

History of the Bendigo Greyhound Racing Club

Greyhound racing commenced in Bendigo in the 1920's when field coursing was conducted in the centre of the Bendigo racecourse at Epsom.

Coursing was not the only form of greyhound racing and gambling in the 1920's and 1930's. There was also illegal fox terrier and even go-cart racing on the creek flats a round Bendigo.

In the early days, Bendigo produced the winners of Australia's most prestigious coursing event the Waterloo Cup with **Brown Hawk** owned by Mr. F. Goyne and **Mindful Elsie** owned by Mr. J. Watts successful in the 1920's and **Robert Macawber** winning for Allan Duffy of Eaglehawk in the 1950's.

Life member the late Alan Abbot told author Tim Haslett of the book "Chasing Dreams" in 2007 he remembered going out as a boy with 20 - 30 people in the fenced scotch thistle fields around Bendigo to catch hares for Plumpton coursing. Hare drivers would block holes in the fences beforehand to stop the hares escaping. Then nets 60-foot-long and three feet high were stretched across the corners of the field. Kids hid behind kerosene boxes placed in front of the nets to scare the hares into the nets. Beaters would move towards the nets driving the hares before them. The captured hares were then put into long boxes with partitions to stop them getting on top of each other and suffocating. A good drive would get 30 - 40 hares as well as a few rabbits. The hares were trained to run down the Plumpton course to find the escape hatches located at end of the course. The hatches had a flap at the end to let the hares in and to keep the greyhounds out. These hatches led to the hare enclosure next to the coursing track. Training the hares to their escape routes initially involved the hares being chased by local kids on motorbikes and later by sheepdogs in preparation for coursing.



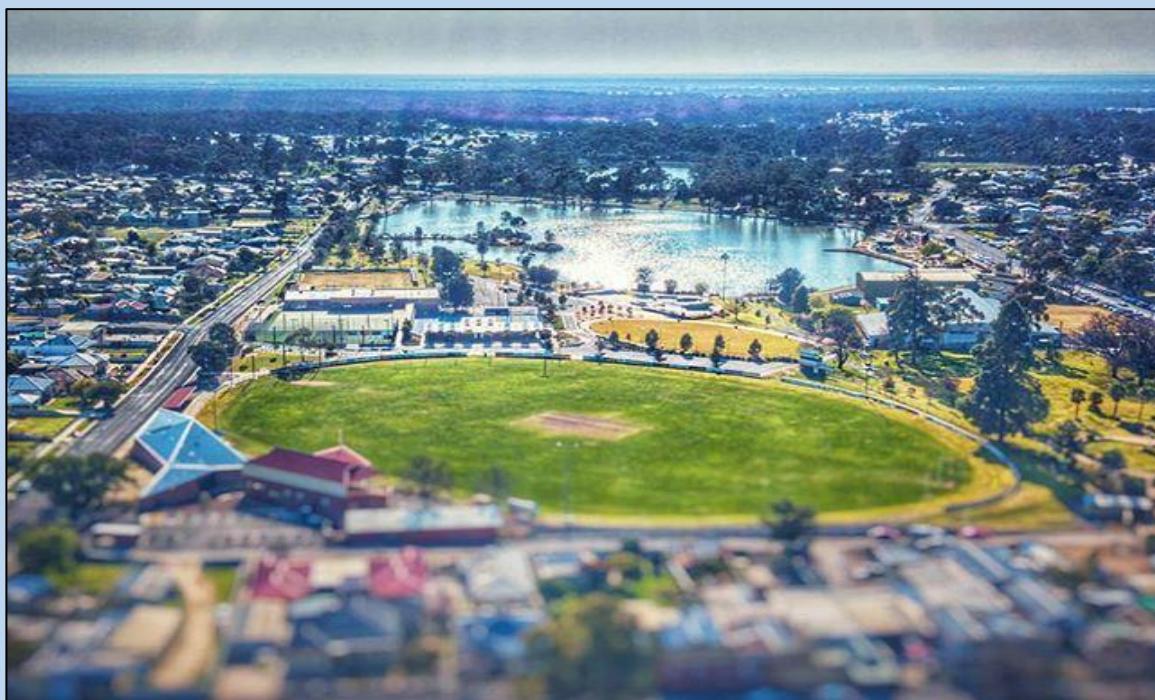
The weather had an important bearing on the outcome of a course. The hares were rarely caught on windy days, which appeared to favour the quarry. However, wet days favoured the greyhound when there were more hares killed. Live hare coursing continued until 1964 when the blue-ribbon classic the Victorian Waterloo Cup was run at Bendigo over a three-day carnival. That winner was the great **Byamee** who was owned by legendary trainer Ray Herbert from Diamond Creek.

