

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL KENNEL COUNCIL LTD



Extended Breed Standard of **THE BORZOI**

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in conjunction with
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History and Hunts - taken from John Gordon "the Borzoi"

HISTORY OF THE BREED

The history of Borzoi in Russia naturally reflects the conditions and circumstances in that enormous and mysterious country.

Even excluding the Asiatic part, it is vast. From St Petersburg (now Leningrad) to the Crimea a thousand miles and it is a similar distance from the old western border to the Ural Mountains. Over these million square miles, communications, when they existed at all, were, until recent times, extremely primitive and though the countryside is uniformly flat except in, the east, there are also striking variations in the type of country, marshes, forests, and open plains all claiming their share.

The history of Russia, prior to the Revolution, is very sharply divided into two periods. The first one comprises of hundreds of years prior to 1861 during the latter part of which the Russian noblemen, in large numbers, had vast estates on which they lived in feudal state and in nearly all cases, maintained hunts.

In 1861 however, a great upheaval took place in which the serfs on which so much of the former magnificence was based, were freed and the estates largely broken up. The second period lasted – until 1917 when the Revolution brought to an end the nobility and all such hunts as had been reinstated.

The origin of the Borzoi is obscure and the earliest stages can be accounted for only by guesswork. We may safely discard, however, the theory that all varieties of coursing hounds are derived from a common origin. Although there is throughout a great similarity in general build, this can reasonably be attributed to them all having been bred to meet the same requirements of great speed. This requirement could not be met by any other conformation but the various breeds have other features that distinguish them much more positively than their similarities unite them.

The first written record of coursing in Russia occurred in 1260. It referred to 'hunting' dogs that catch hares' at the Court of the Grand Duke of Novgorod. This was the time of the Grand Duke Vasil of Moscow, father of Ivan the Terrible, the first Czar of Russia.

The first detailed description or 'Standard' was published in 1650 and the present 'Standard' conforms surprisingly closely to it.

Very little information can be gleaned from early written Russian material apart from the meager facts that arise from the records of hunting dogs that were used to course hares in the thirteenth century. Peter Michailowitsch Gubin in his book, published in Moscow 1890, gives some information as to the breed's development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The German translation reveals that at least seven coursing breeds existed in Russia at that time, one being wired haired and others, which were native to out flung areas such as Poland and the Crimea. He does however mention the Kurland variety of coursing dog, describing it as ponderous and rather awkward in action, but huge and of great power. The variety's coat was said to be short, i.e. about two inches long and wavy and curled in parts. The colours mentioned are grey, lemon marbled and brindled coats, the last being in different shades. This dog was used extensively for coursing hare and the boar. The really good type of "Psovi" Borzoi (a long coated variety) such as we appreciate these days', had become reasonably well established by the nineteenth century, even before this era, and had been maintained thus the ideal form since.

Fortunately, it has not been a breed adulterated or spoiled by faddist features – it is still used in its native land for heavy coursing, at which it has excelled through the centuries. In Russia, coursing the wolf was a national sport, conducted on what was nothing less than a magnificent scale, both by the aristocracy and the moneyed land-owners. Huge kennels were maintained and breeding was not only carefully calculated to produce the best and strongest dogs, but the methods employed were guarded with the utmost secrecy. Bloodlines were of absolute purity and the ideal type and temperament were perpetuated, courage in the strain being of prime importance both to owners and the huntsmen. Certain abilities in the particular strains were developed and became considered key factors typifying the respective kennels, to be preserved at all costs. Before the upheaval of 1861 hunts were numerous and frequently very large with several hundred hounds and, in the case of the estate owner Samsonoff in Smolensk Province, a thousand. In many cases the magnificence with which they were equipped with-matched horses, huntsmen's uniforms and all the accoutrements of a 'most brilliant, spectacle is almost without parallel in history.

The distances, which separated these great estates however, and the difficulties of travel contributed to their segregation so that intermingling of the blood between hunts was difficult. Doubtless such difficulties could have been overcome but owing to the great size of the kennels there was no pressing need for outcrosses and, in addition, the owners took a fierce pride in their hunts, breeding their hounds to what they considered to be the best standard and frequently refusing to part with any hounds at all. At that time, it was considered disgraceful to sell dogs for money, especially in the case of a nobleman.

Enormous prices were paid on occasion for outstanding Borzoi but the owners of large hunts would not part with such hounds for any money and these deals mostly betokened a stroke of good luck for some 'small' breeder.

A legend relates that a rich landowner of the Province of Tarnoff gave his daughter, as wife to an ignorant country squire of the neighbourhood in exchange for a single Borzoi. The descendants of the pair, however, regarded this story as a slight to them and maintained that the deal was not over a Borzoi but a "Svora" i.e. three Borzoi!

After 1861 most hunts ceased to exist and the Borzoi survived in only small numbers, very few passionate hunters continuing the sport. In 1873, however the "Imperial-Association for the propagation of hounds and the regulation of hunting" was formed.

A show was held and sufficient enthusiasm regained to avoid what might have been the virtual extermination of the Borzoi.

Thenceforth the principal hunts, which had been reformed, began their own types out of the few pure ancient -type hounds which were available.

During the last thirty years before the revolution in 1917, the greatest hunting establishment in Russia Perchino, in the province of Tula, owned by His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaivitch of Russia.

"The Perchino Hunt"

Suddenly the wolf would leave the wood, heading for the nearest patch of undergrowth, with Foxhounds following and barking loudly. The nearest hunter to this point then followed the wolf, forcing his horse into a gallop and at the same time releasing his Borzoi from the lead. After the chase and a struggle the wolf would be held down by a Borzoi on either side, who held on with great determination, usually by catching hold of the nearest part to the wolf's ears. The hunter then galloped up and ended the struggle with a stab of his knife.

