

## 2019 Nationals – By GCA EO David Simonette

It was a huge amount of work but worth every minute. That's how I reflect on the 2019 GCA Nationals held in Perth.

Certainly, the feedback from those that attended was glowing and hopefully indicative of how they felt rather than just being polite.

I am pretty sure it was genuine as our self-assessment (GCA and Greyhounds WA) was that everything we hoped to achieve was in fact achieved. If we had the chance to do it all over again, we wouldn't change too many things or wish for a better outcome.

We enjoyed a touch of good luck on a few occasions but we can disguise that as meticulous planning and genius execution – your choice.

I think the Nationals were special this year for a couple of reasons, no more important because they re-enforced why we actually hold them – to celebrate something special.

If we don't bother to celebrate who do we expect will on our behalf?

The dog game is like a revolving merry-go-round in that it only stops for those that jump off. With the amount of racing we conduct 7 days a week except for Christmas Day there is plenty of "same same" about what we do. Trainers get up before first light and don't go to bed until they can, administrators of clubs are usually the poor buggers switching off the lights signaling the last customer has left the course.

Not exactly sure of the number of races we actually run each year, but when you throw in training and trailing, and doing all the work to get them to the track its pretty obvious that the "routine" can suck just a little.

Along comes The Nationals that have been around for more than half a century. It's a race series like no other with the best sprinter and stayer determined by winning their respective state finals before winning the big one. Its no mean feat especially with the requirements of long-distance travel and racing against elite opposition on the back of probably just one look at the track for good measure.

The prizemoney is OK without necessarily being life-changing but it is a series that retains its "special" tag. Why?

As I watched the trainers collecting their mementos at the Gala Dinner on the night before the National Championships and listened to their interviews with SKY Racing's Jason Lincoln the answer became plainly obvious. They were bloody proud to be there.

Proud that they were representing their state and in New Zealand's case, their country.

Proud to have their dog regarded amongst the best.

Proud to be in the company of other trainers from all of Australasia considered the best.

Proud to be applauded by a room of people that respect what they do and value their achievements.

When it comes at a time when being a member of the greyhound fraternity is not widely acclaimed by the general populace, I figure it means even more.

I sensed that they would return home happy and with many more friends no matter the result or race 4 or race 6 at Cannington the next night.

So, to what actually happened in Perth, what's the goss? First rule, what happens in Perth, stays in Perth.

But what I can tell you is that from the GA/GCA National Symposium 2019 to the crowning of the two WA greyhounds as National Champions, and everything that happened in between, the experience for all that attended was positive and renewing.

The Symposium at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre kicked off the official nationals programme on the morning of Thursday August 22.

130 members of the industry came along to be involved in a day of informative presentations and discussion on topics of major importance.

The morning commenced with an opening speech by the WA Racing Minister Hon. Paul Papalia before Greyhounds Australasia Chairman Anne Marie Harrison provided a welcome followed by a brief overview of GA's new Strategic Plan as well as making available copies of the plan to the audience.

The first of three keynote speakers, Peter "Gleeso" Gleeson told us about his lifelong love of greyhounds, as well as some fascinating insights into his world of the media. It was terrific to hear his take on the greyhound industry and the advice offered to administrators as to where the sport needs to be headed.

Another Brisbane boy, Lyall Mercer entertainingly challenged the room as he spoke to public perceptions about greyhound racing – a viewpoint from a public relations expert that is positioned outside our industry.

The third speaker was Gary "GK" Wilson, the owner of past greats Wooley Wilson and Pacermatic, who stole the show with his hilarious anecdotes and sometimes irreverent look back at his colourful life. Gary swallowed a dummy as a 6-month old baby that cut off the oxygen supply to his brain and his interview with MC Darrin Davies was about overcoming the challenges of cerebral palsy amid living a most fulfilling life as a family man, greyhound owner, tipster and media personality.

More serious discussion was reserved for the various expert-led panels on the day that tackled the key industry issues of Responsible Breeding, Welfare and Rehoming, and Safe and Fair Racing. The message was quite clear that all jurisdictions were conscious of the need for decisive action to ensure sustainable levels throughout the full lifecycle of a greyhound.

