

THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL OVAL TRACK RACING ASSOCIATION

by David Rosenstock (thru '83) & William J. Lewis

NOTRA Oval Racing is now a regular and important part of the racing Calendar, but this is a recent development. Louis Pegram, in his 1976 book *The Complete Whippet* tells us that there was Whippet racing on oval tracks in Maryland in the late 1930's and early 1940's with betting. The races were at various distances from 165 to 400 yards, and, interestingly, at 385 yards (350 meters). The latter distance is the most popular distance for oval racing today. From the late 1940's through 1974 there was no organized oval racing in the US for breeds other than Greyhounds. In 1970, a few Whippet owners, unfamiliar with the Maryland activities, but willing to experiment, raced their dogs at the Redlands, California Greyhound training track at a distance of about 440 yards. A few Whippets were run on the 500 yard triangular shaped Saluki Club lure-chase course. It was very clear that the little Whippet racers which burn up the 200 yard straights at National Point Races (NPRs) were capable of putting on terrific races at much longer distances. These races were particularly exciting to the spectators. In the early 1970's there were occasional private races, stakes races, and exhibitions for Whippets on Greyhound training tracks. One Greyhound club set up a 350 yard drag-lure track at the Orange County Fair in California. The Whippets ran it quite well, but the track design was not completely successful. There were some experiments with a 200 yard "U" shaped drag-lure track, again the track design was only partially successful. Then lure coursing appeared, and with it eventually came improvements in pulley and lure machine designs. Information came in from Europe on the racing of sighthounds on drag-lure oval tracks. Mr. Hugenholz of the Netherlands generously supplied (to David Rosenstock) track designs and information on the European experiences with these designs.

Consideration began on how to organize oval racing and what its effects would be. Oval racing would not be competitive with National Point Racing (NPR). NPR is 200 yard straightaway racing which is an excellent test of explosive speed. Oval Racing would be complementary to the NPRs, providing added and different kinds of racing opportunities. This would result in the recognition of the ability of additional worthy racers. It was expected that Oval Racing would be a "breed improvement" program, pointing the way to improving the toughness, endurance, and versatility of the breeds because of the great emphasis on these qualities needed by quality Oval racers. Oval Racing should help introduce improvements in conditioning of the racers because the longer distances of the races and the likelihood of "double-header" NPR and Oval meets would need racers at high levels of fitness to compete successfully. It was also felt that there might be a desirable reduction in correlation of racing ability with size in Whippets compared to straight track racing.

In 1975 the time appeared right to attempt to organize amateur oval racing. Dave Rosenstock prepared a preliminary set of racing rules for a National Oval Track Racing Association (NOTRA) using Greyhound rail-lure tracks and European style drag-lure tracks. On August 3, 1975 and December 6, 1975, the first two meets under NOTRA Rules were hosted by the adventuresome Northern California Whippet Club on a rail-lure track

in Turlock, California. They were very successful meets, with 31 starters at the first meet and 22 starters at the second. They generated much enthusiasm among the Whippet owners. Both meets were won by 5 year old Epinard Shelby of WyndSOR, ARM, owned by Jean and Vince Balint. He was a fine NPR racer who showed himself to be equally at home racing on a rail-lure track at yards.

At that time another group in California(POT) began oval racing with Whippets. NOTRA plans and rules were set aside. The POT inside lure continuous loop design was not entirely successful and, after a few meets, this group ceased operations. NOTRA was then reactivated, and the Northern California Whippet Club set up a 350 meter drag-lure track at Fairfield, California. On September 3, 1978, a very successful meet was run off. The winner among 34 starters was David Gill's Regalstock Wistful Alaine. This under 20" bitch was only moderately successful at NPR racing, but moved up among the best when she took to the drag-lure oval track. In 1979, five meets appeared on the racing Calendar, the first four to be run on the 350 meter drag-lure track and the last to take place on a rail-lure track in Modesto, California at a distance of 330 yards. A second group, the Northern California Whippet Fanciers Association planned to host two of the meets. At the first meet of the year, hosted by the Fanciers, Regalstock Wistful Alaine again was victorious over 21 starters. The second and third meets of the year saw the emergence of a new winner in Regalstock Demon Red Rum, ARM owned by David Gill. This Whippet exhibited a new kind of running style, well back for the first half of the race followed by a powerful drive to the finish line. In the second of Red Rum's wins he took a photo finish over Amberwood Regalstock Cavallo, ARM. The final drag-lure meet of the year was won by Jean Balint's speedster, Volant Trilby of WyndSOR, ARM in an exciting duel with CH Silverado Sue of Sea Aire, ARM. At the rail-lure meet, Darryl and Betty Troxel's Darbe's Liberty Belle Windward, ARM defeated 23 starters.

