



# Last Stop for U.S. Greyhounds

by *Jeff White*

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In the many articles about the end of greyhound racing in Florida, it's common to see the number of remaining states that have live dog racing listed as five: Iowa, West Virginia, Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama. But these articles usually overlook a sixth racing state: Mexico.

While Mexico is not a U.S. state, it nevertheless has a greyhound racetrack that is fully integrated into the racing industry of its northern neighbour. The dogs are bred, registered, trained, and mostly owned in the U.S. They can be transferred easily between the American-based tracks and the Agua Caliente Racetrack in the city of Tijuana, just inside the Mexican border, near the California city of San Diego.

The Agua Caliente Racetrack, the last operating dog track in Mexico, has staged greyhound races since it opened in May, 1947, although straight-track match races had been held for twenty years before then. Like all the U.S. tracks, it is a member of the American Greyhound Track Operators Association.

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A Grey2K USA Board member named Charmaine Settle visited the Caliente track in 2015. She described the kennels as “run down and neglected”. They were a “shantytown” of crumbling and dilapidated buildings without windows or air conditioning. Other rescuers who have been there say the kennels stink of urine and feces. Ten years ago they housed a thousand greyhounds; today fewer than 400 live there. Grey2K research director Matt Read said that records showed the dogs were commonly raced on only one or two days’ rest, thereby increasing their risk of injury and disease. Caliente runs a gruelling schedule, with race meetings every day of the week. In 2014 the track held almost 5,000 races. For comparison, all the racetracks in New South Wales put together held slightly more than 13,000 races in the 2013-14 year.



Some readers will recall the 2016 story of a two-year-old greyhound who was forced to run her last six races at Caliente while still recovering from minor injuries. In her last race she fractured both hind legs. This would normally have led to her being euthanized, but rescuers from the Greyhound Adoption Center (GAC) in El Cajon, California, got to Tijuana in time to transport her back to their premises and provide the surgery she needed on her legs. Nicknamed “Asha”, the young dark brindle featured in TV and print media accounts, sporting bright red and white striped casts on her hind legs.



Greyhound Asha in late December 2016 with her broken legs in casts. (Photo courtesy of Francie Murphy).

Asha was lucky. Animal welfare is a low priority at Caliente. Many of their greyhounds, as elsewhere, face an uncertain fate when they are no longer wanted. The fact is that Caliente is known as the “last stop” on the American greyhound racing circuit — the place where older or slower dogs are sent from north of the border to squeeze as much money out of them as possible before they are “retired” or killed, on the instructions of their U.S. owners.



There is no organized greyhound adoption in Mexico, but rescue groups in California, such as GAC, Fast Friends Greyhound Adoption, and Operation Greyhound, transport unwanted dogs directly from Tijuana to be adopted in the U.S. Like Asha, many of these rescued

greyhounds are in poor shape, dirty and underfed, with injuries, parasites, gum disease, and other afflictions characteristic of dogs from some of the worst racetracks in the world.



While the effects of the Florida dog racing ban are yet to be fully felt, already breeding numbers are down, which is starting to create dog shortages at the remaining U.S. tracks. As the industry inevitably continues to shrink, Agua Caliente will need to reckon with its own eventual demise. It’s difficult to see how it could carry on without simulcast TV revenue and the ongoing support of the U.S. greyhound industry.



Contact info for the Greyhound Adoption Center: <https://houndsavers.org/contact-us/>