Alternatively, the wolves were caught alive, to be kept at the kennels for training young Borzoi. In this case a stick with straps on both ends was held in front of the wolf that immediately caught hold of it and the hunter fastened the straps behind the wolf's neck. Foxes and hares were caught in a similar manner but there was no need for the huntsmen's knife.

The second method of hunting did not require the help of Foxhounds. This was the "field" hunting and a wide stretch of land was combed by hunters, on horseback, with a team of Borzoi each, keeping a distance of about 200 yards between them and forming a half moon.

The third method was the one adopted during the winter when the ground was covered with very deep snow. Whenever the presence of wolves in a wood was reported, nine Borzois were put into a deep sledge and covered up completely by white woolen blankets. They were then placed in a spot where the wolves were likely to appear. Beaters and Foxhounds then drove the wolves out of the wood and when they came towards the sledge the blankets were removed and the Borzoi jumped out and caught the wolves.

Many Borzois were destroyed during and after the Revolution due to the connection with the aristocracy, lines were lost. Russian Borzoi today goes back to Borzoi that were exported to England, Europe and the United States prior to the Revolution.

Borzoi were still used by the fur hunters to collect animals without damaging pelts for the fur trade up until the market declined in the late 1900's.

Overriding Consideration / Criteria

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. From time to time certain conditions or exaggerations may be considered to have potential to affect dogs in some breeds adversely, and judges and breeders are requested to consider these conditions or exaggerations before making their decisions. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure.

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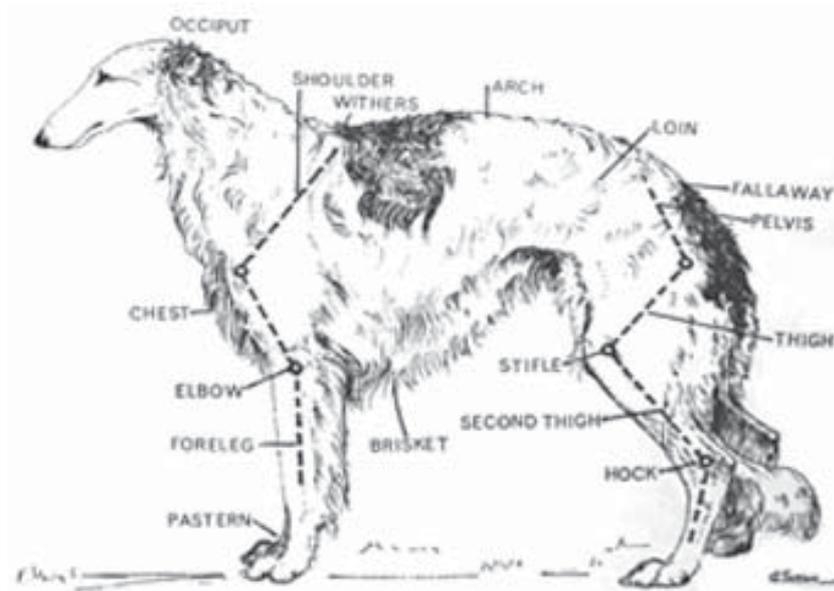


Fig. 1- Points of the Dog.

! GENERAL APPEARANCE

Well balanced, graceful, aristocratic, dignified and elegant.

In the past he was purpose bred to be a superb hunting animal where his structure was suitable for his function and was in no part superfluous. He was bred to be a hound of clear sight and powerful movement who would hunt and catch his quarry whether wolf, deer or hare. "The richness of the coat, the beauty of the colour, the equilibrium of the proportions, the elegance of the movement and the harmony of the forms, that impart an unquestionable air of nobility. He must be distinguished by his calm and his great self assurance..." French (F.C.I.) Standard.

! CHARACTERISTICS

A coursing hound which must be courageous, powerful, and of great speed.

Courage: The Borzoi should stand his/her ground with presence and assurance, never aggression.

Muscular power and great speed: Borzois are short distance hounds and as such, should be capable of great acceleration from a standing start. These two requirements pre-empt sound running gear, considerable angulation front and rear, strong bone and feet, proper condition, deep well sprung chest and the impression of agility.

! TEMPERAMENT

Sensitive, alert and aloof.

The Borzoi should be sensitive, with quiet dignity. He should be alert and far seeing, always ready for the chase. This should eliminate any specimen of undue shyness or aggressiveness.

! HEAD AND SKULL

Head long, lean and in proportion to dog's size and substance. In bitches, head finer than in dogs. Well filled in below the eyes. Measurement equal from occiput to inner corner of the eye and from the inner corner of eye to tip of nose. Skull very slightly domed and narrow, stop imperceptible. Head fine so that the bones and principal veins can be clearly seen. Viewed from the side, forehead and upper line of muzzle form an almost straight, slightly convex line. Jaws long, deep and powerful; nose large and black, nicely rounded, neither cornered nor sharp. Viewed from above, the skull should look narrow, converging very gradually to tip of nose. Occipital process very accentuated.

The whole head must be long and lean, never heavy or coarse, particularly in back skull. Its strength is derived from its depth rather than width. When thinking back skull think oval rather than wedge.

The fill below and between the eyes allows for the gradual flow into the muzzle and taper to the nose with the forehead and upper lines of the muzzle forming an almost straight line. The underline of the jaw should be parallel with the line of the back skull when the head is viewed in profile. The head is fine so that the bones appear 'chiseled' sharp and clean with well defined veining. The Borzoi head in size, shape and bone structure is a good indicator of the structure of the rest of the body.

From the end of the nasal bone the nasal CARTILAGE slopes down to the nostrils which should be black, large (for intake of air) and slightly overreaching. The inner corner of the eye should dissect the head equally between the occiput and nose.

The jaws must be long, powerful and deep, the length of a mature Borzoi head can range from 12" to 13" giving an approximate 6" to 6.5" of jaws and teeth. Jaws must be strong enough to throw prey to the ground and hold. The jaws must be cleanly set into the head, neither foxy nor snipey.

