

In a Blur

*A tripod
Whippet
overcomes
major setback
to hit Fast CAT
track.*



Courtesy Dr. Deanna McNamee, DVM

An impressive pedigree and high expectations preceded Whippet Blur's arrival to the world.

After all, her grandmother won the AKC National Lure Coursing Championship, and her father was a top lure courser and breed champion. Mom was no slouch either, earning her field championship.

Her breeder kept Blur and planned what she wants for all her Whippets: "I hope for both successful lure coursing dogs that will also be successful in the show ring," says Dr. Deana McNamer, DVM, of North Carolina.

Lure coursing is a sport for sight-hounds—such as Whippets and Greyhounds—in which they follow a lure, usually a white plastic bag, moved with a pulley system around fields.

The sport is designed to test these breeds on what they were originally developed to do—hunt game using their amazing vision and speed. Blur showed great promise in her early training for coursing, but her future took a drastic change during her second year of life.

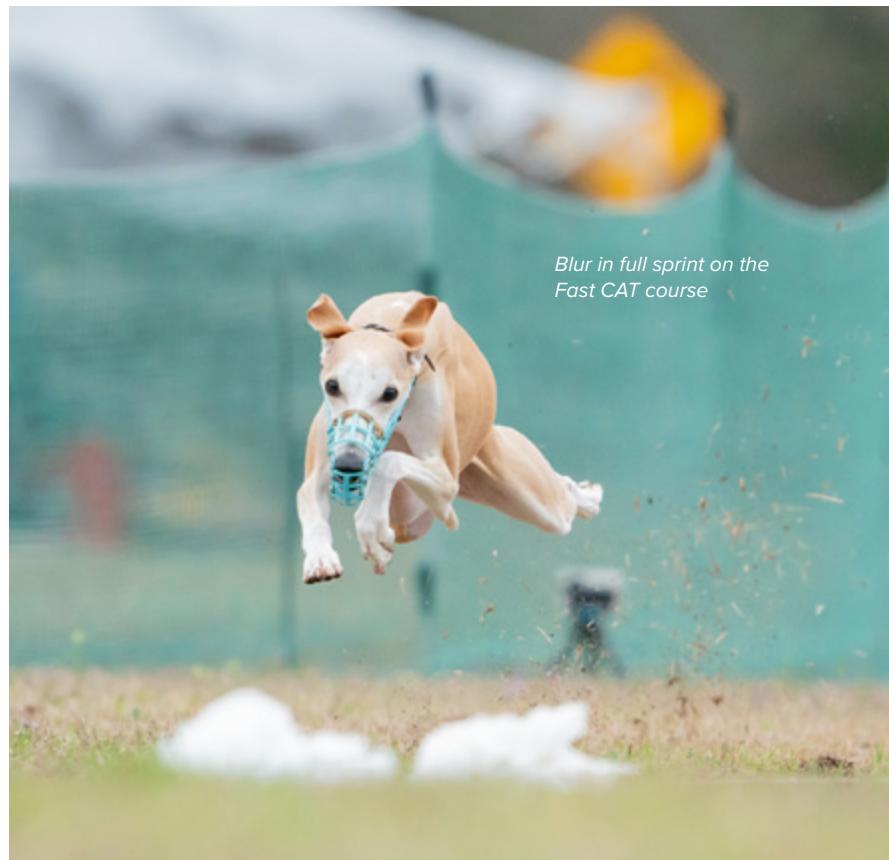
THE ACCIDENT

It was a day like any other day. McNamer and her husband arose before sunrise to take care of their dogs and get ready for work.

"Blur just happened to be the first dog I let outside that morning. Unfortunately, because it was dark when I let her outside, I didn't realize that a small agility tunnel that was out in the front yard had blown in front of our front porch," she says. "The porch is made of stone slabs and is three steps high."

When Blur had been outside long enough to "do her business," McNamer opened the door and called her.

"At this point, it was just light enough for me to see what was happening. She came running to the door and decided to jump over the tunnel and onto our front porch, but didn't realize that there was about 6 feet between the



Blur in full sprint on the Fast CAT course

tunnel and the porch."

When Blur jumped the tunnel, her front feet made the top of the porch, but her back legs didn't. Her right knee crashed into a stone step, resulting in a catastrophic injury. The edge of the step cut the patella ligament from the patella bone and then entered the knee joint space, also cutting the cruciate ligament.

As a veterinarian, McNamer knew it was a devastating accident.

