

Minutes of the Whippet Club Racing Association's (WCRA) Club Representatives Extraordinary Meeting

This meeting was called by the WCRA committee and was held at the Village Hall Ebrington, Gloucester on Sunday 24th May 2009. Before the meeting was opened Kim Saxby (Secretary) checked that the affiliated clubs who had indicated that they would send representatives were in fact present.

Clubs with representatives present at the meeting; Andover, East Anglia, Gloucester, Harvel, Heart of England, Independent, Lancashire, Lizard & Dist, Maidstone & East Sussex, Northern, Scotland, Stanborough, South Cotswolds and West Cornwall

Clubs whose representatives were not present at the meeting; Caledonian Thistle & West Somerset

Also present: The WCRA committee and an uncounted number of interested owners (*total number of people present was approximately 90*).

The meeting was opened at 11:35

1. Introduction

Mark Etheridge (Chairman) introduced himself to the meeting; he had taken over the duties of Chairman after the resignation of Marcus Nelson from the position of WCRA Chairman. He thanked Marcus for his service to the committee. He welcomed and thanked all for coming and apologised for the cancellation of the 2nd WCRA Championships. He stated that it was the intention of the WCRA after the recent frustrations, circular debate and resignations, to hold the two remaining 2009 Championship, run Whippets and keep the purity of the breed. He recognised that there was a need to rebuild a new team. He thanked both Garry Baldock & Paul Chappell for their work for the Association and to Caroline and Marcus Ginter who were now resident in France and had agreed to stand aside to allow additional recruitment on to the committee. He thanked Rob Rixon who had agreed to record the minutes of the meeting. He thanked Dennis Mayger (*the retiring Secretary of the Whippet Club (WC)*) for his services to the WCRA and to Mary Anderson (*the new Secretary of the WC*) for taking his place on the WCRA committee, she had already attended a WCRA meeting. He reported that the Association would co-opt John Broderick, Steve Evans and Doug Hood, with their agreement, onto the committee at the meeting on 6th June 09.

He stated that in the immediate past the problem of the registration of the Vensuter Alamo Flier x Wheatroyd Magic Maisie litter had occurred and the need to work hard to resolve and control the situation meant they needed to look at how the WCRA managed our sport and had looked at this litter. They had drawn in members of the WC to help, namely –

Mary Lowe (WCRA Advisor) for her expertise in the past with unacceptable bloodlines seeking registration to WCRA, her co-authorship of the English Whippet and her experience as the initial Registrar of the WCRA.

Shirley Rawlings (Chairman of the Breed Council) for her expertise with the breed and independence on this particular matter.

Lilah Wainman (WC committee & WCRA seconder) for her expertise and knowledge of the matter.

Betty Beaumont (Show Judge) for her expertise, knowledge of the breed standard and of racing whippets.

Mark stated that it was agreed that the aim should be to sort out this problem together, keeping emotions and strong language out of the debate; to consider the moral situation and ensure that the right outcome is achieved. He said that only club representatives would be permitted to speak during the debate, but they may leave the room with their club members if they wish to clarify a point. He expected that any vote would be on behalf of the affiliated clubs and he asked if they would include an explanation of the reason behind their vote. He reminded those present that there were both WC and WCRA rules that would have to be considered and complied with. There must be fairness to clubs and individuals.

1.1 The WCRA passport process and the litter of August 2007

Points had been raised that many people were convinced that the 'dogs were wrong', however on the other hand the evidence considered at the time was sufficiently correct for the passports to be issued. This had resulted in a defensive position of people on both sides of the argument.

A second issue was to establish common ground.

1.1.1 The passport issue process (*in brief*)

- A) In routine cases, the owner gets the necessary documentation together and fills in an application form, goes to their club secretary – who checks the documentation and signs the form, then the owner goes to a seconder – who examines the dog, completes the form, sending all documentation to the Registrar. The Registrar then issues the passport. Care is needed throughout the procedure that all the information required is present and correct
- B) Non-routine case, the club secretary is authorised to not sign if there are any doubts. The logical action is then for the secretary to inform the Registrar of the doubts of the club's committee
- C) It was back in the 1982 season that Club secretaries were required to sign the application form as club approval of the dog. Rule 3.6 requires that the passport be issued once signatures are obtained. It would seem that there is a conflict between rules 3.1 and 3.6 and this should result in a complete review of section 3 of the rules
- D) If the application is unacceptable to the seconder they should inform the registrar of the reasons – this is confidential

