

Muzzle Myth Buster

Sometimes, when we post a photo of a greyhound wearing a muzzle, we get people questioning the reasoning why, therefore, we would like to provide some insight as to why this is sometimes necessary.

Take Rio (pictured). He is an affectionate boy, who really enjoys human contact, and in fact loves meeting new people, so why does he need to wear a muzzle when out and about? He's certainly not aggressive.

Let's look at his breeding and history. He is a sighthound, who by definition 'hunt by sight and speed'. Not all sighthounds have that instinct of course, but in the racing industry, this potential trait is developed and encouraged to make them chase and want to catch that furry thing that's shooting around the track. Then...what happens if they were to catch it? They could give it a good shake, but, not out of aggression, just instinct.



Rio is one such dog, an ex-racer, straight off the track, who, unless he's lived in a home environment has probably only ever known other greyhounds and chasing that small furry thing. Now, put him in front of a small furry animal, who could be someone's beloved pet – what 'might' his reaction be?

Just because a dog has a high prey drive, it doesn't necessarily mean they won't be safe around smaller dogs. But if, like many ex racers, they have never had the opportunity to meet and learn about other breeds of dog, they may not recognise them as potential friends. Rio will tend to just stand and stare at them rather than lunge or bark – he WANTS to make friends, but his developed instinct and previous experience means that his predatory response 'could' be triggered very easily by movement or speed – so he is conflicted. Therefore, it is safer for him to be muzzled in public purely as a precaution. This protects all the dogs whose owners will let their 'friendly' off-lead dog approach him or the wayward squirrel or rabbit that might accidentally cross his path!

Ultimately, everything we do is for the welfare of our dogs, and we know very little (if anything) about many dogs we receive in our care. As we get to know them, and carefully observe their reactions to stimulus around them, we start to learn whether it would be safer for them to wear a muzzle or not as a precaution against any accidents that may, or may not happen. This protects not just other animals and people, but primarily the dog in question. Every single dog is different, and they are all assessed individually accordingly.

Even if a dog needs to wear a muzzle initially, our behaviourists work with them whilst they are in our care, and it might be that they start to learn and understand about other dogs, or prove they just don't have the instinct, so a muzzle may not be necessary. Once homed, and they start to understand the new world around them, they may prove that they no longer need to wear a muzzle hence why you may see many greyhounds out and about without them. But if the instinct, which may have been enhanced in their racing career, is so strong, then it is wise for that dog to continue wearing one. We all know our own dogs and what is right for them.

It should be noted other dogs of all breeds may need muzzles for other reasons...mainly because they're worried about unfamiliar people/dogs, or might be in pain, hence may be defensive.

Like Rio, all ex-racers will be used to wearing a muzzle from their racing days, and a muzzle won't hinder them from eating, drinking or panting. It's not at all tight and is in fact, quite comfortable to wear as it is so light. We want all our dogs to have a positive association with wearing a muzzle, and whilst many already do (as it might mean going for a walk!), others need a bit of help. Therefore, if we decide it would be beneficial to muzzle a dog who has newly arrived into our care, and they are not used to wearing one, we spend lots of time using positive reinforcement training to help them feel comfortable wearing a muzzle. Food also helps in this regard, as we use treats to build a positive association.

So, we hope this dispels the myths that 'if a greyhound wears a muzzle, the dog must be dangerous' and 'it's cruel to put a muzzle on a greyhound'. Hopefully, it also shows why it can be hard to find a greyhound that is cat friendly! In fact, as many of you know, greyhounds can be amongst the gentlest breeds around, and as you can see, Rio is not at all stressed about wearing his muzzle, even though it interferes with his striking good looks!