The standard denotes a difference between the male and female but very definitely should not be confused with snipiness, frailty or weakness. When examining the head notice must be taken of expression, the exquisite finesse of the skin showing the veining, the zygomatic arch and muscle definition.



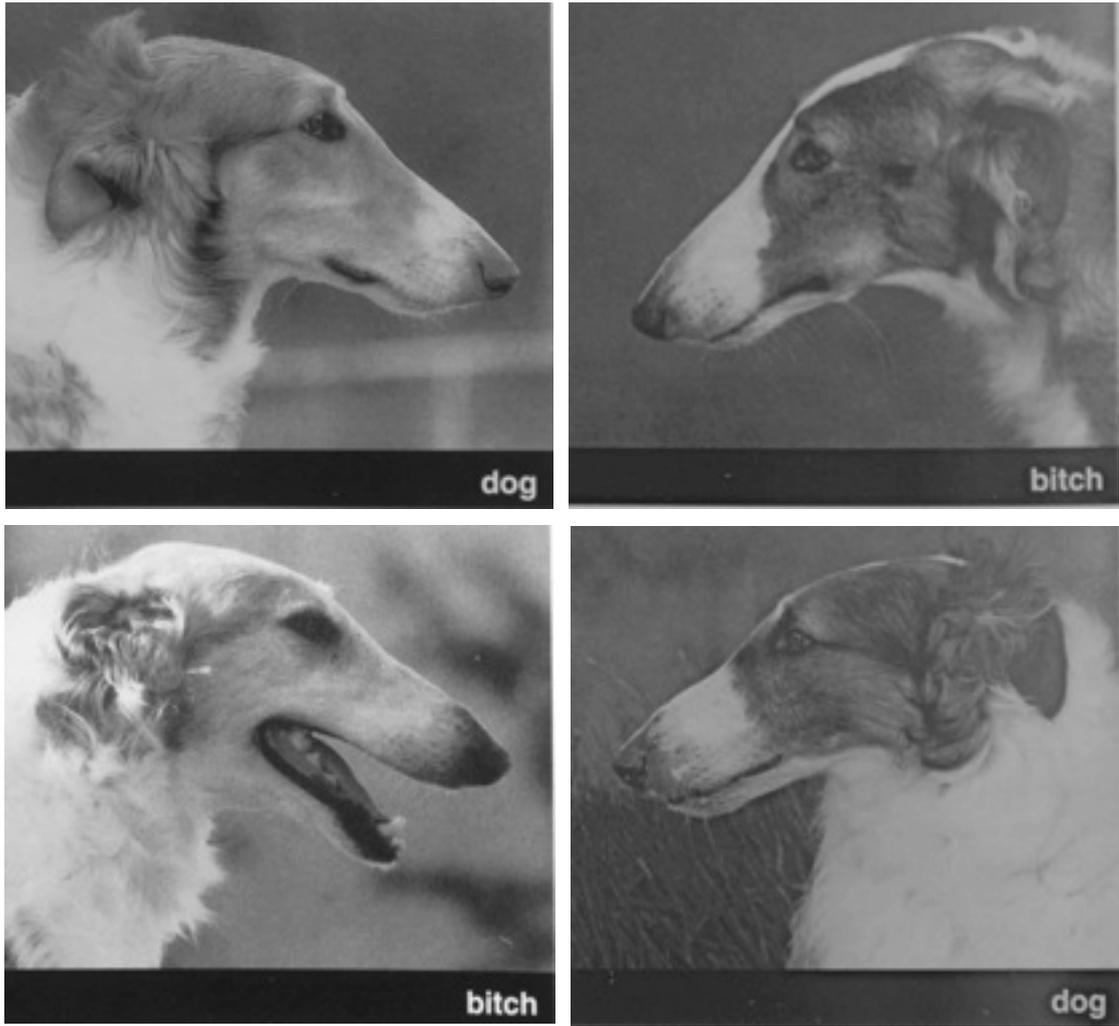


Fig. 2- Correct Heads



Fig. 3

Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig. 6



Fig.7



Fig. 8

! EYES

Dark with intelligent, keen and alert expression. Almond shaped, set obliquely and placed well back but not too wide apart. Eye rims dark. Eyes not light, round, bulbous or staring.

The eyes are the source of expression in the Borzoi face.

Eyes are dark, colour blending with coat is NOT allowed, nor is light rims. Light eyes are to be penalized as are light rims even in all white specimens. The standard states that the eyes are almond shaped, but in fact the eyes itself is round. It is the opening that is almond shaped and set obliquely. The most desired shape is best described as Mongolian. The Borzoi must look intelligent, alert and keen – all necessary for the hunter. Expression hinges very heavily on the eye – it is here you will find the nervous, aggressive or the true “self assured Borzoi temperament” often giving a soft expression. The third eyelid, often referred to as *haws*, should not be prominent, especially when light coloured.

! EARS

Small, pointed and delicate. Set high but not too far apart. Nearly touching at occiput; when in repose, folded back along neck. Should be active and responsive; may be erect when alert, tips sometimes falling over.

The Borzoi's ears are generally nestled on the neck in a curled or 'rose' position, never thrown straight back. One might think when viewing a mature Borzoi with a great neck ruff that the breed has no ears at all. They are small, pointed, delicate and fine in quality, set fairly high so that they almost touch, and in some cases tips may cross behind the occiput. When alerted the ears of the Borzoi are raised to a semi pricked position or just with the tips falling over. However, the use of ears as a test of alertness is not always guaranteed, in true aristocratic sighthound fashion a Borzoi may just choose to look through you.

Overly large, soft ears occasionally may tend to droop or hang down 'hound fashion'. This is a faulty ear. The ear may be the first thing to be seized when hunting wolves, so it should be small.



Fig. 9



Fig.10

! MOUTH

Jaws strong with a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite, i.e. upper teeth closely overlapping lower teeth and set square to the jaws. Full, strong dentition desired.

