

## Belle Vue

The new sport of greyhound racing began at Belle Vue in Manchester back in 1926. The newly formed GRA had chosen Manchester as the place to situate their new stadium designed to host the oval form of racing previously only seen in the United States. The reason for Manchester as the choice was the city's existing sporting and gambling links and therefore close to the city centre; the consortium erected the first custom-built greyhound stadium and called it Belle Vue.

The name of the stadium came from the nearby Belle Vue Zoological Gardens that had been built in 1836 and the land on which the stadium was to be built was leased to the GRA. Construction started in 1926 at a cost of £22,000 converting an area of farmland known as Higher Catsknowl and Lower Catsknowl. The stadium would often be referred to as the zoo in years to come.

On 24<sup>th</sup> July 1926 the very first race around an oval track in Britain was held attracting a curious crowd of 1,700 people. Six races with seven dogs in each race were held on that first night with the first ever winner being a red greyhound called Mistley over a distance of 440 yards (fifty years later a stand would be named after Mistley). Running the quarter-mile flat course in 25 seconds, Mistley romped home eight lengths clear of the field at odds of 6-1.

The first Director of racing was Major-General T Anderson and the first Racing Manager was L.V.Browne. Trainers included Tom Fear, Bill Brinkley & Jack Harvey.

After the end of that first meeting, the GRA were horrified to find they had made a loss of £50 on the night and must have had a week of sleepless nights wondering if they had made the right decision. As it turned out they clearly had made a good decision because 16,000 turned up the following week. From that first meeting to the day the GRA closed for the winter break just three months later on 29 October, more than 11,000 racegoers had paid to watch every one of the 37 meetings and 221 races. The consortium repaid a £10,000 bank loan and shares in the new company rose from their initial value of one shilling to £37-10-00 (the equivalent of £37.50 for an outlay of 5p).

Going to the dogs became a national pastime and the GRA became a substantial company.

