed. The other unusual issue in this case was the size of the vomited food. On the face of it, 0.9kg was greater than the typical evening meal of 0.55kg. However, dry (kibbled) foods can become swollen on contact with water, and this could have had the effect of expanding the volume and weight of food recovered. Further, while the description of the vomitus was not consistent with the stated pre-race morning feed, he considered it possible that the additional food given at 7.30am on the day of the race could have further contributed to this amount recovered.

In Dr German's opinion, if the food vomited was from the meals given the previous day, the associated retention time (if it was between 6 and 23 hours) would be extremely unusual unless there was a significant gastric retention disorder. Dr German stated that he was unable to find sufficient evidence that would conclusively prove that feed must have been given at a later time. This was, however, a higher threshold of proof than the Disciplinary Committee was required to consider when determining the case.

Dr German considered that the possibility of an underlying pathological process could not be completely excluded. However, based upon the lack of medical evidence or suggestion that this greyhound has experienced any previous or subsequent gastrointestinal signs, he found this possibility much less likely than with ARR VERSACE.

The Committee weighed the veterinary and expert advice, and noted the expert opinion that the possibility of underlying disease was unlikely in this case. The Committee concluded that it was highly unlikely, given a greyhound's normal gastric emptying rate, for the quantity and type of vomitus produced by CAMPBELLTOWN in the racing kennels post-race (0.9kg) to have resulted from normal feeding in the run up to the race on 24 May 2011. The evidence pointed to CAMPBELLTOWN having been fed a meal in close proximity to the race, for which no credible explanation had been provided by Mrs Houfton.

Having considered the facts of the case and the evidence provided, the Committee concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that the greyhound CAMPBELLTOWN had been administered an excess quantity of food prior to its race on 24 May 2011.

The Committee found Mrs J A Houfton in breach of Rules 49 (iv), 152(i) and (ii), and 174(i)(a), as the vomiting was found to be caused by unexplained greyhound feeding practices which could have affected CAMPBELLTOWN's performance and/or well being.

TOUPE JOE

The Disciplinary Committee considered the circumstances of the Greyhound TOUPE JOE vomiting 0.3kg of partially undigested food (appearing to be biscuit feed) after it had run at Nottingham Stadium at 8.37pm on 27 August 2011. TOUPE JOE started at 5/2 fav, and won the race by 1 length, after leading at the fourth bend. The race appeared to be largely incident free.

On 27 August 2011 TOUPE JOE weighed 32.6kg pre-race, compared to its previous recorded weights of 32.1kg in a trial on 20 August and 31.9kg on 15 August. No unusual betting patterns had been reported on the race in question.

The Committee received evidence from Miss R Corden (Promoter of Nottingham Stadium), Mr D Baldwin (General Manager), Professional Trainer Mrs J A Houfton, the track Veterinary Surgeon, and the Paddock Steward.

The vomitus produced by TOUPE JOE was discovered by the Paddock Steward approximately 20 minutes after the race. The greyhound was found to be clinically normal post-race.

Mrs Houfton was away on holiday and had not been present at Nottingham Stadium on 27 August. She had been represented by two kennel hands, both of whom had stated immediately after the incident, that the food vomited was not what they would feed as a normal pre-race feed, which is cereal based. Neither kennel hand recalled personally feeding TOUPE JOE on 27 August.

Dr German noted that, based upon the recollection of the staff and the statement of the Trainer, (and noting the absence of accurate written records), a biscuit based meal had not been fed on the race day. A muesli based meal had been provided to TOUPE JOE at 8am and 2.30pm on the day of the race. The previous biscuit based meal was given some 29 hours prior to the race, which would represent a much longer gastric retention time than in a typical dog.

The Committee noted that the possibility of an underlying pathological process could not be completely excluded. However, based upon the lack of medical evidence or suggestion that this greyhound had experienced any previous or subsequent gastrointestinal signs, this possibility was considered unlikely.

Having considered the facts of the case and the evidence provided, the Committee concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that the cause of the greyhound TOUPE JOE vomiting post-race was linked to the feeding practices for the greyhound in the run up to the race.

The Committee found Mrs J A Houfton in breach of Rules 49 (iv), 152(i) (ii) and 174(i)(a), as the vomiting was found to be caused by greyhound feeding practices which could have affected TOUPE JOE's performance and/or well being. The Committee noted that the quantity of vomitus was lower than the other two cases under consideration, but there was no satisfactory explanation for the type of food vomited.

With Mrs Houfton having been found in breach of the Rules of Racing, Mr Weston addressed the Disciplinary Committee on the costs of the hearing.

Conclusion

The Chairman stated that the rule breaches in this case were subject to the recently introduced Penalty Guidelines, Appendix VI of the Rules of Racing. The purpose of a penalty issued by the Disciplinary Committee was to:

- a) protect the welfare of the greyhound
- b) protect the integrity of greyhound racing
- c) maintain public confidence in the greyhound industry
- d) maintain proper standards of conduct of licensed persons or any combination of the above.

The aggravating matters in this instance are:

- three significant cases of vomiting by greyhounds in Mrs Houfton's care were reported within an 8 month period; and
- the absence of admission or acceptance of guilt by Mrs Houfton.

The Committee took into account the following mitigating factors:

- that there had been a change of kennel feeding regime and an attempt to identify any underlying cause for the increased incidence of vomiting from Mrs Houfton's kennels;
- the character references provided by Mrs Houfton, and
- there had been no further significant incidents of vomiting since August 2011.

The Committee was concerned for the welfare of the greyhounds and the impact of these cases on the integrity of the sport. Taking into account the nature of the rule breaches in respect of the Greyhounds ARR VERSASE, CAMPBELLTOWN and TOUPE JOE at Nottingham Stadium on the dates stated, the Committee ordered that Mrs Houfton be severely reprimanded, fined £2,500 and ordered to pay £7,500 costs.

In addition Mrs Houfton was advised that she would be issued with an Advisory Notice, stating that if there was a repetition of rule breaches of this nature within the next 12 months, withdrawal of her licence for a 12 month period would be recommended to a future Disciplinary Committee. Mrs Houfton would also be at risk of a further penalty being imposed on her for any further offence. It was pointed out to Mrs Houfton that this Advisory Notice effectively imposed a 12 month probationary period.

