

White City (Manchester)

Manchester is synonymous with greyhound racing and always will be due to the fact that Belle Vue staged the first ever greyhound race in the Britain and Ireland. By the first ever we mean the sport of oval racing that gripped the nation way back in 1926.

Manchester had considerable sporting and gambling links which is why the GRA chose Belle Vue as the first venue, following the success of 1926 hundreds of tracks quickly followed. Surprisingly unlike other major cities Manchester seemed to be cautious in regard to opening new tracks, London was literally building them everywhere.

The only other licenced track to grace Manchester was that of White City in the Old Trafford area. The original site on a 16 acre plot of land was the Royal Botanical Gardens south of the Cheshire Road with its tramway and north of Talbot Road. The name for the White City of Manchester derived from the 1907 lease agreement with White City Limited owned by Heathcote and Brown who set up the White City Amusement Park on 5 acres of the gardens. The Old Trafford football ground was built a stone's throw away to the west which of course became home to Manchester United F.C.

On 1st November 1927 the remaining eleven acres of gardens were sold to Canine Sports Ltd and a stadium was speedily constructed. The first greyhound meeting took place on 28th May 1928 followed by Speedway on 16th July.

One of the first trainers at the track was J.Madden who steered Loose Card to victory in the 1929 Scurry Cup which brought the first taste of major success to White City. Shortly afterwards in 1930 the stadium was acquired by the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA) who also owned Belle Vue amongst many others at the time. The track circumference was listed as a curious 448 $\frac{2}{3}$ yards with distances of 500, 525, 700 & 725 yards behind an 'Inside Sumner' hare.

1932 was a pivotal year for the track starting with a rival track at Audenshaw which opened on the 15th March; this flapping track would remain much smaller than the two affiliated Manchester Tracks. In June a greyhound called Wild Woolley was propelled to national fame at the time when winning the Greyhound Derby for trainer Jack Rimmer and owner Sam Johnson. White City hound Wild Woolley defeated the next great star (after Mick The Miller) Future Cutlet by a neck in the final.

The following year the tables were turned as Future Cutlet became the Derby champion and Woolley had to settle for third place despite being the favourite on this occasion. The great dog moved on to Harry Woolner at Clapton afterwards.

Despite this wonderful start for WC Manchester the track would struggle to compete against the London trainers in the big competitions and of course the travelling alone was one of the main reasons that few competitions had participants from the Manchester track.

The principal pre-war event was the Wilkinson Memorial Challenge Cup and amenities at the track included a home straight Grand Enclosure that offered catering and licensed bar facilities in the Members club. Starting from the back straight was the Popular Enclosure which continued around the third and fourth bends. The kennel facilities were actually at sister track Belle Vue and contained 320 electrically heated kennels situated well behind the first and second bends of the Belle Vue circuit.

The fact that the greyhounds were housed at Belle Vue meant that the trainers at the time were attached both to Belle Vue and White City Manchester, this continued right up to the seventies.

When the war had finished business boomed as most tracks benefitted from post-war freedom of the public, totalisator turnover in 1946 was £1,878,980 followed by £982,176 in 1947.

A rare derby final appearance by a White City, Manchester greyhound took place in 1947; the greyhound called Lacken Invader was trained by L.Hague. Another trainer Percy Stagg would win the Northern Stayers Stakes three times during this era.

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As the fifties started a new Racing Manager by the name of Charlie Birch took control during a decade that was very quiet for the track with the exception of a cinder track being installed for athletics in 1953. In 1959 Charlie Birch was replaced by R W Payne after Birch moved to Harringay. Payne was in turn replaced by A W Williams.

In 1960 the Cock O'the North, a major race was inaugurated and six years later the Manchester Cup was switched from sister track Belle Vue. Stan Mitchell a recent training addition from Perry Barr was in charge of Barrys Shamrock when he won the first running of the Manchester Cup in 1966, a feat emulated just two years later when Mitchell trained Special Martell in 1968.

The trainers supplying runners to the stadium and sister track Belle Vue in the sixties were Stan Mitchell, Wilf France, Percy Stagg, W Holland, G England and Bill Adams. By 1970 Eddie Moore brought great success to the track when he arrived as a trainer. In 1970 Always A Monarch won the Manchester Cup and finished runner up in the Laurels by a short head to Sole Aim. Moore was joined by other trainers Harry Bamford and Ron Saunders.

In 1971 the experiment by GRA to introduce eight dog races went into full swing with trials at Harringay and racing at Belle Vue and White City (Manchester).



The White City gate. (by kind permission of Adrian Hurt).

The seventies were lit up by Eddie Moore's Myrtown, the dark brindle dog performed admirably during the 1974 Derby final finishing runner up to Jimsun and one year later he made the final again.

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The kennels in the seventies. (by kind permission of Adrian Hurt).

Trainers continued to join the track in the late seventies George Barnett and Jack Hurt were two such trainers, Barnett experienced success with a greyhound called Kilbelin Ruler and Hurt had arrived from Preston in 1977. R Thomas became Racing Manager assisted by Ian Travis.

The GRA Property Trust had come under difficult times by the late seventies but that did not stop the GRA from looking to offload many large city sites and it appears that White City Manchester was next on the list. Sold to developers in 1981 the stadium was duly closed during 1982.

A few years later the stadium was demolished to make way for a retail park, the only reminder of the tracks existence was a white colonnaded gateway in Chester Road remaining from an era when it served as a botanical garden and then amusement park. The site today is called the White City Retail Park.

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Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
500y	Coynes Castle	28.55	22.05.1946	
525y	Tindani	30.01	15.10.1941	
	Jersey Creamery	29.65	1948+	
	Poor Linda	29.00	27.07.1964	
	That Cailin	28.94	1970+	
700y	Pork	41.26	24.05.1934	
	Dark Hissop	41.07	1946+	
725y	Clady Border	42.26	1946+	
	Mighty Kern	41.15	30.07.1964	
880y	Rozels Blue Girl	50.63	15.06.1964	
525yH	Donovan	31.29	28.07.1932	
	Hunters Gift	30.04	14.05.1964	
	Beamons Feat	30.00	1970+	
255m	Bunker Prince	15.15	15.08.1980	
485m	Myrtown	28.76	05.05.1976	
670m	Croghan Hostess	41.12	13.10.1969	
485mH	Beamons Feat	30.00	30.10.1969	
	Strebor Gem	30.00	10.06.1973	

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



Diners enjoy the racing from the restaurant view. (by kind permission of Adrian Hurt).

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Selected Tote Returns

Year	White City Turnover £	Belle Vue Turnover £
1938	589,786	863,352
1941	652,605	1,116,520
1942	502,040	1,290,238
1943	436,067	1,334,563
1944	531,481	1,669,147
1945	891,503	2,884,864
1946	1,878,980	3,840,902
1947	982,716	2,721,547
1948	444,041	2,321,345
1949	1,051,702	1,970,808
1950	989,595	1,835,193
1952	973,583	1,717,283
1953	936,800	1,611,000
1954	867,000	1,558,000



Aerial view of the track (by kind permission of Adrian Hurt).