<p><b>GREYHOUND</b> <b>Racing Association Ltd.</b> RELLE VUE, MANCHESTER</p> <hr/> <p><b>OPENING</b> <b>MEETING</b> JULY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 1926 At 7-30 p.m.</p> <hr/> <p><b>SIX RACES</b> Prize for Each Event—First £10; Second £5.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Judges:</i> Mr. O. A. CRITCHLEY, Major L. LYNE DIXSON, Mr. L. O. BROWN. <i>Timekeeper:</i> Mr. E. WILKINSON. <i>Paddock Steward and Starter:</i> Mr. W. SMITH. <i>Racing Secretary:</i> Mr. MURRAY WILSON.</p> <hr/> <p> The name of any dog unable to compete in a race will be shown on the blackboard in each enclosure. </p>
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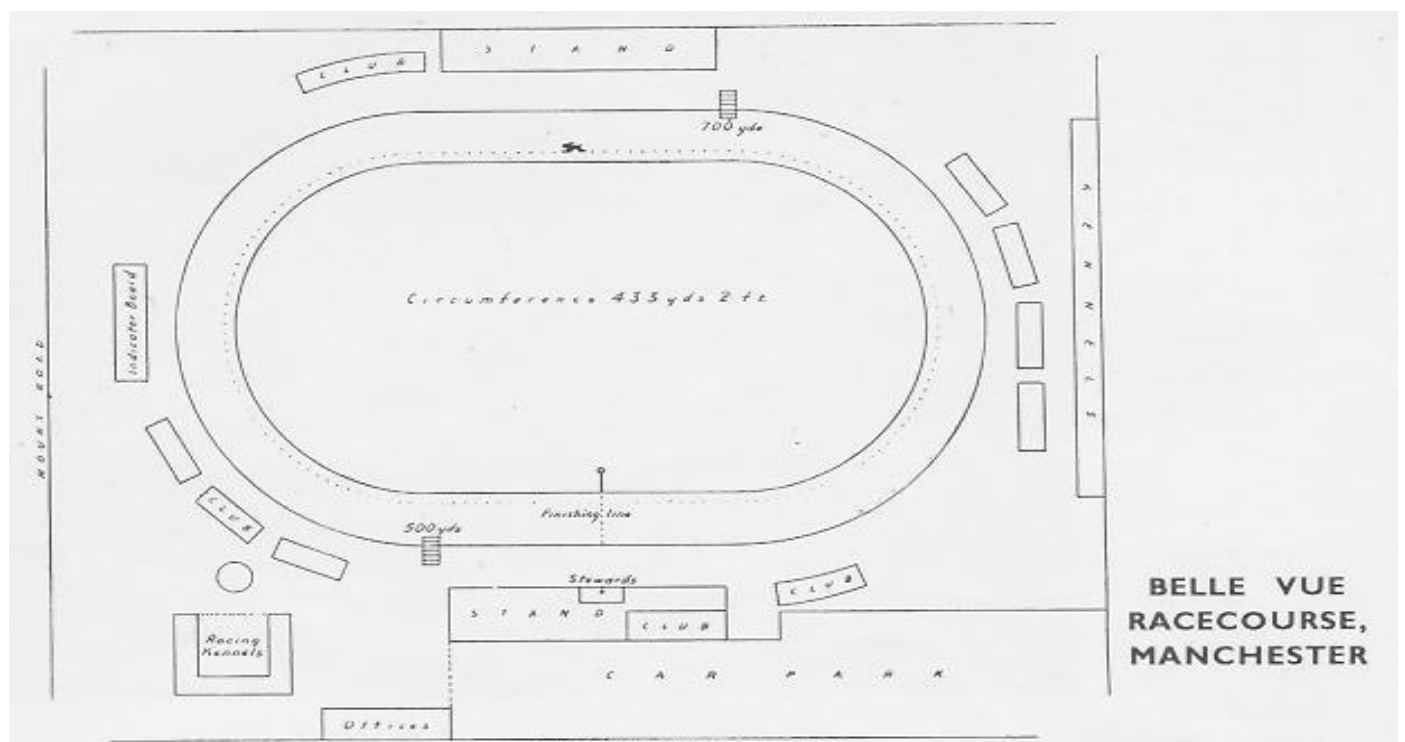
When racing resumed at Belle Vue after the winter break the attendances steadily grew and by June 1927 the stadium was attracting almost 70,000 visitors a week. The phenomenal success resulted in an almost instant and dramatic mass build of greyhound stadiums. One early supplier of greyhounds to Belle Vue was Sidney Orton, a Norfolk farmer who sold 17 greyhounds to Belle Vue for £170 in 1927. Orton would eventually turn his attention to training them at Burhill kennels for Wimbledon stadium.

It was also in 1927 that the GRA introduced the Derby and the Champion Hurdle (later to be named the Grand National) for hurdlers and the Oaks for bitches (both at White City), these races were of course named after the big horse races. Belle Vue introduced the Northern Flat as their first major event. Bonzo handled by Belle Vue trainer Harry Buck is listed as winner of the first Grand National (Champion Hurdle), the culmination of a competition organised by the GRA on the same lines as the inaugural Derby. North vs South affair, restricted to dogs racing on tracks owned by the company. Northern zone dogs, from Belle Vue, Liverpool and Powderhall, took part in a qualifying competition called the Westmorland Cup, while their Southern counterparts at Hall Green, Harringay and White City were sorted out in the Chesham Hurdle.

Although Belle Vue ran many races with seven runners per race after the formation of the NGRC in 1928 the maximum number of dogs per race was limited to six although this rule was to change several times. Early officials in the role of Racing Manager included Edward Owen and Major Percy Brown. In 1930 as the sport continued as the nation's leading pastime resulting in the GRA acquiring the nearby White City track in the Old Trafford area from the Canine Sports Ltd. It was also the first time that Belle Vue had a Derby finalist when Dresden trained by Eddie Wright finished fourth to none other than Mick the Miller. Greyhound tracks continued to thrive in the thirties despite the recent Great Depression and in 1932 Dee Tern trainer by Hewitt reached the Derby final, earlier in the year a third track was opened in Manchester called Audenshaw.