"We had consults with three different specialty surgeons; all gave a very poor prognosis with surgical repair," McNamer says. "They speculated that even with a successful surgery and all the risks that would follow it, failure of the surgery once she started running around was likely and the eventual outcome would be amputation. Rather than putting her through it all, we elected to amputate the leg."

Plans for Blur to enter her first com-

petition changed to plans for helping her adjust to her new life.

"Once the decision was made to amputate her leg, I realized that everything she was bred for was suddenly gone. She could not participate in either showing or lure coursing with only three legs. However, at first, I think the disappointment was overshadowed by the need to care for a tripod. Our focus was just getting her adjusted to living with three legs."

THREE-LEGGED LIFE

Post-surgery, Blur's life consisted of rest and rehabilitation. And then one day, the McNamers realized that Blur was going to be fine. "About six months after her amputation, I was shocked to see how normal she was, running around our yard like a normal dog," she says.

For a time, they thought the best thing would be to find Blur a new home



After a catastrophic injury, Blur the Whippet found her way into the world of Fast CAT.

where she could get more attention. They reached out to their local dog community, but the right home never materialized.

“So, I refocused, and I tried hard to find activities that would stimulate Blur and replace the activities that she was no longer able to do,” McNamer says. “We dabbled in agility and while Blur loved it, my life was too busy for that sport.”

It was clear that Blur yearned to fulfill her legacy of being a lure courser. She effortlessly ran around the McNamers’ 3-acre property.

Three-legged dogs cannot compete in AKC Lure Coursing for sighthounds, but McNamer learned the AKC changed the eligibility for the all-breed Fast CAT events, allowing tripods to enter.

“I thought this was finally her chance to shine,” she says.

FINDING HER PLACE

Fast CAT is a 100-yard straight line dash. Dogs chase the lure and are timed. Their time is converted into miles per hour, and they earn points toward titles based on their times.

McNamer entered Blur in a Fast



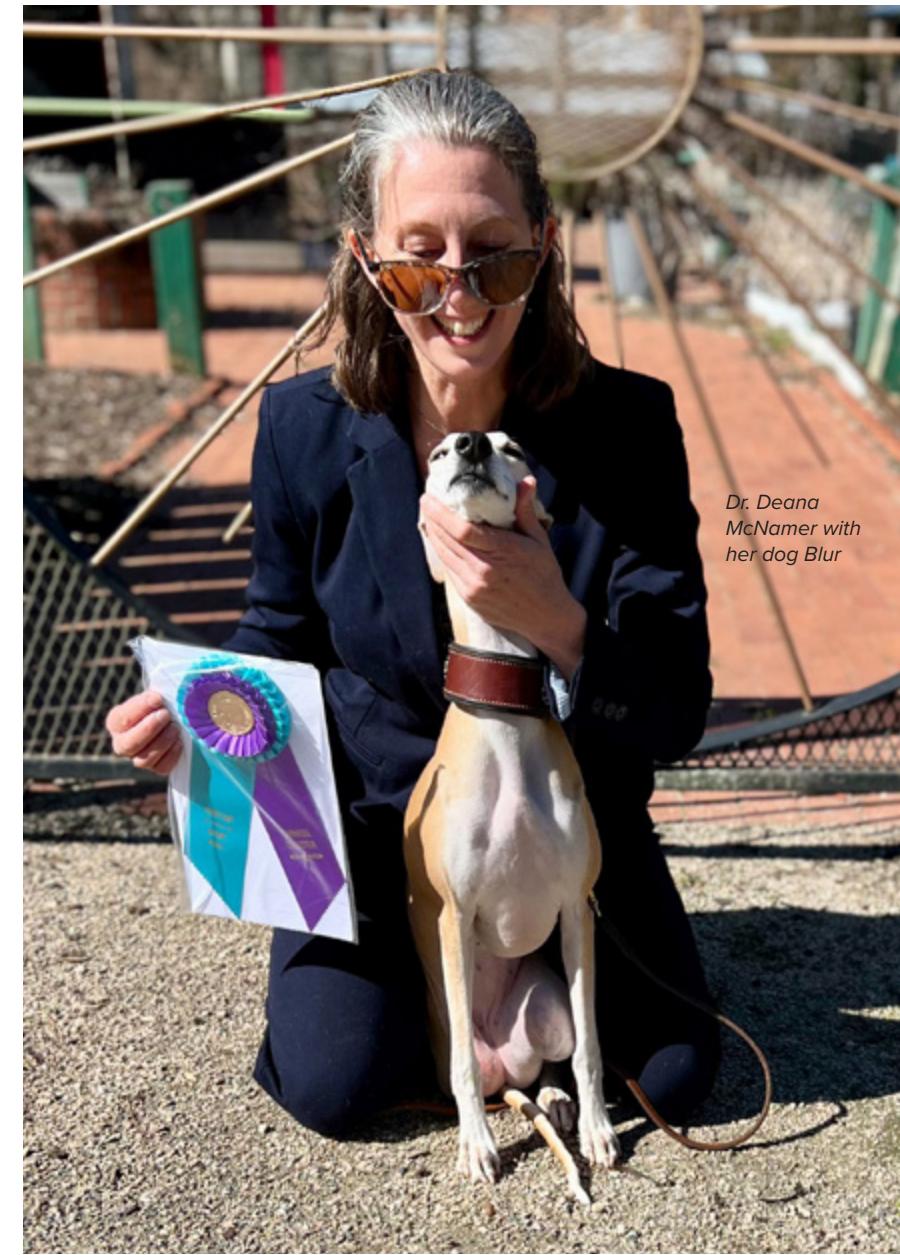
CAT event not far from her home near Raleigh, North Carolina. When she arrived, however, there was confusion when she reported for inspection. At all coursing events, dogs must be checked to make sure they are sound before they can compete.