Thirty bookmakers fielded at the last Bendigo meeting in 1964. Within a year, however, live hare coursing was outlawed in Victoria. While coursing continued until 1964, the late Allen Taylor told Tim Haslett he remembered accompanying his father to the first track or Speed Course racing meeting held at Canterbury Park in 1936. There the Bendigo - Eaglehawk Speed Coursing Club conducted both flat and hurdle racing behind the mechanical lure on a 300-yard circular turf surface. The first meeting was held on 3rd October 1936. People took to this new Saturday racing very keenly and two special trams, packed with at least 100 patrons, travelled to the track from the fountain which is still located in the centre of the city.



Len Griffin Snr was a bookie at the meeting. Forty years later, he would field at the new Lords Raceway. Greyhound racing had great economic importance in the 1930's and 1940's. The late Alan Abbot told author Tim Haslett how he remembered going to Eaglehawk to work with his dad who was a penciller.

For this Alan got £1 (\$47) and dad got £2 (\$94) at a time when the average weekly wage was £3/10 shillings (\$200). Ray Wallace recalls that there was strong opposition to Plumpton coursing and gambling generally from the Churches. But when one of the prominent church leaders was offered a job as an Assistant Judge for £1 per meeting, good money in the Depression, the group appeared to take a more liberal line.



As Canterbury Park was also the home of the football club, officials and kids had to run wire mesh around the fence line to convert from football to greyhounds. A canvas sheet was run across the track to catch the greyhounds at the end of the race. During the cricket season, play would stop for the running of a race with players sitting on the ground to watch the race. When the race was over, cricket restarted. Working around the other sporting codes was not the only difficulty. On foggy nights, a torch was attached to the mechanical hare so the lure driver could tell where it was for many years, the greyhound industry in Victoria fought to have proprietary clubs, which were privately owned by shareholders with a strong profit motive, replaced by non-proprietary clubs. The non-proprietary clubs would effectively be government owned, controlled by a local board of directors and returning profits to the people who bred, owned, trained and raced greyhounds.

This fight was conducted by GOTBA stalwarts Dave Heneberry, Sil Doyle and Allen Taylor all of whom hailed from Bendigo. After a long GOTBA and NCA campaign, legislation was introduced banning proprietary racing. With the advent of non-proprietary racing, new Clubs were formed as non-proprietary companies operating under Constitutions and Articles of Association.

This was a mixed blessing for the Bendigo Coursing Association (BCA) which was founded in 1956 but with no capital to buy or build a track and before the days when GRCB grants for funding were available.

During this time, no greyhound racing was conducted in Bendigo for 18 months.



A public meeting of interested greyhound people raised debentures worth £7,500 (\$196,000) to commence building a track at Eaglehawk. Early progress was slow but with this small amount of money and hundreds of hours of voluntary labour, the BCA were able to construct the rail, build the light poles from used piping, bring in the sand, build a driving tower and install a

second hand Ford VS lure motor. Unfortunately, the electrical contractor had to be paid £7000 (\$183,000) to fit the electrical equipment.