The first legendary Belle Vue hound was Wild Woolley; the brindle dog has won the Derby with Jack Rimmer in 1932 but switched kennels to join Jimmy Campbell. It was not uncommon at this time for White City Manchester greyhounds to switch to the bigger Belle Vue track especially considering that Belle Vue hosted the kennels housing both sets of greyhounds. The 320 heated kennels were to be found on the east side of the stadium behind the first and second bends. Wild Woolley never looked back winning the Northern Flat in a world record time and the Laurels the following year before returning to Jack Rimmer.

Major wins would continue to come the way of the track before the outbreak of war but there was always a danger that the best trainers and hounds would be switched by the GRA moving south to one of the London stadiums. One such case was Harry Buck being moved to White City London. In 1936 Banksell won the Edinburgh Cup for John Dickenson and Genial Radiance claimed the Oaks for A.G.Hiscock. The Northern 700 was set up as a new race in 1937 joining the Northern Flat as prominent events.



It was in 1937 that GRA purchased the land on which the stadium sat bringing the whole operation into their hands. Crowds continued to flock to the race meetings even as war broke out and racing was restricted to daytimes or summer. Totalisator turnover in 1946 was £3,840,902 decreasing to £2,721,547 in 1947.

When peace dawned again the industry had a shortage of trainers and hounds, one trainer called Jimmy Jowett would have a short stint at the track in 1946. Success came to another trainer L Hague who steered Mondays Son and Lacken Invader to successive St Mungo Cup wins in 1946 & 1947 although the latter win is listed as him being attached to WC Manchester.

W S Mulley became Racing Manager in the early fifties and would eventually be replaced by Arthur Aldridge in 1959 who in turn left to be replaced by Norman Russell in the early sixties. In between the track experienced its first post war classic win when Cyril Beaumont's Ballypatrick took the Scottish Derby title. Despite limited classic race success the stadium was still seen as the best in the north as shown by the selection of the track by the NGRC to host BBC Television Trophy no less than four times from 1961 to 1982.

In 1961 the GRA introduced under track heating systems at Belle Vue, Harringay and White City following a successful trial in Scotland. Electric cables were basically sewn into the track by the tractor and a team of workers about eight inches under the turf. They would prove to be useful until the advent of all sand tracks.

Cyril Beaumont reached the Derby final in 1962 with Master MacMurragh and one year later Dalcassian Son lifted the Laurels trophy for AG Hiscock. Another trainer Randolph 'Randy' Singleton was taken away from Belle Vue to joining White City London in 1964.

During June 1964 Belle Vue won the Greyhound Derby for the first time, Hack Up Chieftain trained by Percy Stagg and owned by S.Donohue had won a minor open at Belle Vue when watched by Brigadier General Critchley a GRA Director. Critchley suggested that the greyhound be offered the 48<sup>th</sup> and last place in that year's event, the rest is history following success of the 20-1 shot in the final.

The 1970's started with a bang when Stan Mitchell was named trainer of the year whilst attached to Belle Vue and Harry 'Bammy' Bamford had his first graded runners at the zoo. In 1971 Hall Green Racing Manager Sid Wood moved to Belle Vue and Bob Rowe (son of Leicester Racing Manager John Rowe) filled the position at Hall Green. This was the same year that the GRA experimented with eight dog racing. In fact the Northern Flat took place as an eight dog competition, the first major event to do so.

Following the sad closure of West Ham in 1972 the classic race known as the Cesarewitch was transferred to sister track Belle Vue and GRA Director of Racing Major Percy Brown retired after 40 years in the sport. It was in the seventies that Belle Vue underwent a £500,000 facelift, the previously mentioned Mistle stand was built and the track was able to offer a state of the art restaurant and tote facilities. The popular side stand was also renamed the Chieftain stand after their Derby champion.

In 1973 Stan Mitchell left to join Hull replaced by Jean Day.

Harry Bamford scored two Cesarewitch victories in 1976 & 1977 with Moy Summer and Montrean respectively; Montrean also came out on top in the 1977 BBC Television Trophy. The silver jubilee year was a year to remember because Balliniska Band trained by Eddie Moore claimed a second Greyhound Derby crown for Belle Vue and owner Raphael Bacci.

