

Few people are better placed to speak about the relationship between structure and performance in Whippets than **Alayna Morland**. As Chair of the UK Whippet Breed Council and a long-standing breeder of whippets that achieve the highest success both in the ring and on the field, she offers a well-rounded view on how these two worlds can inform and strengthen each other.

Form Meets Function

A Balanced Perspective on the Modern Whippet

by Stacey Haynes

Since its founding in 1984, the UK Whippet Breed Council has served as the coordinating body for Whippet breed clubs across the country. It works alongside The Kennel Club to uphold the Whippet breed standard, while also promoting responsible breeding, health initiatives, and educational outreach for breeders and owners alike.

In this interview, Alayna reflects on how form and function are not opposing forces, but two sides of the same coin. She also highlights how cooperation between organizations such as the UK Whippet Breed Council and UK Sighthound Sport can support the breed's development in both appearance and performance, ensuring its well-being and versatility for generations to come.

➤ **You have had notable success with Whippets in both the show ring and on the lure coursing field. How important is it to you that the breed continues to reflect this dual-purpose heritage?**

It is incredibly important. Whippets in this country are still an unexaggerated breed that can do the job for which they were originally bred. But they have developed into so much more than that. They can do agility, flyball, obedience, scent work,

gundog training – they seem to excel at anything they are given the chance to try.

Most impressively, they can go out on the lure coursing field, become the absolute fiend they need to be, and then switch straight back into being a loving family pet in the blink of an eye.

Much like a super food, they are a super breed – not only retaining their original purpose but going well beyond it.

➤ **In your view, how does performance (particularly in activities like lure coursing) demonstrate the Whippet's original purpose? Do you see a clear connection between function and the breed standard?**

Lure coursing is the closest way we can test the Whippet's original purpose. It mirrors their natural instincts and ability – not just to chase, but to recover and go again.

One thing I have consistently noticed about successful coursing dogs is that they are free of exaggeration. The Breed Standard describes the Whippet as balanced in conformation and unexaggerated – and that is exactly what you see in the dogs that excel in the field.



AN INTERVIEW
WITH

Alayna Morland
Chair of the
Whippet Breed
Council

“Much like a super food, they are a super breed – not only retaining their original purpose but going well beyond it.”

Over the years I have analysed the breed standard to become a breed speaker and mentor, and I genuinely believe that our Whippet standard makes a dog that can perform its original function. Although we are taught not to fault judge, a dog that has something like extreme rear angulation or upright pasterns cannot perform its function.

There is also never a perfect dog, but when awarding a CC in the show ring, I want a dog that I would tweak here or there but that has no functional faults, and is strong and robust enough to do the job it is bred for whilst retaining its elegance.



ABOVE

Alayna Morland with Ch Zoraden Gingerbread Latte JW, photo credit to Hannah Wayman

LEFT

Ch Lolani Cafe Amore owned by Deb Yeates, Laurie Winter and Alayna Morland - Sired by Ch Zoraden Gingerbread Latte JW



LEFT

Ch Lolani Cafe Amore in action on the field



➤ **For owners who are more familiar with conformation showing, what would you say to encourage them to explore lure coursing with their Whippets?**

Just as gundog judges are required to attend a field trial before awarding Challenge Certificates, I would encourage anyone who wants to judge, breed or exhibit Whippets to at least attend a day of lure coursing.

It offers a real insight into why the breed standard matters – seeing the dogs in action brings it all to life.

Even better, have a go with your own dogs!

➤ **From your own breeding program, which benefits (e.g. physically, mentally, or otherwise) have you observed in dogs that have participated in lure coursing?**

The dogs absolutely love it! It builds their confidence and fitness, and it gives them a mental outlet as well as a physical one. You can see the sheer joy when they run.

You can see that they are completely satisfied expressing their natural instincts.

➤ **In your experience, what are some practical ways we can strengthen the relationship between the showing and sport communities within the breed?**

The collaboration of showing and lure coursing that happened at the Houndshow is a brilliant way to strengthen the relationship.