## **GA/GCA NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 2019 PANELISTS**

### **Responsible Breeding**

Dr Garnett Hall	Veterinarian, Official WA GAP Ambassador
Judy Lind	Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, NSW
Brenton Scott	Greyhound Strategy and Development Manager, Racing Queensland
David Brasch	Breeding Expert, Owner Pedigrees By Design
Michelle Romer	Leading WA Breeder – Breeder 2018 National Sprint Champion

### **Welfare and Rehoming**

Linda Britton	Multiple WA Leading Trainer and Hall of Fame Inductee
Dr Alicia Fuller	Manager Greyhound As Pets GRNSW
Cheryl Isaac	Fast Friends R&R Retirement and Rehoming Agency
Ross Barnett	Commissioner - Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner

### **Safe and Fair Racing**

Scott Robins	Director, Safe Racing and Sustainable Breeding GRV
Prof. David Eager	University of Technology Sydney
Denis Borovica	General Manager, Racing Integrity RWWA
Matt Corby	Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing South Australia
Dr Barbara Backhoy	Cranbourne OTV, Owner Langwarrin Vets, MGRA Board Member

### **Industry 2029**

Grantley Stevens	Chairman, Greyhound Racing South Australia
Peita Duncan	Deputy Chair, Greyhound Racing Victoria
Tony Mestrov	Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing New South Wales
Alan Clayton	Chief Executive, Greyhound Racing Victoria
Sean Hannan	Chairman, Greyhound Racing New Zealand
Greg Miller	Vice Chairman, Greyhound Clubs Australia, CEO Sandown

The Sandown Greyhound Racing Club's Jason Adams assembled a group of young participants that provided the audience with the thoughts and aspirations of the under 25-year old brigade in what was perhaps the most "on point" segment of the day.

The afternoon session heard from Tabcorp's Darren Pearce who talked about the opportunities for all clubs to provide live and on-demand content as part of the Sky Racing Active digital platform and then it was the turn of industry leaders from throughout Australia and New Zealand to provide their vision for what the industry may look like in 10 years from now. It was an overwhelmingly positive outlook but with a need for much work to be done to assure prosperity.

I have been enthused with the amount of support levelled at the concept potentially becoming a regular feature of the Nationals programme with GRNSW's Tony Mestrov, GWIC's Judy Lind and NSWGBOTA's Steve Noyce all expressing their commitment to host the 2020 Symposium in Sydney

#### 2019 Nationals Welcome Dinner – Thursday 22 August.

The first social event of the nationals was held at the picturesque Fraser's Restaurant perched above the Perth city skyline in Kings Park. More than 150 guests enjoyed a three-course meal matched with local WA wines to the sounds of the Adrian Galante Quartet. Formalities were kept to a minimum but the one exception was a surprise presentation by Greyhound Clubs Australia to Marg Long in recognition of her service to AGRA and GCA over more than two decades. Marg was a key player in AGRA during her lengthy involvement with the Melbourne Greyhound Racing Association and was a prime mover in the establishment of Greyhound Clubs Australia a little over two years ago.

"This is all a bit overwhelming to be honest but I would just like to thank everyone involved with this (presentation)," Marg said.

"I have enjoyed every minute of my time in this industry and the wonderful friends I have made along the journey."

#### 2019 GCA Annual General Meeting – Friday 23 August

A number of meetings were held including GCA's AGM which was conducted at the Cannington track. BGRC's Les Bein was re-elected unopposed to the Chairman's post, as was Sandown's Greg Miller to the role of deputy.

The GCA Committee for 2019/20 as elected;

Dennis O'Brien and Noel Reilly – WA

Joe Cotroneo and Shayne Stiff – NSW

Troy Harley and Greg Miller – VIC

Luke Gatehouse and Les Bein – QLD

Graeme Barber and Richard Stamford – TAS

Shaun Mathieson and Vacant - SA

#### 2019 GCA Nationals Gala Dinner – Friday 23 August

More than 230 guests attended the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre for the social highlight of the nationals – the presentation of the GCA 2018/19 GOTY awards.

The evening was pitched as "The Greytest Show On Earth" with theming and entertainment to match. The opening act featured more than 40 performers with song, dance, acrobatics and fire twirling all especially choreographed by Carmelo Pizzino (Dancing with The Stars) for the occasion.

It certainly set the tone for a fun night of entertainment amid the important task of recognizing our sport's highest achievers. Congratulations to the connections of Orson Allen (GOTY), Fernando Bale (Sire of the Year), Chica Destacada (Dam of the Year) and Zipping Bailey (Run of the Year). WA local Chris Halse took out honours as GCA Leading Trainer and young participant Jade McKenzie was named the Denise Fysh Award winner in recognition of her spirited fight to return to good health after a serious car accident.

Saturday night belonged to the West Aussies with both National finals going the way of the locals. Reidy's Runner gave his trainer Christine Bennett her biggest moment in the sport winning the Distance title, whilst Chris Halse made it back to back Sprint crowns when Premium Share emulated the deeds of his kennelmate West On Augie (Sandown 2018).

Congratulations to Greyhounds WA that did an outstanding job in hosting this year's Nationals. To GWA Chairman Richard Humphries and his committee and management team of Noel Reilly, Dennis O'Brien, Michael Seaton, Craig Renton, Kelly Frampton and James Broadhurst – 2019 forever be the benchmark.

Special note should also be made of Racing and Wagering WA's support of the Nationals which included the provision of prizemoney and a sizeable contribution towards the marketing of the event.

Can't wait for Sydney 2020.