The teeth should be large and strong with a complete set – 22 lower and 20 upper. Weak under jaws generally tend towards missing premolars, which, although most of the holding power is done by the canine teeth, should be considered detrimental to a sound dog.

The Borzoi mouth must have adequate length of jaw to be able to bite and hold onto his prey.

While one or two missing premolars might not hamper a dog in holding his prey, certainly several missing teeth would do so. It should be remembered, however, that the Borzoi jaws are quite long as compared to those of other breeds.

There will often appear to be gaps in the line of teeth, but counting will determine whether or not there are actually missing.

Dentition

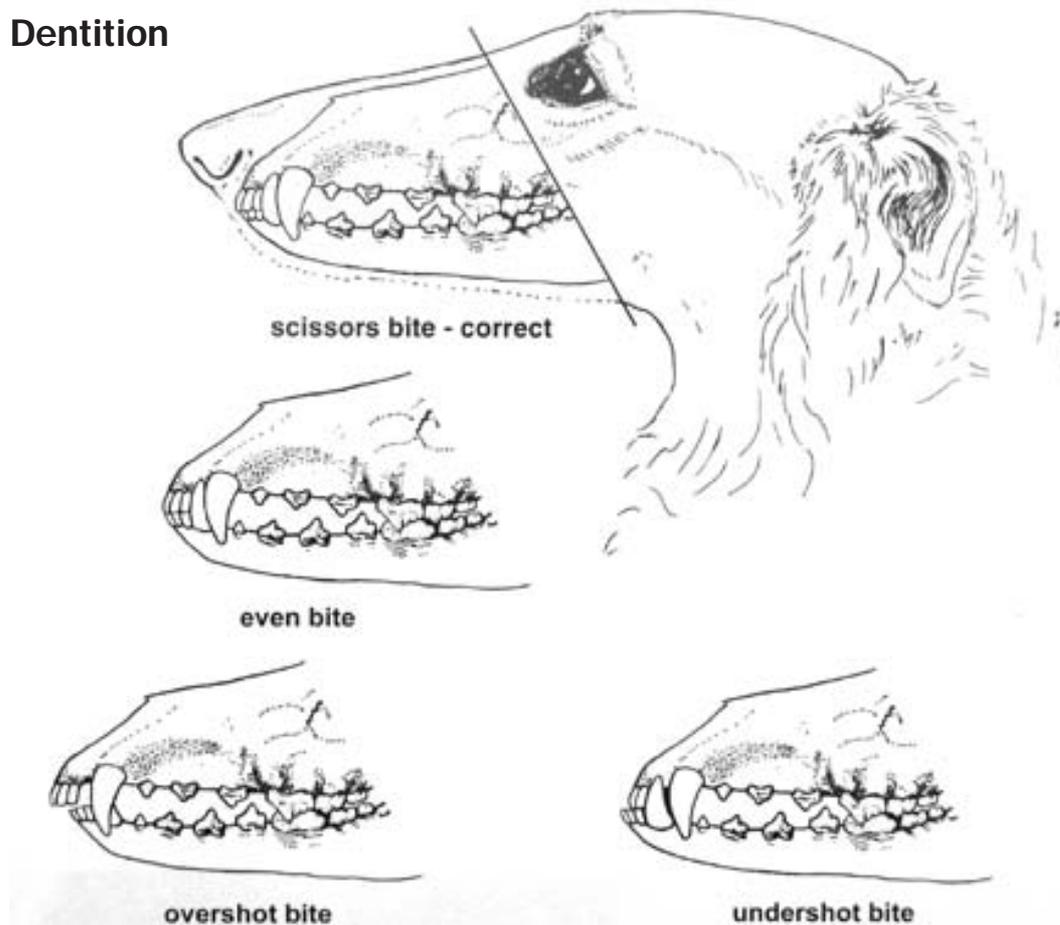


Fig.11- Mouth

I NECK

Slightly arched; reasonably long and well muscled. Free from throatiness, flattened laterally, set at an angle of 50-60 degrees to the longitudinal axis of the body.

According to breed definition the Borzoi must be 'extremely elegant', 'graceful in outline' and 'strong' – the neck is the pivotal point for tying all these qualities together. Ideally the neck is about the same length as the head –if it were long like a drake and therefore a Greyhound, it would be impractical for catching the wolf and would imply weakness for its own particular game – if it were short like a bull it would not have the flexibility also necessary to seize its quarry but would interfere with the essential action of the shoulder blade and thus reach of the foreleg and speed of action. It is also flat (laterally) – another characteristic of the breed – widening to the front of the neck and slightly arched. The arch actually starts at about the 2nd and 3rd vertebrae to allow the flow into the topline.



Fig. 12a - Incorrect necks.