In recent years we have seen many more people who show start having a go and then competing at lure coursing events. It has been wonderful to see, and everyone really enjoys it and feels welcomed. We have also seen an increase in lure coursing people taking an interest and starting to show.

Anyone who has not tried showing yet – we would welcome you as a breed. Apart from the odd drama here and there, it is one of the friendliest and most encouraging breeds to show. If you need help and tips to get started, please get in touch.

Our Breed Council is not just for the show side of things – it is to safeguard the breed as a whole for the future, and we would also welcome anyone in the lure coursing community to observe at our online meetings to see what it is all about.

We are also adding useful information about our breed to our website on a weekly basis and I would love to hear from anyone with something interesting to contribute, whether it's something you do with your Whippet or a particular skill you have developed that is breed specific – treating minor cuts and injuries, for example.

More societies and clubs are putting on Racing and Lure Coursing classes. As the quality and quantity of dogs improves, these classes are becoming more competitive.

I firmly believe that when it comes to the challenge at a show, all classes should be considered, as we have so much quality running through all, including Racing and Lure Coursing. The increase in numbers since the Whippet of the Year qualification has been very significant, and I will continue to encourage show societies to include these classes.

One further point to this is that the showing and lure coursing community has already come together to help with the rescue and welfare situation within the breed.

RIGHT & BELOW

Ch Maccus Rosa
Gallica Daphne
JW owned by
Gemma Maxwell in
the show ring and
on the field. Sired
by Ch Zoraden
Gingerbread Latte
JW

Stacked photo
credit: Fred Holland



LEFT & ABOVE

Zoraden Fifty
Shades Darker JW
owned by Diana
Bowsher
Stacked photo
credit: Dawnsafon
Photography

“Lure coursing is the closest way we can test the Whippet’s original purpose. It mirrors their natural instincts and ability – not just to chase, but to recover and go again.”

Building on these links can only make that stronger – with experienced people in the right places not only to help the dogs that are in need, but to raise awareness and hopefully reduce the number ending up in rescue in the first place.

It also helps spread the word about important health issues – like the need for heart testing. The way the lure coursing community has taken this advice on board has been amazing to see. The line “my dog can run fast so why does it need heart testing” is still something you see on the stud dog pages, but if those involved in performance are also promoting health testing, it can only help strengthen the message.

➤ **UKSS now sponsors a lure coursing trophy at Whippet of the Year and is introducing a perpetual award for the top scoring hound in the season which holds a Stud Book number. What kind of impact do you think this type of recognition can have?**

This is **hugely** important. The ultimate Whippet is the one who can excel at both.

Balanced, moderate and curvy Whippets should be able to excel at both. Recognition like these highlights and rewards versatility – which is exactly what the Whippet should be about.

Supporting the UKSS in its recognition efforts is vital. By valuing both performance and conformation achievements, we send a clear message that the Whippet must always remain a functional and versatile hound.

➤ **You attended the UKSS trials day held alongside the Houndshow. What were your impressions of the event, and how do you see initiatives like this helping to bring different parts of the Sighthound community together?**

It was a fantastic event with a real buzz of excitement. There was a wide variety of sighthound breeds taking part, and the atmosphere was welcoming and encouraging for everyone.

Seeing show people and sport people side by side, all enjoying their dogs doing what they love, really showed how much common ground there is. I think initiatives like this are key to breaking down barriers and building stronger links across the sighthound community.