For 1980, six 350 meter drag-lure meets were scheduled. At the first meet, a new star emerged, Joe and Joni Cochran's Flyaway Spirit of Cachet (Blazer). He won the first three meets of the year, winning over 31, 28 and 43 starters, and beating back into second place each time, Regalstock Amberwood Voodoo, ARM. These wins earned Blazer the first ever Oval Racing Championship (ORC). People had begun to think it was impossible to win an ORC, but Blazer showed how easy it could be. Then at the 4th meet of the year, Blazer suffered his first defeat. His sister Flyaway Delisa's Delight (Corky), owned by Sue Morris, beat him back into 2nd place in a field of 22. To show it was not a fluke, she did it again at the next meet in a field of 43 starters. Blazer finally turned the tables in the last meet of the year, beating Corky back into 2nd among 23 starters. The oval races had been dominated in 1980 by the Blazer and Corky brother-sister team.

1981 was the year that NOTRA Oval Racing entered a period of sharp growth. Six new Host Clubs decided to offer oval races. The Calendar showed 13 meets, including a rail-lure meet, hosted by eight regional clubs. The year started with a meet hosted by the Southern California Whippet Association at Brea, California. This was the first meet to be held outside of Northern California. Corky defeated a field of 40. With that win she became the second ORC. She ended up winning 7 meets in 1981, including the first 220 meter race, 5 meets at 350 meters and the 330 yard rail-lure event. Blazer won 3 meets and was second

to Corky 4 times. The first meet to be held outside the USA was hosted by the Vancouver Island Whippet Association which held a meet on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada. This 23 starter meet was won by the diminutive Loughren's Taffy owned by Harrison and Dummerton. Taffy was not spectacular at NPR's but moved up sharply when put on the drag-lure oval. She appeared at the July 4th meet in Fairfield, California and cameaway with a second to Blazer among 46 starters.

1989 saw a change in the requirements for a Whippet Oval Racing Championship as points required grew from 12 to 15, while 12 remained as the goal for Minor Breeds though none had as yet attained an ORC. There were 48 Whippet, 4 Greyhound and 1 Ibizan Hound Meets this year, all down slightly from the number the year before. Kentfields Kalypso needed the final month of the year to pick up the two National Points to edge out Pogo, 32 to 30 for the National Championship.

NOTRA's Fifteenth Year, 1990, would be another year of expansion as the Great Basin to Rocky Mountains would see the addition of the Utah Sighthound Racing and Coursing Club, the Rocky Mountain Sporting Whippets of Colorado and the Las Vegas Whippet Club (later renamed to Southern Nevada Sighthound Association) to the NOTRA schedule. The Southern states were represented by the addition of the Hampton Roads Whippet Club and the Richmond Area Coursing Enthusiasts, both of Virginia. The last California Whippet Derby would be held in Santa Barbara, California and was won by Chimago of WyndSOR, RCH, ORC, FCH owned by Frank and Mary Wilson of California. The Derby would yield to plans for a first NOTRA "Nationals" for 1991. An all time high of 64 Whippet Meets was held this year and Pogo left no room for error as he amassed a final 22 point lead to win the National Championship with 12 Meet wins and 44 National Points.