A further Scottish Derby triumph ensued in 1982, this time Ray Andrews (a recent arrival from Leeds) was in charge of Marbella Sky. The following year Norman Porter was the Racing Manager at Belle Vue when the White City track in Manchester closed its doors. Consequently the Cock O'the North race was switched to Belle Vue but the Manchester Cup, a former Belle Vue event was scrapped.

Better news arrived in 1984 when Scurlogue Champ appeared on the British racing scene, the black dog along with Ballyregan Bob would resurrect the greyhound industry. The Belle Vue public was lucky enough to see Scurlogue break the track record twice in 1985. Hong Kong Mike trained by Ray Andrews provided more welcomed success by putting his name on the role of honour list of the Juvenile, International and Pall Mall.

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Ian Travis became Racing Manager in 1987 before Manx Marajax won the St Leger, Carmels Prince broke the track record at Oxford when winning the Oxfordshire Stakes and Airmount Flash also won the St Leger. The greyhounds were trained by Nigel Saunders, Michael Compton and Jimmy Gibson.

Saunders was responsible for a greyhound called Sullane Castle; the brindle stormed to Pall Mall victory and finished Derby runner up in 1993. The Cesarewitch was moved to sister track Catford in 1995 but the Laurels arrived from Wimbledon in 1997, the same year that Tarn Bay Flash won the Grand National for Pat McCombe.

The new Millennium saw a few changes, in came an excellent management team of John Gilburn, Mick Smith and slightly later Stephen Gray. Major open race honours were still forthcoming; Pack Them In (Andy Heyes) claimed the Laurels, Talktothehand (Gibson) the Oaks and Pilot Alert (also Gibson) reached the Derby final.

In 2004 the Gold Collar was hosted by the track following the closure of Catford and there were major wins for Pat Rosney with Dairyland Sue in the Select Stakes and Andy Heyes with Double Take in the TV Trophy.

Zigzag Stewart won the Cesarewitch in 2005 for June McCombe before a few lean years followed. In 2009 The Scurry Gold Cup was brought to the track in an attempt to save the classic race but unfortunately another, the Gold Collar, finished having to make way for the Scurry. The Gorton Cup also drew its last breath in 2009 and Bob Rowe the GRA Chief Racing Manager took over the vacant Racing Managers chair for the final time before retiring. Mick Hardy left Oxford to take over as General Manager creating a dream team of Hardy & Rowe.

At the end of 2013 Dave Brayshaw took control from Bob Rowe and classic Oaks race arrived from Wimbledon. During 2014 the GRA sold Belle Vue and Hall Green but retained a lease agreement. The zoo was purchased by the Crown Oil Pension Fund for 2.6 million.

In 2015 Andy Heyes called it a day as a trainer.

### **Selected Track Records (Pre-Metric)**

<b>Distance</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
500y	Wild Woolley	28.49	1932	Northern Flat final, world record
	Jamboree Reveller	28.40	20.04.1940	
	Newceston Ration	28.07	1950+	
	Rushton Spot	27.73	21.07.1954	
700y	Congleton Lord	40.95	04.05.1938	
	Killcoran Castle	40.83	1950+	
	Come To Johnny	40.12	10.10.1959	
	Mighty Kern	40.07	25.07.1964	
	Stolen Silver	??	08.1968	
	Meronome	39.96	1970+	
880y	Tanyard Princess	51.69	05.12.1959	
	Meteoric	50.94	24.10.1964	
934y	Western Stream	55.30	28.07.1951	
500yH	Douro	29.45	26.09.1928	National Record
	Moorbrook Airmouse	29.19	25.07.1959	
	Mystic Scamp	=29.19	11.08.1965	
	Blue Sprite	29.12	11.08.1965	
	Feakles Wish	28.92	1970+	
700yH	Grouncil	43.91	20.09.1933	
525yChase	Clarehill Rambler	30.02	08.08.1959	
	Clarehill Rambler	=30.02	15.08.1959	

+ Date when record was held, not necessarily the year it was set.