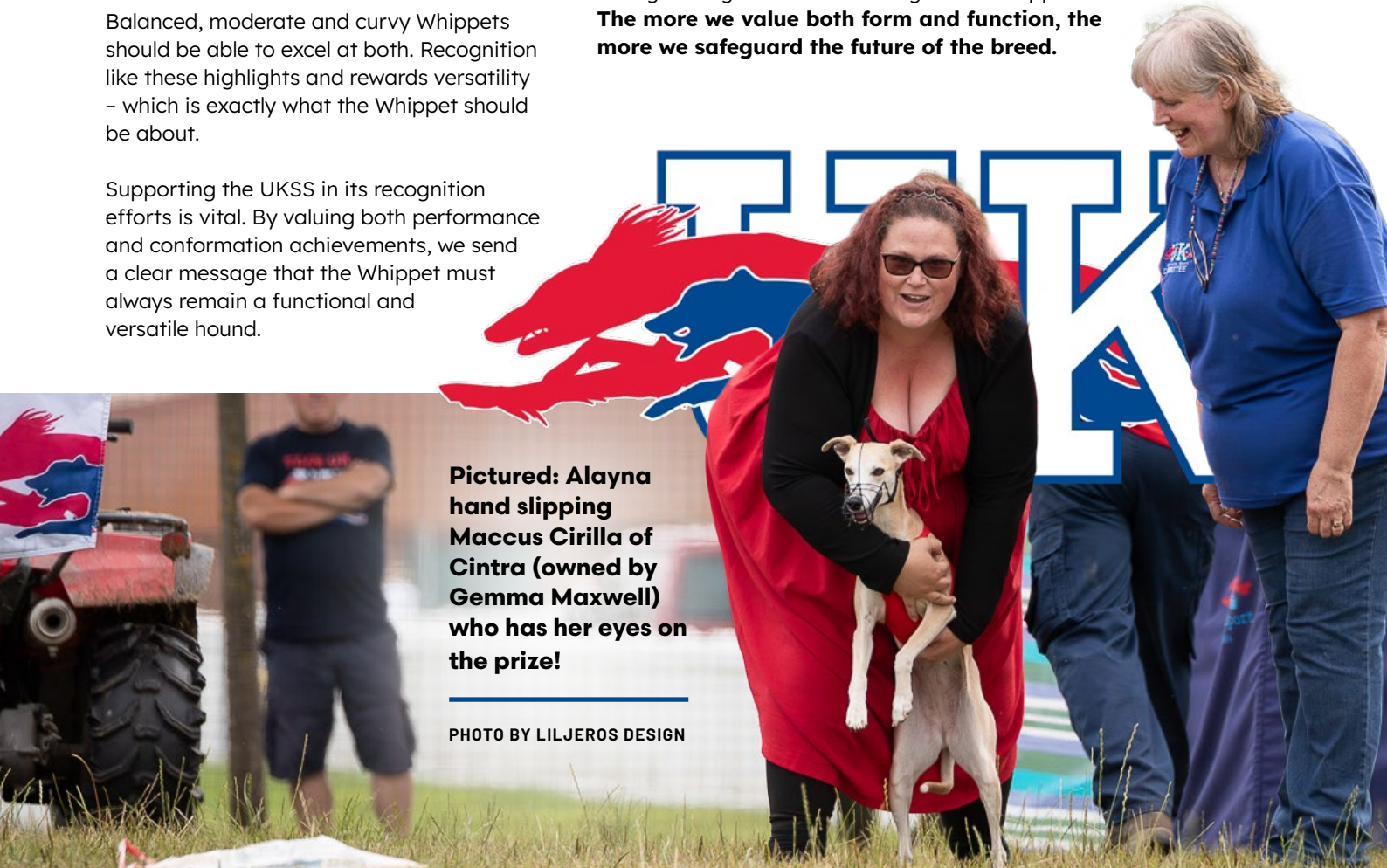
➤ **Looking beyond Whippets, do you think other sighthound breeds might benefit from similar initiatives – such as lure coursing awards or dedicated classes to help preserve and promote their functional heritage?**

Yes, absolutely. The only way is to try things. If you have several dogs that can only go in the Open Class at a Championship Show, having Racing and Coursing classes can give another option.

It benefits the exhibitor by giving them more classes to enter, and it benefits societies by improving entries. Most importantly, it helps preserve the functional heritage of the breeds while promoting balance and soundness.

I would just add that supporting activities like lure coursing is strengthening our understanding of the Whippet.

The more we value both form and function, the more we safeguard the future of the breed.



Pictured: Alayna hand slipping Maccus Cirilla of Cintra (owned by Gemma Maxwell) who has her eyes on the prize!

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