“I was told that they couldn’t tell if she was lame or not. I was patient as I knew this was a new change. I showed them the rule change, explained that I was a veterinarian, and assured them that

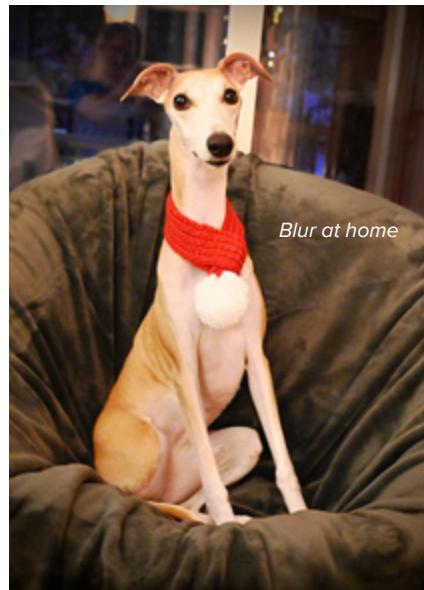
she was moving normally for her with only three legs,” she says. “Finally, it was decided that the Field Trial Committee needed to evaluate her for lameness and once that was done, she was approved and ready to go.”

Blur headed for the start line and immediately drew attention.

“I will just say she was a superstar. She ran down the track like she had four legs. Everyone was amazed. I was proud, but to be honest, this was just



Dr. Deana McNamer with her dog Blur



any other Whippet. When she slows down and stops, you can tell she only has three legs because of the way she needs to compensate for her balance," Frodsham says. "We have run a few other tripods since. All pass inspection and run pretty normally."

There are many opportunities for dogs that lose limbs. Today, tripods can compete in AKC agility; the non-jumping classes of AKC obedience and rally; and AKC scent work; in addition to Fast CAT and the all-breed Coursing Ability Tests (CAT).

If you have a dog that loses a leg, keep your mind open to all that they are still capable of, McNamer advises.

"Once the amputation has happened, the dog doesn't see any limitations like we do. I believe they do understand that things have changed, but in my experience, they very quickly adapt to those changes and just go on living life the best they can," she says. "And the best thing you can do for them is to not limit them but to let them be the best they can be." **FD**

Left: Courtesy Mary Pick; right: Courtesy Dr. Deana McNamer, DVM

Blur to me," McNamer says.

Blur clocked 27.45 mph on her inaugural run. After a rest, they prepared for their second run of the day, and McNamer realized that Blur had a fan club.

"Suddenly, I had a crowd. Everyone, especially the kids, all wanted to make sure they saw Blur, the three-legged dog, run. She had another stellar run, not much slower than a normal Whippet, and everyone cheered her on."

Blur came home following the three-

day event with her BCAT title. Her fastest run was 7.43 seconds, or 27.53 mph.

Chris Frodsham, business operations manager of Time to Fly Performance Dog Sports, was running the Fast CAT event where Blur made her debut. It was his crew's first experience with a tripod entering one of their events.

"The comment from our staff was, 'If I didn't see that Whippet finish the run, I never would have known she was a tripod.' When running, Blur looks like

Penny Leigh is the director of the AKC Agility League and AKC GoodDog Helpline and competes in dog sports with her canine team.