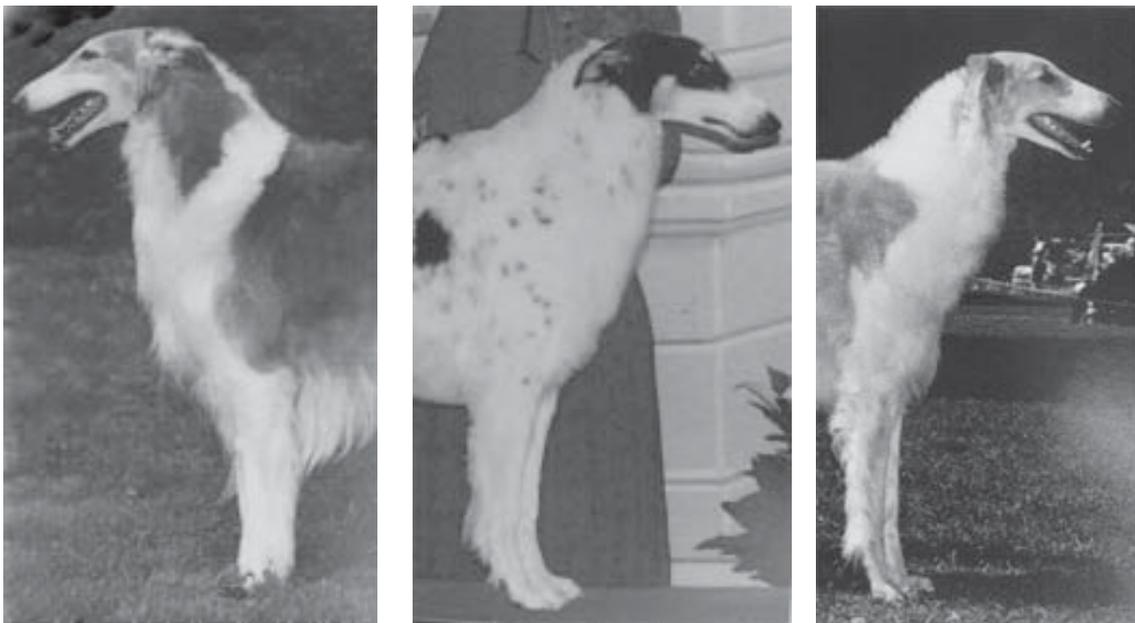


Fig. 12b - Correct necks.

! FOREQUARTERS

Shoulders clean, sloping well back. Muscular but not loaded. Fine at withers but not accentuated. Forelegs clean and straight. Seen from front, narrow like blades; from side, wider at elbows, narrowing down to foot. Elbows directed backwards, turning neither in nor out. Pasterns slightly sloping, strong and flexible. Length of forearm nearly equal to half total height at withers.

“Clean, sloping well back fine at the withers.” In many breeds of dogs it is one area of major concern, since the fault of a straight shoulder produce many adverse effects. It is easy to see and feel.

The elbows should be in a vertical line with the withers and directed to the rear, turning neither in nor out. The front legs should stand under the hound.

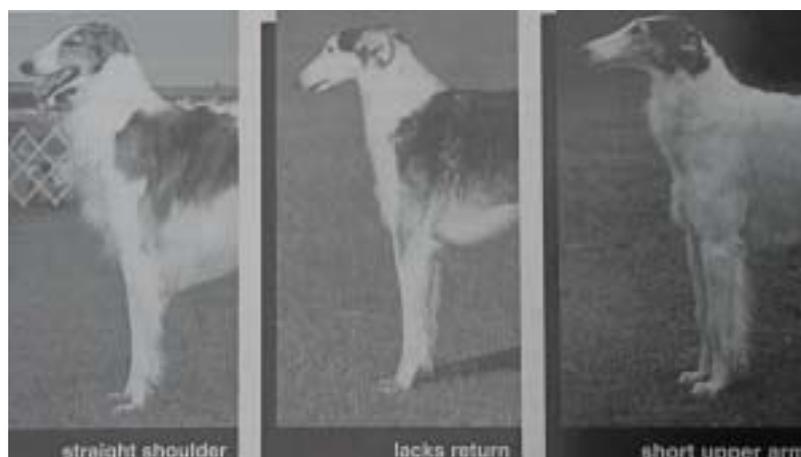
“Fine at withers” refers to the point of the scapula not the width between the forelegs (the ideal for the top of the blades to be the width of three fingers apart). At no time should a Borzoi appear to have the two front legs coming out of one hole. As a general rule the width between the forelegs should equal the width of the back skull (this will also indicate any specimens that are heavy in head). At no time can the shoulders be loaded or coarse. Even in well conditioned specimens the shoulder blade will be easily felt as will the vertebrae of the entire spine.

Blade-like bone is a MUST. Once you feel it, you will know it.

It should be dense and strong but must be pointed at the front of the leg and wider at the rear of the foreleg. It is often described as a star-picket or triangular or oval, it may also feel flat at the sides. Round shaped front legs, although looking heavier in bone, are in fact totally wrong and should be heavily penalised. Viewed from the side, the front leg is wider at the elbow gradually narrowing down to the pastern, again triangular in outline.



Fig. 13- Shoulders



(Straight upper arm)