1991 would be David Rosenstock's last year as NOTRA National Director as he would resign due to expanding business activities. And NOTRA continued to grow and the hunt for a National Championship would be a spectacular between two fine bitches, one from the East Coast, Lyth Mystique, owned by Jennifer Miller and Chris Williams of Pennsylvania and the other from the West, Miklby of WyndSOR, owned by Jean and Vince Balint of California. Mystery would grab the title with 41.5 National Points to Mik's 37. Unfortunately, the two never met head to head. The First NOTRA National was held in conjunction with the First NAWRA National, sponsored by the Whippet Clubs of Northern California and held in Suisun, California on June 30, 1991. Sixty four starters would go out on a scorching hot day for three programs of ovaling on a 350 continuous loop that would see Ringdove Quantock, "Rufous" owned by Tony and Helena James of Cobble Hill, BC, Canada take the day with a 3 point edge over local favorite, Cari On Pride O'WyndSOR, owned by Lee and Bonnie Charron of Hayward, California. This year would also go down as the year a Minor Breed finally attained an Oval Racing Championship: East Coast Borzoi racer, Phoenix Intent Fezzik, owned by Sam and Susan Banks, pulled off the fantastic feat and two other East Coast Borzoi got within 1 and 2 points of their titles, Ember and Ishtar respectively, poised to accomplish theirs in the following year.

On January 1, 1992, at David Rosenstock's request, his National Race Director duties were assumed on an "interim" basis by Jean Balint, and his Registrar-Recorder responsibilities

were assumed by Mitch Cipriano. He called for them to send out to the Member Clubs a proposed Articles and By Laws and a request for nominations for candidates to the National Offices for an election that would be effective July 1, 1992. Jean Balint moved forward and with Mr. Rosenstock's blessing, formalized the position of NOTRA National Director-Minor Breeds to be filled by volunteer, Minor Breeds Secretary, Sam Banks, and as the nominating process approached, called for an additional office to be created, that of Secretary-Treasurer. By the end of Jean Balint's interim tenure, Woody Rider, had accomplished a complete update of the NOTRA Rule Book. The elections produced Jack Lewis as National Race Director, Mitch Cipriano as Registrar-Recorder and Woody Rider as Secretary-Treasurer. They would fill the remainder of what would be ongoing two year terms. In the midst of all the administrative changes lots of hot racing was going on with the highlights including the ascendancy of Wheatland Orange Crush, "Zorro" as a National Contender and the Second NOTRA Nationals to be held in British Columbia, Canada. "BC National 92" also was held in conjunction with the NAWRA Nationals and the event was spectacular as the Host Clubs, British Columbia Whippet Racing Club and Vancouver Island Whippet Association put on a terrific time. The 350 Meter, 56 entry, drag-lure meet was won by Sailaway Tomaso Pantera, RCH, ORC owned by Barry and Lorna Leinbach of British Columbia. And Zorro, owned by Cheri and Ron Boutelle of Missouri, would win the National Championship with an awesome tally of 51 National Points after a season that saw an all time high of 77 Meets. New clubs on the scene were the Garden State Sighthound Assn. of New Jersey, the Show Me Whippet Club of Missouri, the District Area Sighthounds of Maryland and the Pennsylvania Area Whippet Society. The end of the year saw the first ballot process for Rule Book Changes and the most noteworthy of these were the change to the Minor Breed Scoring process that would allow these hounds to attain an ORC before old age preempted them, and the formalizing of the Supreme Oval Racing Champion certification, and the grandfathering in of all past NOTRA greats who met the criterion.

Zorro would continue his crusade throughout the Mid West in 1993 but was challenged by an East Coast speedster, Barje's Blitzen Benz, owned by Geoff Opresnick, for Number 1 in the National Standings. Their duel would go into the final month of the year as Zorro went to the East Coast with a 53 to 50 point lead and back to back oval meets awaiting. Zorro came away with 4 more points and the diminutive Blitz was blanked, as they finished 1 & 2 respectively in the National Standings. But Blitz had his weekend in October as the first NOTRA Nationals were held East of the Rockies, in Hamilton, Ohio. A Double-header Oval weekend sponsored by the Bluegrass Whippet Club and the Tri State Whippet Association, entries came in from all over the country. The first day was a 220 and Blitz blew the boxes in 3 of the 4 heats to take the day with Taters McKinsey of Windy Glen, owned by Fern and Chuck White of Wyoming taking second. The second day was a 350 and Sharon Canales' hot Velvet Hammer Mirage from Oregon showed the way home with 18.5 points followed by Zorro and Blitz, each with 15 points. Blitz' efforts earned him the top total points for the weekend for the overall Top Trophy. A fantastic meet weekend! Another special event was the NOTRA Western Whippet Speciality held in conjunction with the NAWRA Nationals, sponsored by the Utah Sighthound Racing and Coursing Club in Riverton, Utah. This meet saw Supreme Oval Racing Champion, Ringdove Hot Pursuit, owned by Tony and Helena James of British Columbia, bring home the win over 58 entries followed by Velvet Hammer Mirage. A great racing season that produced 89 Meets and more new clubs: the Greyhound