Because of the long layoff, greyhounds in the district had fallen away. Not deterred, the Committee decide to promote breeding by leasing a champion greyhound **Fine Earl** from NSW. **Fine Earl** was to stand at stud at a very attractive fee. The idea was a great success and assisted the number of greyhounds bred in the district. The opening night on March 2nd, 1957 had 20 bookmakers in attendance. By the time of the last meeting at Eaglehawk was run on Saturday Dec 2nd, 1982, prize money had risen to \$1050 (\$24,001).

Racing continued at Eaglehawk until the government suggested multiple use of the trotting complex at Lords Raceway to take in greyhound racing at Junortoun.

The shift to Lords Raceway took place in 1972. By now money was available from the TAB Development Fund and the Control Board funded the brand-new track, kennels, office, betting ring, grandstand, spray irrigation system and new boxes. By the time the track was ready to be opened, the Greyhound Development Board had invested \$800,000 (\$1.8m) in the complex.

However, funding from State bodies did not mean the end of volunteer's work. Typical of the legion of volunteers supporting clubs in regional areas, Mr Charlie Summerhayes, who was well into his 70s, came across from his home three or four times a day to water the grass in front of the new grandstand.



Allen Taylor remembered a fierce debate with the Development Board over the shape of the new track. The locals wanted a single turn, horseshoe for the 430m races with double turn for the rare 700m races. The Development Board wanted a four-turn track similar to Sandown. Eventually, the locals prevailed, and the single turn 430m track was built.

This was a significant change from the race distances at Eaglehawk where the races had been held over 355m, 528m and 726m. Members of the GOTBA believed that greyhounds who struggled to finish the 355yards at Eaglehawk would be out of business on the new 430m track. One major advantage of the new track configuration was that it eliminated the dash for the first turn

on the 528m Eaglehawk track where many fancied greyhounds were knocked out or interfered with. This had become so common that the turn was known as "bookmakers" corner.

At opening night of the Lords Raceway track, Mr Jim Bourke, a long-serving President of the Club was reported in the Bendigo Advertiser as describing the opening as "a milestone in the history of Bendigo and sport in general".

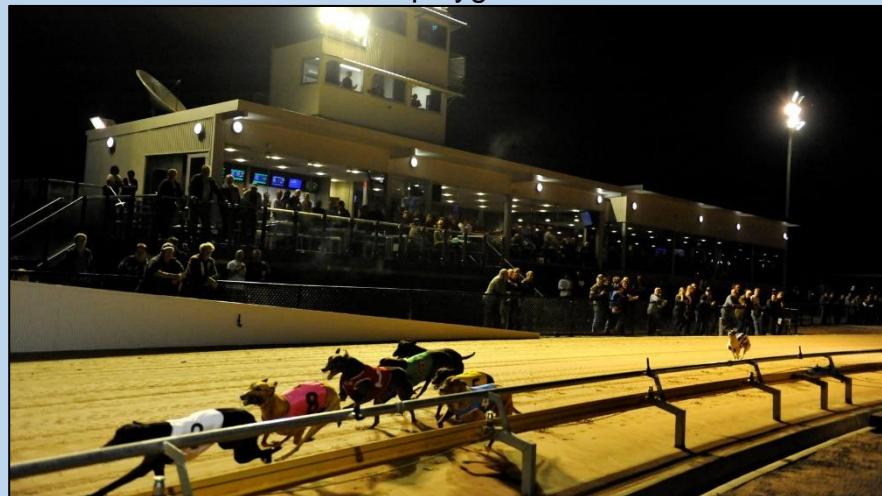
The opening featured an innovative lure designed by Noel Bramich. The Bramich lure was also used at Sandown, Warrnambool, and Warragul at the time and was driven by two electric motors rather than being dragged by the more traditional

cable system. The lure also activated a switch that opened the boxes thus eliminating human error.

Unfortunately, the new lure system did not operate well in very cold weather and was eventually replaced by the traditional system.