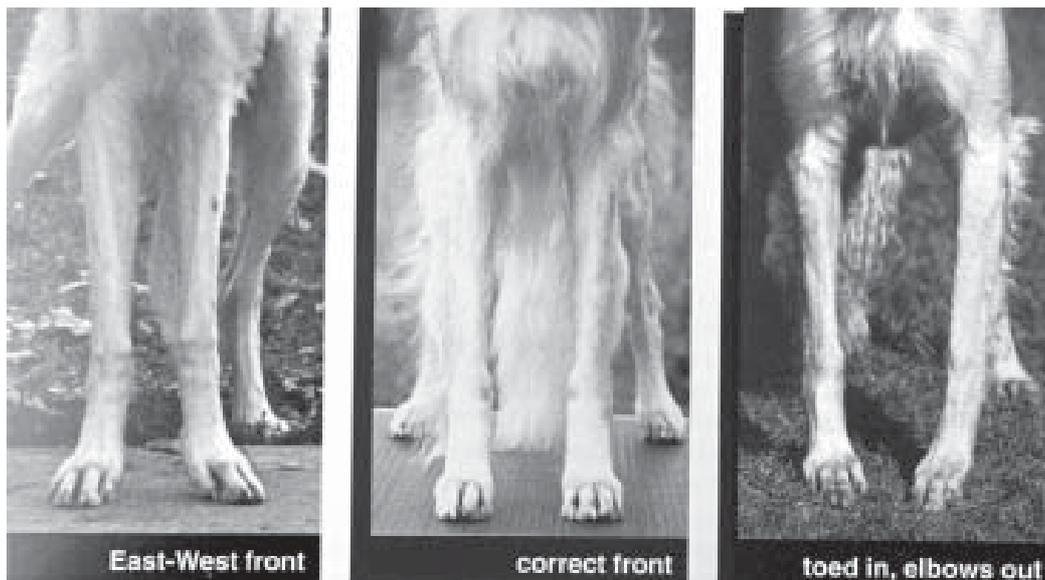
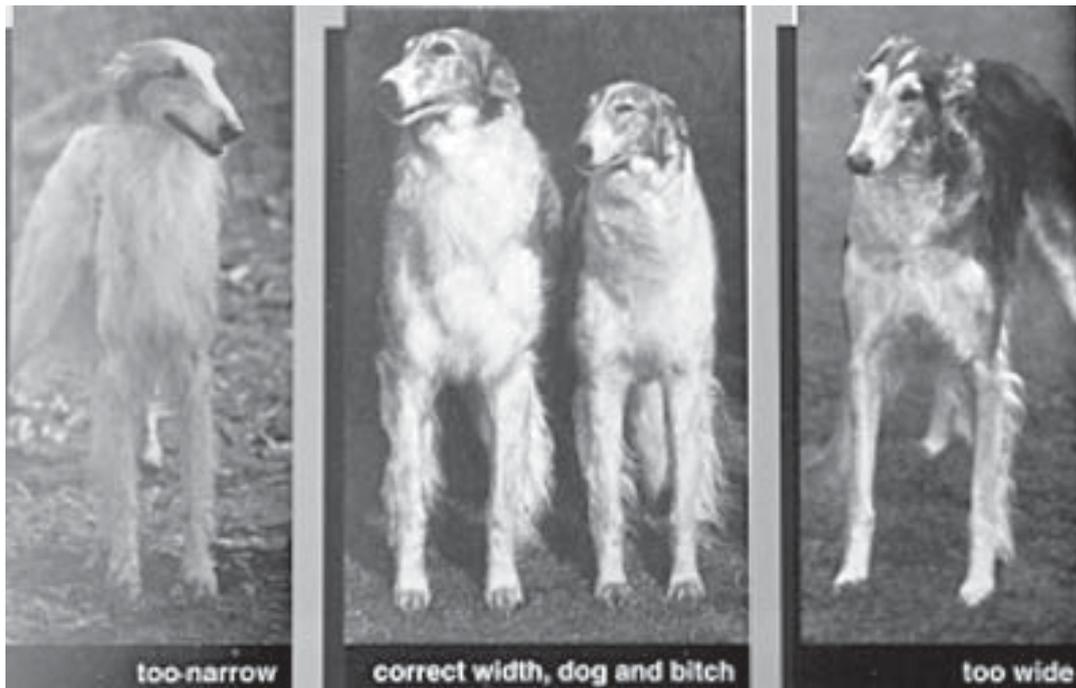


Fig. 14 – Fronts and pasterns

! BODY

Chest, ribs of narrow oval cut, great depth of brisket, reaching to elbows, giving great heart and lung room, especially in mature dogs. Breastbone slightly pronounced with adequate width between elbows, and abdomen very tucked up. Back rather boney, muscular and free from any cavity, rising in a graceful curve with well balanced fall away. Highest point of curve is situated over last rib. Curve is more pronounced in dogs than bitches. Loins broad and very powerful with plenty of muscular development. Fall away long and well muscled. Width between hip bones at least 8 cm (3 ins).

The depth of chest MUST reach at least to the elbow which should be approximately half the total height of the dog at the withers. The ribs should be of oval cut. The dog must be able to run fast, it must be aerodynamically sound. It would never catch a wolf if it had the chest of a Bulldog or a St Bernard, but slab sidedness is inappropriate because of the need of space for heart and lung room.

The Borzoi does not have a keel to its chest as in a Dachshund but the width viewed from the front must permit sound free uncluttered action of the upper arm and facilitate great turning ability. Best described as slightly prominent forechest. Optical illusions can occur when assessing the chest due to short upper arm or very profuse chest feathering.

The height at the withers should be approximately the same as, or slightly more than the height at the hips. The arch should start on the 3rd thoracic vertebrae and given that there is a well balanced fall-away, the highest point will be at the last rib which should be approximately half the total length of the dog. The word 'graceful' ties the whole picture together. The length of head to the neck, length of the neck to topline that flows into the sweep of the tail – a continuous, eye appealing, line that is never ending either STATIONARY or in MOTION.

There are many factors that can affect a correct topline:

1. muscle tone
2. obesity
3. pregnancy
4. length of coat over withers and croup
5. age

We have been given parameters for an acceptable topline and told the dog is to have more than the bitch. Nowhere in the standard does it state that a bitch can be flat or flatter. You are told to go UP the scale NEVER DOWN.

It is accepted that the MINIMUM width between the hip bones should be 8cm (3"). When viewed from behind the hindquarters should appear as the widest part of the dog. The well balanced fallaway necessitates a good length of back croup so that the hindquarters do not have a "tacked on" appearance, and allow width for the thigh musculature.



Fig. 15a – The four (above) show range of acceptable toplines within the standard



Fig. 15b – Incorrect toplines



! HINDQUARTERS

Quarters wider than shoulders, ensuring stability of stance. Thighs long, well developed with good second thigh; hind-legs long and muscular; stifles well angulated; Hocks broad, clean and well let down. Posterior line of hock vertical. Seen from side, legs slightly set back.

This is one of the few breed standards that calls for WIDER hindquarters than forequarters.

There must be the desired propulsion needed to chase its quarry and this needs great muscle power.

There should be good width through the hock when seen in profile to allow the tendon attachment from the second thigh and correct flexibility in the joint.

From wherever viewed the hindquarters are to appear the widest and strongest part of the dog. Therefore when viewing the hound from the front the back feet will lie in a line OUTSIDE that of the front feet.

The croup should be a continuation of the graceful curve of the topline sloping gently down from the hipbone in exactly the same proportions as the arch of the neck and the rise at the spine, neither steep nor flat. Ideally the angulation of the hindquarters should be equal to that of the fore, with long thighs and hocks low to the ground.

With correct front conformation the hindquarters must be equally strong to balance the forward stride. When judging it is important to watch for perfect balance.

