

‘Rescuing a traumatised greyhound has spurred me to fight to ban racing’

By Dan Vevers, Sunday Mail Chief Reporter
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An MSP who rescued an abandoned racing greyhound with a broken leg has told how it led him to launch a campaign to end the controversial sport.

Greens politician Mark Ruskell, who is behind a private Bill that would end the sport in Scotland, took former racer Bert into his family when he was around two years old.

His family rescued Bert, now 12, from a sanctuary but quickly discovered he had been left with anxieties and injuries from his track career.

Despite some difficult times, Bert settled into his forever home, where he began to recover and then flourish.

The Mid Scotland and Fife MSP says it is his pet and the trauma of ex-racing dogs that is at the heart of his Bill.

The 52-year-old dad of two said: “These dogs are racing at a phenomenal speed, up to 40mph, and they’re racing together as a pack around a curved track and they can often collide.

“That’s when they can get really bad injuries, even broken necks and sometimes die.

“There are lots of dogs that have survived the industry and I think each one of them has a story to tell.

“Bert entered our lives long before I got active on this as an issue. He is a very gentle soul, and has fitted in very well with the family.”

It was only after the MSP and his family brought Bert home that they became aware of his difficult background.

He said: **“We had a hard time with Bert when he was first living with us because he would get very anxious when separated from us.** He had quite a few anxieties. He struggles to sleep at night in the dark, he needs the light on.

“It was only by talking to people in the SSPCA that we realised he was probably reared in a puppy farm in Ireland.



“In puppy farms they’re kept in these big sheds and the lights are left on the whole time, and they’re separated from their mothers early on.

“The other thing was **his front left wrist was broken.**

“We didn’t have any vet records but it was obvious when we took him to get it X-rayed that he’d had a previous break in that leg, caused by racing, and it hadn’t healed properly.

“There have been times when he’s been out on the beach, and he’s clearly enjoyed running with the boys, but then a few minutes later he comes back and his limp is back.

The proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill would make it an offence to race greyhounds at tracks in Scotland.

Data from 2023 showed 109 greyhound died trackside in the UK, while a further 4238 dogs were injured.

These days, Bert is a beloved family dog full of character, a winner of the Holyrood Dog of the Year contest in 2017 who will be entering the contest again this spring.

The Greens MSP says he’d encourage anyone considering adopting to choose a dog like Bert.

“I wouldn’t want to put anyone off from rehoming a greyhound, because they’re fantastic dogs.

“If you want to do it, my advice is just go for it.”