

Let these dogs lurch into your heart

Those of you smitten by retired NGA Greyhounds (and who among us isn't?) – by their beauty, intelligence, gentle impish nature, athleticism and unique working background – will love their sibling-cousin, the American racing Lurcher. There are over 5,000 of these hounds throughout the Midwest, from Iowa to Connecticut and, each month, dozens of Lurchers need new forever homes.

The American Lurcher

The “underdog of underground racing”, the Midwest American Lurcher is a by-product of the oval racing industry, typically 7/8 Greyhound and essentially like a Grey. Since the late 1940's, they have been bred for wagered sporting events – field trial races on rough tracks or swim races – held on private lands, sportsman clubs, or on state lands.

These closest relatives to the NGA Greyhound may look and behave like extended family members, but the Lurcher's working life is different. Instead of racing once or twice a week, a Midwest American Lurcher will race a series of heats over one or two days, usually on weekends. The winning dog will have participated and won multiple races in this time. Their training consists of “roading”, the practice of running a leashed dog from a moving vehicle. Typically, Lurchers are not crated indoors but live outside, yearlong, chained to doghouses. Unless they are rescued, most will never see toys or treats or know the luxury of sleeping inside on a comfy roaching-bed. They will have no reason to brandish that goofy Lurcher (or would that be a Greyhound?) smile.

Yet without an NGA tattoo, with the addition of hunting dog bloodlines (usually 1/8 coonhound or Whippet in the Midwest, though swim dogs may be half coonhound), and with their own special story still generally unknown, these sweet deserving dogs have – until recently – been left unconnected to loving families when they are no longer fast enough. Most racing Lurchers do not make it to adoption. While some owners are more responsible and find places in their community for their retired Lurchers, more often than not, the dogs that are no longer performing to their owners' satisfaction are disposed of.

Enter the American Lurcher Rescue Project Inc. (formerly the Ohio Lurcher Project), a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit All-Volunteer organization. Since September 2013, this small, dedicated group has saved close to 200 Lurchers. Says the organization's President, Suzanne Reep (who is also the Vice President of Joey's Greyhound Friends Inc.), “Our love for the retired racing Greyhounds has drawn us together to help Lurchers who have often been forgotten.”

The American Lurcher Rescue Project

Like the Greyhound Project Inc., the American Lurcher Rescue Project raises awareness about the dogs' plight and promotes their post-career adoption. The American Lurcher Project is not yet an adoption group, but rescues Lurchers who have been abandoned, are no longer wanted, or are in immediate danger, and provides basic and sometimes more extensive medical care if needed (e.g. vaccinations, Capstar treatment, Frontline and Heartworm test). The hardworking team of volunteers finds loving forever homes for these dogs by transporting them to responsible adoption groups throughout the United States and Canada.

Bias alert: My own heart-dog, Firestyxx was among the first dogs saved by the American Lurcher Project, in October 2013. The elaborate, choreographed journey to his new life was neither long nor unusual in the experience of the American Lurcher Project: A volunteer from Toledo picked him up from Detroit and kept him overnight; she met another driver in Central Ohio who picked up two more dogs and yet another volunteer and, together, they drove further west; in Indiana, another volunteer transported the three dogs further west; another volunteer drove them to Madison, where they were met by volunteers of a Greyhound rescue and adoption group from Winnipeg, Canada who transported the dogs to Manitoba.

The American Lurcher Project website and Facebook page include information on the Midwest American Lurcher, field trials, dogs currently available for adoption and those who have been rescued.

From these social media entries, stories unfold about the Lurcher character, which could be summed up as sensitive, intelligent and forgiving. For example there's Mia, the brood mama who collects and piles her many stuffies around her at her forever home; Rain, blinded by an untreated infection, knows the commands "steps" and "wrong way", and even counts the steps in any new surroundings; Duck (who awaits his forever home) sustained a compound fracture to his leg while roading, was rescued and stoically underwent surgery and rehabilitation to good health; Cornelius, who has found his home, is an obliging blood donor for other dogs; Firestyxx regularly visits residents of a seniors' home and walks at least seven kilometers daily because that's what his people do.

Most recently, another athletic dog, Otis (formerly known as Lobsterpot, and Sam I Am), was adopted by a professional photographer/surfer/snowboarder/skateboarder through the Greyhound Adoption Centre in California, with the help of the American Lurcher Project. According to the GAC's blog, his new dad calls him a "total cuddle bug and a bit of my shadow." (Sounds like a Greyhound.) He says, "He's such an incredible dog, by far the best I've ever had. He is just so freakin' awesome."

For more on these awesome (and deeply appreciative) dogs, see: the website: <https://www.americanlurcherproject.org>

the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/329757577168024/>

The Lurcher as a pet

Lurchers make excellent pets. Like Greyhounds, they are social, smart and have a sense of humor. Depending on their age (they can live 12-14 years) and type of breed they are mixed with, Lurchers may be more energetic than Greyhounds. Their size and weight are within the greyhound range. Coming to their forever home from an outside environment, their coats (available in any of the greyhound colors) may be fluffier or thicker but, within a few months of indoor living, they lose their farm coat and become sleeker.

The usual "greyhound rules" apply to Lurchers. They must live indoors. They have low body fat and are not tolerant of extreme temperatures. When outside, they should be leashed or supervised in a fenced yard (invisible/underground fencing is not an acceptable containment system for Lurchers). They are chemical sensitive like the Greyhound. Precautions must be taken for the use of pesticides for flea/tick prevention and for lawn and garden care. Lurchers should be tested for their compatibility with cats, which may vary with the particular feline and circumstance. They normally come well socialized with other dogs, including small dogs. Their high-prey drive may be a challenge to the rabbits, squirrels and birds they encounter.

Also like Greyhounds, newly retired Lurchers will not have had home experience so they must be taught the rules of the house. They are easily housebroken and must learn about windows, mirrors, stairs and hardwood floors. They may benefit from basic obedience classes as long as the training is positive.

A real plus for the Lurchers is that the majority love children and adore being around kids of all ages. They will want to join in the activities of their family, including play with stuffed toys. Unlike most NGA Greyhounds, Lurchers will enjoy a game of fetch. They also love to sleep and roach.

They reserve the right to be champion coach potatoes.

How you can help the American Lurcher

You can help American Lurchers in any number of the following ways:

- if you are an adoption or rescue group consider taking a dog or two – contact the American Lurcher Project;
- if you know of an adoption or rescue group (Greyhound adoption or all-breed rescues), help spread the word and encourage them to contact the American Lurcher Project;

- adopt an American Lurcher; the American Lurcher Project can direct you to an adoption group in your area;
- volunteer with the American Lurcher Project:
 - drivers are needed in many states to help with transport; most Lurchers go to groups many miles away
 - there are other volunteer opportunities – contact the American Lurcher Project
- foster an American Lurcher, either short-term (a week to a month) or long-term (a month to three months);
- donate to the American Lurcher Project – 100% goes to the Lurchers (for transport costs, spay/neuter/vaccinations/medications, and foster costs including food, beds, bowls, crates, collars and leads), at:
American Lurcher Project Fundraiser page:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/206564622856291/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/206564622856291/>
Mail and PayPal Address:
americanlurcherproject@gmail.com
Website: www.americanlurcherproject.org

Author, Gail Perry, Winnipeg, Canada



Homer – Adopted!