Over the years, funds from the Development Board and Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) have brought many changes to Bendigo. The electronic trip start replaced hand starts and electrical timing and a new digital semaphore board replaced the old stopwatches and manually operated result boards. New starting boxes covered by roofing and the building of the new fully glassed, air-conditioned grandstand with tote facilities, live TV coverage and replays of all races added to the comfort of patrons.

In all of this neither greyhounds nor children were forgotten. The new kennels holding 100 greyhounds was fitted with evaporative air-conditioning and Alan designed and constructed a children's playground.



The club has enjoyed long and loyal support from members like Alan Abbot, Lex Campbell, Allen Taylor, Jan Janssen, Barry Hiscock and Jack Wardell who, between them, had a total of over 150 years of service on the Bendigo Greyhound Racing Association Committee. Allen Abbot, Allen Taylor and Lex Janssen were deeply involved in the shift to Lords and Lex served as President from 1989 to 1996.

The Hiscock name is one synonymous with the club Barry is a former President along with his wife Pauline rarely if ever miss a Bendigo meeting. A current committee man he has served the club in all aspects of the sport for over 40 years and has fond memories of the Eaglehawk days. Their son Corey started driving the Lure when 14 years of age and went on to become Track Curator learning his craft from his mentor the great Ron Izon. Corey is currently the Track Curator for the Meadows a job he has held since the MGRA moved there in 2000.

Jan Janssen's involvement dated back to the Eaglehawk days where he was lure driver and saw the change from cable lure to the Bramich lure and then to the modern motorised lure.

On the 17th August 1998, Allen Taylor's long service to the Bendigo Club was recognised by the opening of the A J Taylor Stand at Lords Raceway by the Mayor of Greater City of Bendigo.

In the next decade, Noel Massina took over as President and Bendigo, like many Clubs has changed its racing timeslot to fit with SKY Channel broadcasting requirements. The switch to twilight racing has meant that crowds have diminished. However, the revenue from off-course turnover has seen weekly prize money increase from approximately \$7,000 per night to \$25,000 per night.

While Allen Taylor passed away in 2006, he would be proud of the continuing progress at Bendigo.



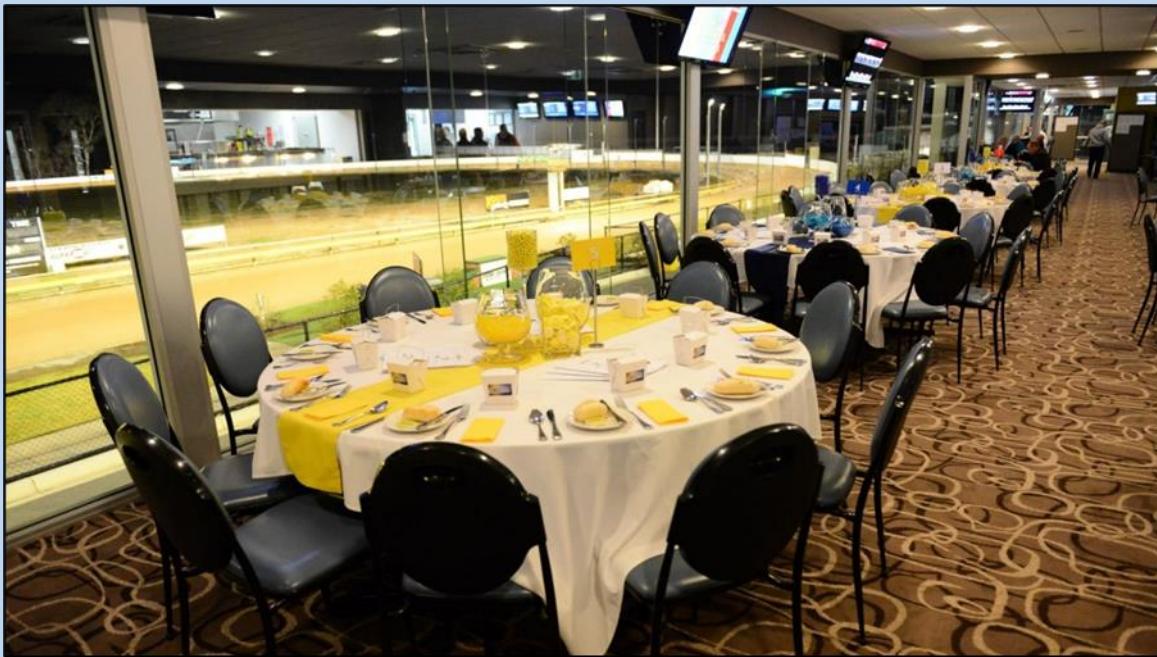
Trailing and conditioning facilities via straight hand slipping tracks have been provided for local use. The Club has for many years has conducted its Gold Rush Carnival held during Easter where five days of racing included the Bendigo Cup which has now moved to July.

