

Weekender

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Left-behind greyhounds can expect dazzling future

Lesley Wells

The greyhounds left behind in the now defunct Canidrome in Fai Chi Kei are gradually being rehomed and the majority of them appear to have a dazzling future ahead of them.

The Civic and Municipal Bureau (IACM) has been looking after the greyhounds that were abandoned by Macau (Yat Yuen) Canidrome Co. Ltd. since the final deadline for the canines' removal from the dog racetrack on October 6.

After the racetrack finally closed its doors at midnight on July 20 the owners of the betting business left 550 or so greyhounds behind and their care was taken over by IACM officials with volunteers from Anima going in to help, walk, bath, feed and play with the hounds some of which appear to have been badly treated before.

Yat Yuen then proposed several locations to move the greyhounds to while they were being found adopters overseas. All of the locations – one of them adjacent to a senior citizens home in Coloane – were officially deemed unsuitable for the greyhounds and so on October 6, the bureau considered the hounds abandoned and took over their care.

Initially, Anima's volunteers were no longer allowed entry but the animal protection group's president, Albano Martins, was able to persuade the bureau to allow a few volunteers in to keep their eyes on the greyhounds.

This reporter has been volunteering at the former Canidrome kennels since August and goes there at least six days a week. Although initially there were a large number of volunteers, the numbers began to dwindle significantly after many had taken selfies of themselves with the greyhounds and never came back.

Since the ban has been lifted there are probably only six volunteers that are regulars now. Martins told *The Macau Post Daily* earlier this week: "I need more volunteers, many volunteers, but not the ones that just want to take selfies, I want volunteers who will come regularly to walk, feed, bathe and give the animals affection."

Since September, five to 10 greyhounds a month have been leaving the ex-Canidrome and been flown to greyhound rescue centres around the United States en route to their forever homes, so slowly things are getting better for them.

Earlier this week *The MPD Weekender* spoke to Martins at the Canidrome as five more of the greys were leaving to catch a barge to Hong Kong and a flight to Detroit to the MotorCity Greyhound Rescue Centre and ultimately their forever homes.

Martins said, "After these greys have left, we have 471 left in the Canidrome and my main concern is to send them all to Europe, the US and Australia, except those too old or too sick to travel, in the limited time we have."

According to figures provided by Anima as of October 31, 50 greyhounds are not up for adoption overseas due to age or health problems.

He added, "The animals still need a lot of treatment and they still need their teeth cleaned."

The greyhounds that are being adopted locally and in Hong Kong all have to be desexed and their teeth cleaned before Martins will allow them to go to their adoptive families. Unfortunately, a couple have died after the procedure which has greatly saddened Martins. "How can we do this without deaths?" he asked. He appears to hold himself personally responsible as Anima transports the hounds to and from the vets after treatment.

Martins also said, "I do not believe that the situation has improved at the Canidrome since Anima has not in charge

anymore, it is not good so we need to get the greyhounds out as soon as possible."

Martins said that by May the majority will have gone to Europe and the US, then 40 will be going to Australia and four each to Singapore and New Zealand. "The problem is the Canidrome will not pay for the [air] tickets for the dogs going to Australia, Singapore and New Zealand and the rescue centres and adopters cannot afford the A\$2,000, about 10,000 patacas, it will cost for 10 days quarantine, so I need to find a solution for that."

For the last week two women from an Australian rescue centre have been at the Canidrome – and yesterday a lady arrived from the US – to see the situation for themselves. Martins said, "I am sad to have had to ask them to come here, we need more volunteers, since we [Anima] were banned from coming, maybe the majority of the previous volunteers think that they still cannot come here. I am not sure that all the animals are walked every day.

"It is not as good as before, the conditions are worse than when we were here, the cells are not properly cleaned and they are wet. The quality of life of the greyhounds is worse than when we were here before," he added.

Martins feels that this is due to the fact that a lot of the staff are from a cleaning company and not kennel hands or from the Civic and Municipal Bureau as before.

The *MPD Weekender* also spoke to Australian Cathy Brown who works as a foster of rescued greyhounds and works with two rescue centres, "Helen's Helping Hounds" and "Rescued Greyhounds NSW CC," Down Under.

Brown said that she decided to come to Macau to see the plight of the greyhounds for herself. When asked for her first impression of the ex-Canidrome, she said, "Shock, sad, heartbroken, raw. I am very sad and exhausted. The whole experience is emotionally draining when I go to see the dogs and hear what they have been through, but then I think about what they are going to."

She added, "The Macau-born puppies are heartbreaking as they have never seen grass."

Brown pointed out that in 2013 the Australian government stopped issuing canine passports for greyhounds to come to Macau but in the former Canidrome there are still a number of greys from Down Under. "How did they get here?" she said. "How did they leave Australia and enter Macau without a passport?" she added.

Brown said that looking at their ear tattoos the dogs came from big trainers and breeders in Australia, who are still racing



Cathy Brown (left) and Robin Reich pose with Beau Bobby at the Canidrome on Wednesday. Photos taken and provided by Lesley Wells

dogs. "I shall report what I have found to the Greyhound Welfare Tribunal. It can be done anonymously too."

According to Anima as of October 31, there were 61 greyhounds from Australia younger than five at the ex-Canidrome.

Robin Reich from the US, who is a volunteer with "Greyhounds Pets Inc" in Woodville, Washington, arrived in Macau on Tuesday night and made her first visit to the ex-Canidrome on Wednesday morning. The *MPD Weekender* asked her what her first impression of the former Canidrome was. "When I arrived, I thought it was not so bad as the greyhounds were being walked and that made me happy, they [greyhounds] are happy to see you...but then... I saw some of their cells had no beds, they were dark and damp. Some were better but I was not happy."

"Many people get the impression that the greyhounds are safe, but they are not safe!" Brown nodded in agreement.

Reich went on to say, "I have been disturbed by some of the things I have seen, some of the handlers are rough with them [greyhounds] but the dogs do look better than I thought they would."

"I am here to take photographs of 50 dogs as when Pet Levreri [the Italian greyhound centre that is coordinating the European adoptions] knew I was coming here, they asked me to take photos and assess the characters of the 50 other dogs that are going to Europe."

A total of 75 are said to have already been adopted in Europe and leave early next year.

Both women frequently had tears in their eyes when they visited the greyhounds and saw their current plight. This reporter explained that the conditions in the ex-Canidrome now, although not perfect or ideal, were so much better than they had been when Anima first went in to the kennels in July.

The duo were slightly happier hearing that, but not much.

Martins said, "We need more volunteers, not selfie takers and if anyone is interested please contact Anima by email anima@macau.ctm.net"



(Left to right) Robin Reich, Albano Martins, a handler and IACM staff member pose with Happy Sky before she leaves for Hong Kong on her way to Philadelphia at the Canidrome on Wednesday.



(Left to right) Albano Martins, Cathy Brown, a handler, Lesley Wells, Helen Lauricella and Robin Reich pose with Sure Super Class before she leaves for Hong Kong on her way to Philadelphia at the Canidrome on Wednesday.