

Liverpool (Stanley)

Four months after the Liverpool Greyhound Club Ltd opened Breck Park another track was staging race meetings. This track was the Greyhound Racing Association's (GRA) Stanley. The race to be the first track to open had been won by Breck Park but the GRA wasted no time in upsetting their rival track by posting national advertisements warning potential stadium investors, claiming that they had sole rights of greyhounds chasing electric hares. This upset the Breck Park management so much that they took the GRA to court over the notices; they felt that it was unfair that the GRA could publish such material in Liverpool when a rival track existed already.

The Stanley track south of Prescott Road and north of Edge Lane in the Old Swan area of Liverpool opened on the 17th August 1927 becoming the second track to operate in the city. The site chosen had been a former brick works and clay pit. The circumference of the track was a galloping large 516 yards and it provided a stern stamina test for a greyhound. There were 160 resident kennels that served both Stanley and later sister track Seaforth.

One of the first significant events taking place was the Westmorland Cup; this was a competition for hurdlers from the Stanley track with the winner taking part in Northern Zone final. The first two in turn would then participate in the Champion Hurdle (or the Grand National as we know it today) at White City against the Southern zone qualifiers. Jumps races on GRA tracks were then confined to four runners but were very popular.

Racing ended in October 1927 when the track went into the winter break with plans to reopen during Easter 1928. However despite reopening the stadium was acquired by the Electric Hare Company in 1929. The directors were Jimmy Shand, Tom Wilson and John Bilsland and they had moved their entire greyhound operation from Southend-on-Sea (greyhounds included) by train to take over Stanley after leaving Southend due to higher rent demands.

The Stanley track boomed resulting in the syndicate taking control of another track in Liverpool called Seaforth which they planned to open in the near future. Wilson opted out of the company and his shares were purchased by the other two. Affiliation to a governing body came in the form of the British Greyhound Tracks Control Society (BGTCS); this organisation was much smaller than the National Greyhound Racing Society (NGRS).

By 1930 the Shand-Bilsland success was continuing ensuring a healthy lifestyle for the pair. Bilsland then bought out Shand for £400,000 leaving the Electric Hare Company under the control of Bilsland. With the money gained from the buyout Shand had plans of a grand nature, a super track just one mile from Stanley and it would be called White City-Liverpool.

The third Liverpool track called the White City was opened on 20th August 1932, owned by Jimmy Shand but trading as the 'The White City Greyhound Racing Company' this now meant there were three city tracks operating. With three tracks up and running yet another arrived but this time it was away from the centre of Liverpool near the docks, the long awaited Seaforth became the fourth Liverpool greyhound stadium when opening on 25th February 1933. The decision to open Seaforth by the Electric Hare Company Ltd would be an extremely successful one because despite its location away from the centre it would become the most frequented.

Despite the fierce competition all four tracks actually made good profits, probably based on the fact that there was a very keen population willing to spend money on the racing. Stanley suffered legal problems just like Breck Park due to the totalisator and gambling issues that ended up in court.

The Liverpool Stanley rugby league club arrived in 1934 and the venue was also used for speedway as the Liverpool Merseysiders rode there from 1936-1937.

The war arrived and severely disrupted racing during the duration but when hostilities had ceased the stadium was subject to a boom like so many others after the war. A massive totalisator turnover in 1946 of £1,814,431 proved how good business was, this figure would represent a mind boggling £50 million today. The following year the track still achieved turnover of £983,540.

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