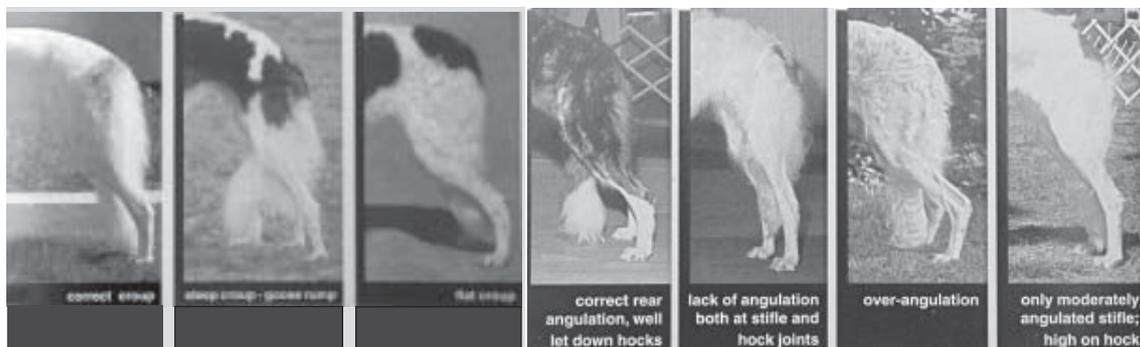
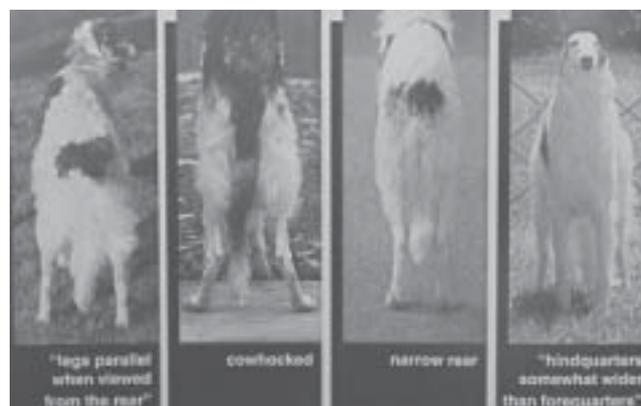


Fig. 16 - Hindquarters



! FEET

Front feet oval, toes close together, well arched over strong thick pads. Turning neither in nor out. Hind feet hare-like, i.e. longer and less arched.

These MUST be long and well arched with toes close together. The Borzoi feet were bred to act as "Snow Shoes". The toes must be sufficiently mobile to cope with any surface and the pads must be thick to cushion his movement. Round or cat feet would not be anywhere near effective in a broad base support in the snow. The hind feet must be long and strong to grip and support ensuring the Borzois' ability to be able to twist and turn whilst in full flight.

For the animal to drive behind and gather ground beneath him – the stress factors must be equally spread from the hip or shoulder right through to the feet, the structure must "mesh" with the formation of his particular body and function. The pasterns must be strong, comparatively short, firm and springy and at a slight angle to the foot.



Fig.17 - Feet

! TAIL

Long, rather low set; when measured between thighs reaches up to top of nearest hip bone. Well feathered, carried low in a graceful curve. From level of the hocks, may be sabre or slightly sickle-shaped but not ringed. In action, not rising above level of back.

The tail is the extension of the spine. The tail is necessary for balancing especially in turning. It must at times in the ring, that is, be carried low in a sickle shape but not ringed. Your eye should be able to tell you if it is long enough but for those of you who wish to measure it, it should be pulled through the thighs. Ideally the tail feathering should reach the ground when the dog is stationary. If the tail is carried over the line of the back, the graceful outline is not apparent.

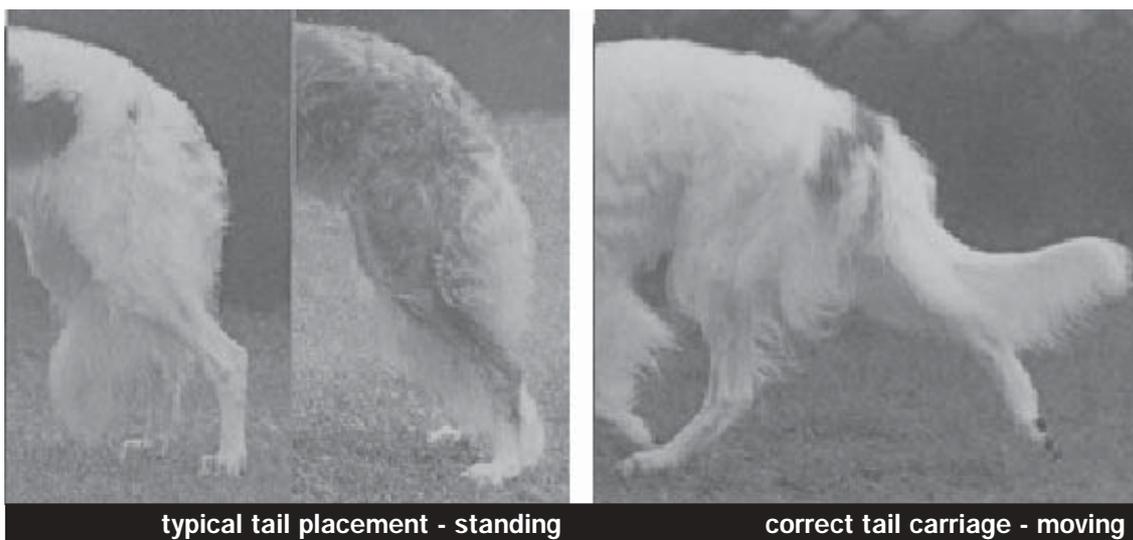
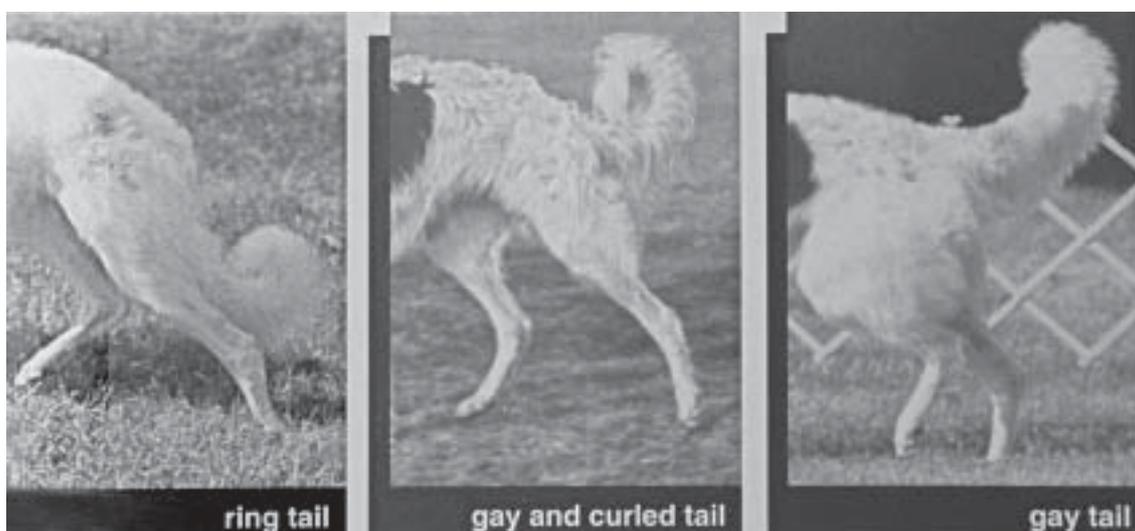