While catering for all classes of greyhounds, the Carnival had been timed for the tourists visiting Bendigo for the Chinese festival. Bendigo was also given the privilege of running The Inaugural Great Chase final worth \$50,000. In 2006, a new single tier kennel block and administration complex was opened. It has also been involved in raising money for the building of the museum for the Bendigo Chinese Association where a plaque exists to represent the contribution and in the 2004-05, Local Drought Relief program.

2008 saw the BGRA celebrate its 30th anniversary at the Lord's Raceway.

2012 saw the Club launch a new chapter in its decorated history when it unveiled a state-of-the-art redevelopment with a price tag of \$4.2 million. The redevelopment included a new racetrack, racing over 425, 500 and 660m, and brand-new facilities included a function room, bistro, bar and TAB facilities all under the one roof, which is available for weddings, engagements, birthdays, anniversaries, conferences, seminars and other corporate events. The facilities bringing the Bendigo track into the 21st century and allowing it to compete on a level playing field with all the other tracks in Victoria, if not Australia.

The BGRA stages over 100 race meetings each year, including the Bendigo Cup as its flagship Group 2 event, and also hosts the annual 2012 Ready 2 Race event, where people can watch greyhounds going through their paces before they are auctioned.



The Bendigo Greyhound Racing Association is committed to managing its operations with the community in mind. It sponsors local sports teams, hosts events to support good causes and offers community organisations access to its facilities for fundraisers and charity days.

Greyhound racing generates around 120 direct jobs, and more indirectly, and contributes around \$10 million annually to the Bendigo region.

This annual event raises money for community groups that work with the aged and disabled and gives their clients a great day out at the races. Since 2003 the Bendigo Great Chase Community Days have donated around \$20,000 to local community groups.

Club Presidents

J. P. Bourke 1956 – 1972, R. Rogers 1971 – 1972, J.P. Bourke 1972 – 1983,

B.I. Hiscock 1983 – 1989, G A Campbell 1989 – 1993, W. Robertson 1996 - 1997

W. Thompson 1997 – 1998, N. Massina 1998 – 2010, R. Douglas 2013 - present.

Listed below is the Bendigo Cup honour roll. The club first raced at the Eaglehawk circuit just out of Bendigo in the 50's. The Cup was run over 400 yards, but for a few years in the 70's saw it go over 528 metres. When the club moved to Lords Raceway in 1988 the race was conducted over the current sprint distance of 430 metres every year except 2001 when it was run over the middle distance of 545 metres. A number of top horse-shoe dogs have won the cup over the many years it has been the club's flagship event. This year's winner was the third on the new circuit at Lords Raceway over the popular distance of 425 metres.

