Right, greyhounds pursue a live domestic rabbit attached to a mechanical arm at a Florida training track. Opposite, jackrabbits such as this one, confiscated by wildlife officers, traditionally are used to train racing greyhounds.

On the fateful morning, (Robert) Mendheim had just finished schooling twenty-two pups when eleven police cars came tearing up the road. "I'd have thought they were after Bonnie and Clyde or John Dillinger," Mendheim said. In addition to the planted eyewitnesses, agents hiding in shrubbery with long distance lenses had taped the entire [training] exercise...—Greyhound USA, January 1989

No, it wasn't Bonnie and Clyde or John Dillinger Florida law-enforcement officers were after, but greyhound trainers suspected of breaking state law. On the morning of October 4, 1988, The HSUS, with assistance from state and local law-enforcement agents, converged on a Lee, Florida, greyhound training track to arrest dog trainers for using live rabbits as lures for their charges. In the first felony raid of its kind, the Lee, Florida, action followed the first successful infiltration of such a training operation in the United States.

Robert Mendheim—one of America's most prominent greyhound owners with many of the country's most successful dogs—was not the target of the sting operation. He was just one of several trainers charged with releasing dogs to chase a live domestic rabbit at the training track that morning. In all, a dozen people were arrested; four, including Mr. Mendheim and track owner/operator George Frost, were charged with third-degree felonies, another eight for misdemeanor offenses.

The HSUS's undercover investigation began in early 1988, after the HSUS Southeast Regional Office in Tallahassee received an anonymous tip that someone was dumping large numbers of jackrabbit carcasses in the Lee, Florida, area. A rural community, Lee is located sixty miles east of Tallahassee, near the Georgia state line. A large number of highly successful greyhound owners and trainers reside there.

Twelve-dollar Jacks
Faster than domestic rabbits, jackrabbits are traditionally used in " coursing"—releasing two or more greyhounds in an enclosed field to chase, and ultimately savage, a jackrabbit. "Jacks," as they are called, are widely used for this purpose because they dart about quickly, giving greyhounds a good run for their $12 cost. The dogs eventually catch up with their quarry,

FLORIDA'S FELONY GREYHOUND RAID

A dozen arrested for use of live lures
Live Rabbits Whirled Around Track

In response to the anonymous call, the HSUS dispatched an investigator to the Lee, Florida, area to assess the situation. Using a cover that gave the investigator wide acceptance among kennel owners, the HSUS investigator made numerous visits to the Frost kennels. There, in relation to housing and schooling dogs for owners, George Frost operated a training track where, four mornings a week, as many as one hundred greyhounds came to train on live lure.

Over the course of several months, our investigator spent a great deal of time with both Frost kennels. There, in addition to housing and schooling dogs for owners, George Frost operated a training track where, four mornings a week, as many as one hundred greyhounds came to train on live lures.

"When I visited the Frost training track, I was surprised to see the large number of dog tracks lined up, waiting to run. Several greyhounds on live lures," said the investigator. "And I was told that many of the people who came to the track had travelled from several counties, despite the fact that what they were doing was a felony. It just didn't make sense to me. So many people said they were using dogs on live lures, especially in a training exercise. Typically, the first thing a greyhound is trained to do is to run a lure. And it's a lure on a rope. It's a (money that's going to have to be spent sooner or later."

In October, 5:00 a.m., officers with the Florida Game Commission and Madison County sheriff's office met with the HSUS in Florida, and Southeast Regional Director Marc Paulhus to discuss plans to carry out the morning raid. Nearly 7:35 a.m., a live domestic rabbit was tied to the mechanical arm and eventually allowing dogs to run the lure. Anyone who thinks this is a joke is not an American public, with the goal being to change our current reality."
by the abdomen to the track's mechanical arm and whirled once around the track to ensure that the track was in good working order. Shortly thereafter, the first two greyhounds were released to pursue the pathetic southeast office. At press time, a continuance had been issued for the felony trial and no new court date had been set. In addition to the criminal charges against pouring in since. One, in fact, led to the November arrest of another Madison County, Florida, man who was caught with seventeen jackrabbits in his pickup truck. (According to another Florida statute, it is a misdemeanor to possess nonindigenous animals without a special permit.) At his trial, that individual, employed by a well-known North Florida greyhound trainer, stated that he purchased the jackrabbits for cooking purposes. Thereafter, his mother took the witness stand, where she reportedly rattled off her recipe for jackrabbit stew!

"It's particularly ironic that the vast majority of greyhound trainers continue to use live lures," says investigator Baker, "while, at the same time, in those states whose attempts are underway to legalize dog racing, industry leaders are telling legislators that live-lure baiting is an archaic practice that's been superceded by mechanical lures."

"Just two years ago," said our investigator, "Robert Mendheim telephoned our Tallahassee office to boast that he was no longer using live lures in training. Look where he is today."

"While we are pleased with the Lee bust," the investigator continued, "we realize that it represents only a very small step toward getting the industry off in the right direction. During the investigation, and with all the tips we've received since, it's become very clear that this is a huge problem throughout the greyhound industry, and one we will continue to expose until it stops."

THE HSUS POLICY ON GREYHOUND RACING

The Humane Society of the United States condemns greyhound racing and, specifically, the training known as coursing, in which greyhounds are trained to chase and kill a hare or other animal, and all practices utilizing live lures or other animals as lures in training greyhounds. It is HSUS policy, therefore, to oppose dog racing because of cruel training methods, the large scale breeding of greyhounds in the hope of producing a winner, and the use of greyhounds and other animals as live lures. The use of animals as lures for dog racing is unnecessary. There is no evidence that eliminating the use of live lures will result in the elimination of cruelty and dogfighting problems. The investigator continued, "It represents only a very small step toward getting the industry off in the right direction. During the investigation, and with all the tips we've received since, it's become very clear that this is a huge problem throughout the greyhound industry, and one we will continue to expose until it stops."

PROGRESS IN PUERTO RICO

In December, The HSUS visited Puerto Rico when a contingent of our staff traveled there to work with many of the island's animal welfare. The American territory has severe animal cruelty and dogfighting problems, with little animal control. Southeast Regional Director Marc Paulhus, Laura Bevacqua and Dr. Susan Lieberman, joined by John Snyder of the National Animal Control Association, conducted a one-day seminar on humane and livestock issues and visited local legislators, humane societies, animal shelters, and zoos. One of Puerto Rico's most powerful lawmakers has already agreed to sponsor legislation to make dogfighting a felony. One of the fighting dogs seized in the June 1988 raid on the Lowes' property resulted from the dogfighting investigation.

The Lowes' decision to stand trial, on February 21, forced the prosecution to present three days of graphic evidence to the court, including tape recordings which allowed the jury to hear the gruesome details of the world of dogfighting. Great Lakes Regional Director Sandy Rowland was called as an expert witness in dogfighting and provided details of dogfighting terms to the jury. He identified specific evidence that was taken in the raid.

On three days of the Lowes' presentation of evidence, the Lowes pleaded guilty to three state felony charges, one each for fighting, training, and selling a dog for the purpose of fighting. Charges of dogfighting against their son were dropped. Sentencing was scheduled for March.