### Selected Track Records (Post-Metric)

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
237m	Kilree Parade	14.69	14.07.1984	
	Parliament Act	14.25	08.03.2001	
	Laser Beam	14.18	13.02.2005	
	Laser Beam	14.05	10.05.2005	
	Little Flash	14.02	31.07.2005	
250m	Night Runner	14.37	09.05.1987	
	Gulleen Wishes	14.35	1988+	sand
	Ravage Again	14.20	18.05.1990	
260m	Quick Bozz	15.23	08.11.2005	
	Hackman	15.23	28.05.2006	
	Jetharts Here	15.21	20.09.2007	
	Lunar Vacation	15.12	01.11.2007	
	Boherbradda Mac	15.07	31.01.2008	
	Abbeyside Bart	15.06	23.10.2008	
	Pennylane Flash	15.05	28.05.2009	Scurry Heats
	Centaur Allstar	15.00	04.06.2009	Scurry Semi-finals
	Drumcove Lad	14.96	20.10.2011	Scurry Final
	460m	Balliniska Band	27.26	09.04.1977
Kickham Inn		27.26	15.05.1978	
Hillville Flyer		27.15	1982+	
Fearless Mover		27.04	1982+	
Precious Prince		27.99	01.12.1984	*sand, Northern Flat Final
Fearless Action		27.57	19.10.1985	Manchester Puppy Cup Heats
Fearless Action		27.56	24.10.1985	Manchester Puppy Cup semi-f
Fearless Action		27.51	17.05.1986	
Fearless Action		27.50	27.09.1986	
465m		Upade Joe	27.37	11.05.2001
	Bat On	27.36	13.02.2005	
	Bat On	27.34	10.05.2005	Gold Collar Final
	Moatview Lady	27.34	07.08.1005	
	470m	Sky Blue Honcho	28.04	18.08.2005
Fear Me		27.45	17.09.2005	Manchester Puppy Cup Heats
Geordie Parker		27.41	13.07.2006	Northern Flat Semi-finals
Barnfield On Air		27.32	27.09.2007	Laurels Heats
Barnfield On Air		27.20	04.10.2007	Laurels Semi-finals
590m		Thunderbird Two	35.11	13.11.2005
	Vatican Jinky	35.06	25.09.2007	Gold Collar Final
645m	Montreen	39.25	09.04.1977	
	Fergus Rock	40.69	24.07.1984	
	Glenbrien Smut	40.08	28.09.1985	
	Aglis Blaze	39.64	16.08.1994	
647m	Drumsna Cross	39.53	10.08.2000	
	Creamery Puzzle	39.11	29.06.2004	Cock O'the North semi-finals
	Roxholme Girl	39.01	25.11.2004	Gold Collar Final
	Roxholme Girl	38.96	10.05.2005	
	Zigzag Kit	38.95	18.08.2005	Cock O'the North heats
	Zigzag Kit	38.85	23.08.2005	Cock O'the North semi-finals
	670m	Roxholme Boy	40.54	20.07.2006
Calzaghe Frisby		40.30	24.10.2006	
Hurleys Hero		40.18	09.06.2009	Cock O'The North Final
Wordsandatune		40.15	20.08.2009	
815m	Visiting Time	50.88	06.09.1980	
	Laden Jennie	52.30	15.09.1984	*Sand
853m	Scurlogue Champ	54.78	21.09.1987	
	Scurlogue Champ	54.62	28.09.1987	
	Decoy Lynx	54.59	17.06.1994	
875m	Let Us Know	54.50	23.10.2001	
878m	Roxholme Girl	54.33	18.03.2006	Television Trophy Heats
260mH	Blonde Chief	15.76	26.02.2006	
460mH	Meanus Dandy	28.13	27.08.1977	
	Bewitching Tess	29.34	15.03.1986	*Sand

	Distant Panther	28.99	24.09.1988	
	Greek Commander	28.60	02.08.1994	
465mH	Born to Go	28.15	24.07.2001	
	Drive Up Sam	27.92	06.07.2004	
470mH	Taipan	28.25	24.10.2006	
	Platinumlancelot	27.85	09.06.2009	
645mH	January Prince	42.00	14.04.1962	
647mH	El Tenor	41.09	18.05.1999	

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