1957 **Cantee**, 1958 **Taranya**, 1959 **Slippermee**, 1960 **Eager Flight**, 1961 **Sweet Mandy**, 1962 **Sweet Mandy**, 1963 **Shan's Jewel**, 1964 **Unknown**, 1965 **Chief Anama**, 1966 **Unknown**, 1967 **Princess Kerry**, 1968 **Rebelaire**, 1969 **Unknown**, 1970 **Andrew Takiri**, 1971 **Melbourne View**, 1972 **Leicester Edie**, 1973 **Borough Cheer**, 1974 **Proper Duke**, 1975 **Sidanna**, 1976 **Sue Silin**, 1977 **Worooa Jack**, 1978 **Fabey Forbes**, 1979 **"Not Held"**, 1980 **Slick O'Leary**, 1981 **Official**, 1982 **Welcome Jag**, 1983 **Meatworker**, 1984 **Bronze Wing**, 1985 **Newstone Flyer**, 1986 **Stamp Of Learod**, 1987 **Buka Sunset**, 1988 **Naphlio**, 1989 **Mets Man**, 1990 **Hard Rain**, 1991 **He's Jake**, 1992 **Belmont**, 1993 **Tivoli Man**, 1994 **Thorgil Tex**, 1995 **"Not Held"**, 1996 **True Type**, 1997 **Sarah's Deano**, 1998 **Lansley Bale**, 1999 **Tom's Legacy**, 2000 **Whitten's Legend**, 2001 **Renzo Bale**, 2002 **Hey Brother**, 2003 **Puzzle Prize**, 2004 **Brumby Lad**, 2005 **Smack Wallop**, 2006 **Dragway Flex**, 2007 **Airbourne Bale**, 2008 **El Galo**, 2009 **Taipan Bale**, 2010 **Latifi Jiam**, 2011 **Enry Walt**, 2012 **Peggy May**, 2013 **Ronan Izmir**, 2014 **Paw Licking (1) Warrior King (2)**, 2015 **Fernando Bale**, 2016 **Aston Bolero**, 2017 **Landmark**, 2018 **Vanderworp**, 2019 **Crimson Vixen**, 2020 **Yozo Bale**.

Fun Facts:

Without much doubt the best dog to race from the Bendigo area is the 1986 Australian Cup winner Eaglehawk Star. Bred raced and trained by Bendigo stalwarts Ron & Joan Gilchrist. The Brindle speedster known as the "Eaglehawk Express" had 33 starts for 23 wins and six placings winning over \$80,000 in prizemoney. He ran second behind Rustic Venture in the 1984 Melbourne Cup final, made an Adelaide Cup and Maturity final. He ran second in a National Sprint at Harold Park, something beaten behind Busy Vintage. Eaglehawk Star recorded fast time at every track he raced at. He set a track record for both distances at Shepparton over 340 and 440 in consecutive weeks. At stud he served 298 bitches over a nine-year period producing Ginger, Casino Tom, Dashing Eagle, Iceni Princess, Farena Star, Ezard, Falcon's Nest, My Mate Teddy and many more. Frightful Flash who after being exported to Ireland rewrote the record books in a stunning stud career, he was Irish Stud Dog of the Year 1997-1999.

When remembering different things from different tracks the most famous maiden winner often comes up. In Bendigo's case their most famous is surely Hall of Famer Highly Blessed. Now they have had a few topliners win their maiden at Bendigo. Eaglehawk Star for one and another Australian Cup winner Franklin Deano. Barry Hiscock also informed me the 1973 Australian Cup winner Half Your Luck won his maiden at the old Eaglehawk track after coursing in the afternoon at Tatura. I know plenty about the maiden won by the mighty Highly Blessed because I ran second to her two weeks in a row. Firstly, in a semi-final of the maiden series with Camona Black then in the final with his sister Camona Lady. In fact, in the semi's Camona Lady ran best of the night 25.12. Highly Blessed 25.20. The final of the Southern Cross Network Maiden Thousand was Monday the 16th of October 1989. Over 430

metres my two dogs had boxes one and two and the champ was in three. Camona Lady led for most of the way with her brother in second place both to be run down late by Highly Blessed in 24.85 winning by three and half lengths. She went on to become a superstar, one of the best of all time.