Fig.18b - Tails



! GAIT/MOVEMENT

Front, straight with long reach, pasterns springy. Hind, straight with powerful, driving hocks; moving wider than front. Viewed from side, appearance in action should be that of effortless power.

Unfortunately so few judges are ever able to witness the breathtaking sight of a Borzoi in full flight exhibiting the spectacular "double suspension gallop". The times when the conformation of the animal is put to the supreme test can only be in areas much larger than any show ring size and also much faster than any handler would be capable of keeping up with. Gait is the test of conformation, particularly side movement. If a dog is made well it will move well.

When viewed from the side there should be noticeable drive from well angulated stifles and flexible hocks, together with ground covering front movement. Straight extension of the foreleg in front with pasterns strong and springy with top line visible.

At no time hackneyed, mincing or short striding. The head will not be held as high in gait as when stacked or free standing. The overall appearance should be one of effortless power, endurance, speed, agility, smoothness and grace.

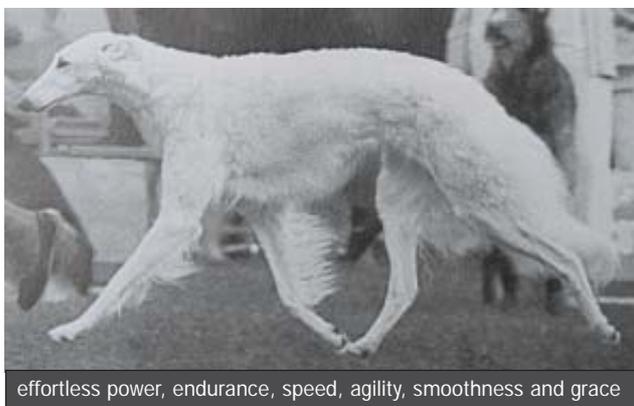


Fig.19 - Movement



Fig. 20- Suspension gallop

! COAT

Silky, flat, wavy or curly (but never woolly). Short and smooth on head, ears and front of legs; much longer on body with heavy feathering on backs of legs and hindquarters, tail and chest. Neck carries a large curly frill; more profuse in dogs than bitches.

Here is one of the great differences between the male and female. So much importance is placed on length and quantity rather than texture. Yet a dog of profuse coarse coat would not resist the extreme Russian winter anywhere near as well as a lesser coated animal with correct texture. It should be like silk or velvet to the touch. The Borzoi is a triple coated animal: top coat, undercoat and guard hairs. (These extremely long and rather sparsely scattered hairs appear on mature animals only)

Generally the male carries a more profuse coat, with greater length, especially on the fore chest and in rear quarters or pants. The neck coat generally is very profuse and curly – curling upwards and towards the head as does the hair over the topline. The back of the forelegs tend to carry good length of coat and of course tail feathering should be profuse. Notwithstanding the fact that the Borzoi is a coursing hound and NEVER should there be so much coat as to interfere with the movement or function.

Head, ears and front of forelegs – short, smooth and flat, the purists will say that the Borzoi should be shown “au naturel” that meaning no trimming but this will be purely a personal preference. However shape and conformation should NEVER be scissored in.

The texture of the coat is much more important than the amount or waviness or curliness. It should be silky, never wooly or wiry or harsh. A coat in good condition will be soft and lustrous. (Often just after a coat drop, the texture may be temporarily a bit coarse). Extremes in straightness or curliness, however, do not contribute to the ideal picture of the Borzoi. The coat very definitely lends itself towards an elegant appearance. However, a Borzoi should not carry so much coat that he appears out of proportion or unsuitable as a hunting dog.

! COLOUR

Any colour acceptable, with the exception of merle.

It should be also noted that any colour combination is acceptable.

! SIZE

Minimum height at withers:

Dogs: 74 cm (29 ins)

Bitches: 68 cm (27 ins)

There are no maximum limitations, simply the minimum 74cm (29") dogs 68cm (27") bitches. Although today a dog of 74cm is well within the standard, he would be considered too small to do any serious winning.

! FAULTS

Any departure from the foregoing should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog.

! NOTE

Males animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Borzoi: John Gordon

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Borzoi Lecture: D Tuck

Borzoi Lecture – From Russia With Love: C Rafton