1.1.2 The Vensuter Alamo Flier x Wheatroyd Magic Maisie litter – 26th August 07

- A) *There are 4 in the litter in question.* Owners of three of the litter submitted applications at the same time – the fourth was afterwards
- B) The 3 passed the scrutiny and according with rule 3.6 the Registrar issued the passports
- C) Registration is a team effort and the Registrar requested guidance from both the Advisor and WCRA Chairman – WCRA committee members who are required to make executive decisions are then required to seek committee approval

- D) The WCRA committee were unhappy with the decision and reversed the decision
- E) The Registrar worked hard and she was close to the decision, her support was based on the belief that the litter were kosher
- F) On the subject of parentage there is no 'hard and fast' rule for the breeder and owner of the stud dog to submit to DNA testing – to provide proof of parentage, but DNA testing was under taken
- G) The Kennel Club's (KC) DNA process, under Vets supervision was used. The evidence and results were disputed as it was felt that the vet could not recognise or identify the dogs. However, the Vet did vouch that he did the tests (*took samples*)
- H) The WCRA has on file the KC letters of evidence dated 6th March 08 for 3 of the litter and dated 1st October 08 for the fourth in the litter
- I) The WCRA considers each litter on a case by case basis, there is no protocol for DNA testing, knowledge is poor and the committee should look long and hard at this matter. The results of these and any further test should be used as an information gathering process – DNA testing could be considered as a second stage of passport applications
- J) The committee were slow to act; the proceedings were not confidential as there was a leak of information from the committee. The result was that WCRA actions seemed to be one step behind the grapevine (*assisted by internet communications*)
- K) An emergency committee meeting was held after the 3rd Championships of 2008, members agreed to wait until after the passport applications were received and this could be considered a missed opportunity
- L) There was no evidence to support the refusal to issue the passports, however as this was so late in the year the issue was held over by the Registrar until the New Year (2009 - as it was felt that if issued a 'Sticker' would be required before the passport was used)
- M) Vensuter Alamo Flier died
- N) At the WCRA committee meeting in February 09 the committee voted for further DNA testing of litters 3 and 4 sired by Vensuter Alamo Venture.
- O) On receipt of satisfactory reports on the DNA testing and after the WC AGM in March 09 it was decided to activate the passports. Beliefs and thoughts of the committee were recorded in the minutes
- P) A letter from a senior, life member of the WC was received and this prompted the formal request for Mary Lowe to investigate
- Q) In the course of a year many passports are issued – the WCRA Advisor is only rarely involved, in this case investigation confidentially and the purity of the breed is paramount
- R) Evidence, irrespective of the outcome, is subject to possibly legal requirements and human rights issues. The KC registration is based on trust

1.2 Chairman's summary of the situation

There are two sides to the argument. The investigation has been slow and flawed. With open minds the WCRA gave too much thought to how people would see it. There were many reports – genuine evidence, as a result opinions polarised and then closed minds on both sides. There was a need to share information – but some people felt that others would not listen.

The WCRA committee never stood a chance due to a split and lack of confidentiality. Four committee meetings could not provide any leadership to the situation. There was a vast amount of information and effort to prove points.

Those against the registration of the litter suggested that the dogs appear to be non-pedigree – this was a gut feeling. This has gathered momentum and a conspiracy theory suggested. The gut feeling was difficult for some to put into words. The running actions of the litter raised concern.

1.3 Statements and questions regarding the DNA testing

Mary Lowe stated that she had looked at the dogs, their colour, and their action. She considered them to be racing whippets. They had muscled rather unusually, but many passports had been issued to dogs with these muscle conformations in the past

Shirley Rawlings added that she felt the conformation was ‘as could be expected’. They had the faults of their Sire & Dam, there was no reason to condemn the Macarthur kennel breeding in the bitch’s breeding – she had looked back at the breeding and considered it as far back as WCRCh Jack’s Boy, and others

Jeff Cook (Gloucester) disagreed about the ‘speed line’ suggested. He was aware of 50 pups in the Macarthur line (from March Wind) and these dogs did not look like this litter. Their backs were too straight and flat; the muscle conformation at the back end excessive

Di Done (Independent) felt the WCRA should stop the perceived divergence between the show and racing whippet

Ray Jones (Independent) stated that one of his dogs had been the top stud dog over a 6-year period and had never sired a pup that looked like one from this litter

Liz Third (Scotland) said she had seen the dogs, they were obviously not show specimens - they looked fast, they were not typical of the racing whippets that she has seen. She felt that the Macarthur kennel did produce dogs like this litter

The chairman asked that photographs of Macarthur bred bitches in copies of Whippet News and the passport centre pages of Macarthur Covergirl (*WCRCh Magic Trick*) be circulated to those present

Julia Cloke (South Cotswolds) offered to bring into the meeting a 13-year-old Macarthur bred bitch that she had in her car

Mark Shearing (Andover) stated that it was not the pup’s dam but their sire, which was in question, “but he had passed away”

Shirley Rawlings stated that DNA from the brother of the sire could be tested. She had a document with a photograph of Alamo Flier having a DNA sample taken by a Vet. She stated that she had coursed her dogs against Alamo Flier and knew the dog.