Club of Canada, Tally Ho Greyhound Club, Northern California; Whippet at Goldendale, Washington and at the end of the year, the Windy Glen Racing Association came aboard in Anderson, California with a Thanksgiving Weekend meet. The year end Ballot process for NOTRA Rule changes produced one change that would create a stir in '94, a change to the scoring system! Jack Lewis, Sam Banks and Woody Rider were all reelected to a new two year term and Sue Weilbacher was elected to replace Mitch Cipriano who resigned the position of Registrar-Recorder effective the end of the '93 season.

1994 proved to be another fantastic racing season that saw events go to 91 for Whippets and 40 meets in which the "Minor" Breeds participated! Two new clubs joined the association, the Whippet Racing Activities Group of Washington and the Reata Whippet Racing Group of Utah. Not long after the start of the season, a newcomer went to the top of the charts and would remain there all season long, Ringdove Kentfield, co-owned by Tony and Helena James and Merril and David Woolf. Zorro made a charge before the middle of the season but a second injury removed him from the scene by August. Another challenge came on in Windy Glen's Dusty Roads owned by Mitch and Christine Cipriano of California. As of August 21, Dusty had broken into the Top Ten. This year the NOTRA Nationals were an "All Breed" Nationals for the first time and the event was held at the Multnomah Greyhound Park training track, "The Rail", in Fairview, Oregon. Held in conjunction with the NAWRA Nationals, the oval National was co-hosted by the Washington Whippet Racing Club and the Greyhound Club of Canada. The entry was a record breaking 93 Whippets, 5 Afghans, 18 Greyhounds and 1 each Irish Wolfhound, Scottish Deerhound, Borzoi and Saluki. Dusty would take the event for his fifth meet win in a row while Nike won the Afghan event, Pride over all the Greyhounds. Dusty would go on to win 9 meets to include the last Meet of the year in Southern California to tie Ringdove Kentfield for the National Championship. The new scoring system was in effect all year and for the first half of the season the controversy roared on with pro & con voices equally loud. The year end ballot process quieted the roar with a return to the traditional scoring system. Also noteworthy in the ballot process was the addition of the rare desert breed, Sloughi to the list of eligible sighthounds. Also the '92 Ballot change to the Minor Breed point requirements for a championship finally bore fruit as the number of Minor Breed ORC's more than doubled to 7 with 4 Greyhounds, 2 Borzoi and 1 Ibizan Hound winning their championships! Announced with the mailing of the Ballot was that the WASIT, NTWC, SHOW-ME and GSLWC would be the Co-Hosts for the Fifth (and Second All Breed) NOTRA Nationals to be held on the Koch property in Celina, Texas in May 1995. Back to back Ovals of 350 Meters and 300 Yards on a drag-lure are scheduled for this sure to be exciting weekend.

1995 celebrates the 20th Anniversary of NOTRA! Could David Rosenstock ever have envisioned the great success his dream would become? NOTRA continues to grow and is healthier than ever with more Clubs, more Meets, more Entries and more Sighthound Breeds than ever participating. Long live the National Oval Track Racing Association!

NOTES: The history of NOTRA through 1983 is from the 1983 Yearbook of Oval Racing written by David Rosenstock. The history was abridged slightly dropping a couple

of paragraphs that didn't seem relevant over time, otherwise his text is "as written" by him. I used his "Racing Report" (later edited by Kim Otero) and Chris Reynold's "Whippet Racing Monthly" for the gaps in my personal knowledge and information between the years 1984-1991. Wm J Lewis