Mark Shearing (Andover) asked how long ago this coursing was and stated that the photograph did not prove that the dog had been DNA tested or was the sire of the litter

Carol Brown (East Anglia) asked why when Vensuter Alamo Flier died did a sample of his hair not get kept for testing?

Ray Jones (Independent) asked if all the pups and the dam had been DNA tested?

Kim Saxby (Secretary) stated that other dogs had been tested. A dog from a previous litter, which could be identified by ear tattoos, had had a swab taken by a Vet and the sample was tested by the KC. The conclusion confirmed that he was from the same sire as the litter in question. She added that the first litter of 4 (*October 1999*) by the Sire were not tested at this time.

Ray Jones (Independent) asked why were the Centres at either Bristol University or Animal Health Trust at Newmarket not used to carry out the DNA testing?

The Chairman stated that the testing carried out was robust and evidence of the DNA had been reported. They had used Vensuter Rio Venture (*3rd litter by the Sire – August 04*) as a control.

1.4 Statements and questions regarding colour

Judy Booker (Gloucester) stated that there were colour issues with this litter, regarding the colour Cream and the nose pigment masking gene (snow nose). There were also problems with the interpretations of ear dots and the black mask of some of the litter. 'Experienced racers' have stated that they do not look like racing dogs – this should not be confused as the difference between Whippets which show and those who race. She stated that rule 3.1 could be used to refuse a passport. She also queried the colours shown in the photographs and asked if Mary Lowe had seen the 'professional photographs'. She asked why Sue Ward had forgotten about the second litter sired by Vensuter Alamo Venture (*dam Magic Enchantress – June 2002*)?

The Chairman stated that there was a conflict between rules 3.1 and 3.6. At the very least this was untidy

Mary Lowe replied that not all experts agree with what is reported on Colour genetics and a detailed technical discussion followed on the matter of cream masking, black masks and nose colours.

The Chairman stepped into the debate, stating that this technical discussion was beyond most peoples understanding and the complex discussions should be continued outside of the meeting.

- It was agreed to break for lunch –

2. Identified Issues and Actions to be taken

The Chairman reported that the next committee meeting of the WCRA would be held on 6th June 2009 he hoped that at this meeting the way forward could be discussed. At this point he summarised the issues identified so far.

2.1 Colour Genetics

It was felt that colour genetics was a valid technical issue, any report needed to be in a language that we could all understand. There needed to be an independent input into the report and Dr Geoff Sampson was suggested. Both Mary Lowe and Judy Booker agreed to discuss the matter and would involve an independent expert if possible. Judy Booker stated that this form of analysis could prove that Alamo Flier was not the sire, or that he was possibly the sire. It could not prove that he was the sire. The aim was to report the findings of this colour discussion to the next committee meeting. All clubs present agreed with this action.

2.2 DNA Testing at AHT

It was agreed that further independent DNA testing was necessary. The Animal Health Trust at Newmarket, Suffolk was suggested. It was felt that the exhaustive tests would be as indicated and required by them. Nigel Holt at the AHT would be approached to organise the testing and decide which dogs would need to be tested. Absent Sire testing may be used but this will be left to the AHT to decide the appropriate form of testing in these circumstances. This was agreed.

2.3 Review of Section 3 of the WCRA Rules

Due to the conflicts between rules 3.1 and 3.6 the chairman stated that a revision of the rules was necessary. It would be easier for all concerned if when complete this section could be summarised in the form of a diagrammatic flow chart. All voted for this action.

2.4 Review and Development of DNA testing Process

The Chairman stated that to work correctly this procedure had to be with the full co-operation of the affiliated clubs. He suggested a working party of four or five people, be set up to consider this procedure and added that Sue Hoddinott had already started work on this matter. This work would consider how wide spread testing needed to be, when it is done and how it is done

June McDonald asked what had happened to the WCRA DNA testing procedure in place in 1991?

Rob Rixon asked that any working party should investigate the DNA testing procedures already in place for running dogs in Belgium, Holland, France & Germany Norman Heaton (Northern) asked who was going to set up the working party?

The Chairman answered that it would be the WCRA who set up the working party with the expertise from the affiliated clubs

This was agreed.

2.5 Who do we affiliate to and how

The Chairman felt that this matter was best left to a later date.

The point was not discussed.

2.6 Other Issues or action points

Betty Beaumont stated that she had seen the dogs and felt that they were not of genuine type. She asked why the owners of these dogs do not do the honourable thing and withdraw the dogs until all the testing has been completed? It would not be interpreted as an admission of guilt.

Julia Cloke disagreed and refuted the allegation, asking for an explanation why.

Lilah Wainman stated that they were not of 'show type' but she could not find any reason why she should not have seconded the passport applications on the day.

Dave Woollett (Harvel) felt that the passports should be 'taken away' until the testing was complete and the pedigree proven.

Shirley Rawlings (as KC Representative) stated that evidence must be provided before a decision could be taken.

Mark Shearing stated that he had been told that the sire was non-pedigree.

Sue Ward stated that they have never bred non-pedigree whippets.

The Chairman repeated that there had to be time allowed for the gathering of information and evidence.

Ray Jones (Independent) stated that the dogs should not be allowed to run.

Sheila Birch (Magistrate) stated that the Association has the constitution and the right to take away the passports if they are under dispute; she suggested that the passports should be suspended until the evidence has been gathered.

The Chairman stated that there were rumours about a non-pedigree dog that had sired these pups and named some non-pedigree dogs and their owners. The owners of these dogs were happy to be DNA tested if necessary.

It was felt that the DNA testing of these non-pedigree dogs was unnecessary.

3. Voting

The Chairman stated that it would be helpful if this Club Representative Extraordinary Meeting could agree some points, he asked if it was the agreement of the meeting that the clubs be invited to vote on the situation.

Carmel Smith raised a 'point of order' and stated that it was not within the constitution to allow the members of the affiliated clubs to vote at this meeting.

The chairman accepted this but felt the vote, which was consultative, and not binding on the WCRA committee, would reflect the attitude of those present and would aid further discussion.

It was agreed that a vote would be taken which would be in two parts – a vote from the club's representatives and a vote of individuals.

3.1 Club Representatives vote and reason

The Chairman asked that affiliated club should vote in turn and give a reason why they had voted in that way.

The proposed vote was **to suspend the passports of the litter** (*Vensuter Alamo Flier x Wheatroyd Magic Maisie - born 26th August 2007*)

Name of the Club – vote (the reason)

Andover – for (they are 10 yards faster than any other dogs)

Caledonian Thistle – not present

East Anglia – for (withdraw their passports)

Gloucester – for (do not want these dogs to race)

Harvel – for (for the good of the sport)
Heart of England – against (passports should stay in place)
Lizard & Dist – for (they should be excluded until after further investigation)
Maidstone & East Sussex – for (they are not right, need to get it sorted)
Northern – for (passports taken away, dogs banned)
Stanborough – for (passports should be rescinded)
South Cotswolds – against (no new evidence forward today)
Independent – for (suspension agreed by the majority of the club)
Lancashire – for (no running until this is cleared up)
Scottish – for (they should not run)
West Cornwall – for (a club majority decision)
West Somerset – no representative present

3.2 Voting from the floor

The Chairman asked that WCRA committee members do not vote at this time as they will have an opportunity to vote at the next committee meeting on the 6th June 2009. The Vote results from all present at the meeting as individuals for the proposal to suspend the passports was as follows: – For (57), against (15) abstentions (5)

4. Questions and Answers submitted from the clubs

The chairman asked, that bearing in mind the vast amount of discussions that had already taken place and the amount of time already committed to this meeting, did the clubs wish to go through each of the questions sent to the WCRA Secretary in turn? *The general census was not to have the question and answer session, however there were some additional questions put from the floor.*

It was agreed that written replies to the questions would be considered and returned to the affiliated clubs.

A question from the South Cotswolds club was raised regarding the unsporting conduct of some individuals at the first 2009 WCRA Championships (*as a result of the dogs from this litter running*).

The Secretary stated that this would be discussed at the next committee meeting, however one member of the WCRA committee had resigned as a direct result of the behaviour of some owners at the Championships.

A question regarding the Gold Collars 2008 was raised.

The Chairman stated that this would be handled at another meeting

The Chairman was thanked for his management of the meeting.

The Chairman thanked those who had helped with the administration for this meeting, he thanked all for attending and raising the various issues – which will be discussed at the WCRA committee meeting to be held on 6th June 2009.

The meeting closed at 15:45

These are a true record of events as far as my notes (and those of others) and the recorded voices that were taken on the day allow. I have included some explanation necessary for clarification and I have put these in italics. I apologise if there are any inaccuracies in these minutes.

Rob Rixon – 27th May 2009