

The Borzoi

Compiled by Borzoi Canada

“Oh, what a beautiful dog! What is it?”

How many times have we heard this when walking our Borzoi, whether at a dog show or the park? Unique in appearance, they always draw attention where ever they go. Their sweet personality and a gentle demeanor, even though they are a large breed, makes them a pleasure to take almost anywhere without being intrusive.

Truly an aristocrat of the dog world, they are considered by many to be one of the most beautiful and intelligent member of the sight hound family. Once you own, or are owned, by a Borzoi you'll never forget their intense love and loyalty.



Veni Harlan photo

History

Known by many names around the world - Russian Wolfhound, Russian Windhound, the Siberian Wolfhound, Barzoi, Russkaya Psovaya Borzaya and Psovoi to name a few - there are many theories on how the Borzoi came to be. The first written account of hare-coursing dogs of Borzoi type was a Russian document dated 1260. Persian Greyhounds, Saluki type dogs and heavier coated hardier Russian boarhounds or sheepdogs all could have played a role in their development.

The Borzoi was considered a working dog then and colour was of little importance compared to great speed and strength. Cross breeding occurred when the owner thought such a breeding would produce a better working dog. Because of the great distances involved and transport difficulties, breeders were forced to line breed and inbreed their stock and so set the breed. Out crossing later did little harm. Because they were so highly prized as a hunting and coursing dog, the crossbreeding was very carefully done, usually with a greyhound type dog. There became two distinct types of early Borzoi, the Siberian and the Circassian. The Siberian had a close thick undercoat and the colouring was usually white and lemon, tan or brindling markings. The Circassian type had a flat coat of about two inches but with profuse feathering of the front legs and thighs and thick curls around the neck. The Imperial Kennels of the Czars, known as Gatchin, were started in 1613. In 1650 a book of rules for Borzoi hunting was published and dedicated to Czar Alexis.

In the seventeenth century the favourite sport of Russian nobility was coursing or hunting deer, foxes, hares and wolves. They maintained huge kennels of 150 – 160 Borzoi. They were highly cherished for their extreme swiftness, agility, courage, as well as their ability to sight, catch and hold their prey. To acquire a Borzoi was only on presentation as a gift. Czar Nicholas I presented Queen Victoria with the first pair of Borzoi. Later Czar Nicholas II of Russia gifted the Princess of Wales (later Queen Alexandra) with “Alex,” - a great champion and the Queen’s favourite. The Duchess of Manchester was given “Katae”, the first Borzoi exhibited in England in 1863. This was the beginning of their popularity in England.

Borzoi were first shown in Moscow in 1824. In 1860, British royalty began breeding and exhibited the Borzoi presented to them by the Russian nobility. In 1892 the Borzoi Club of England was founded. In 1893 the AKC had a total of 8 Russian Wolfhounds registered and in 1903 a group of fanciers formed the Russian Wolfhound

Club of America. In 1936 the breed's name was officially changed to Borzoi conforming to the name used by European kennel clubs.

In the years 1917-1919, the Russian Revolution saw many of these great dogs destroyed, but thankfully many found their way to North America, England and other European countries.

In Canada

The first known breed standard in the world, dating from 1650, closely resembles today's standard in all countries, including Canada. By 1900, the CKC had around 14 dogs registered. John G. Kent, of Toronto imported several Borzoi from General Boldareff's kennel in Russia. Then in about 1907 Mrs. O'Brien, Mr. Zuercher and Dr. E.A. Harrington imported dogs from the Valley Farm in the US and soon became leaders in the breeding and exhibiting of Borzoi during those early years. Mr. A.V. Webley started his Tolstoy Kennels in 1918. He bred the famous Morvich of Tolstoi who, at nine months of age, soared from the novice class to Best of Breed at the 1922 Westminster show in New York, judged by J. Bailey Wilson, and in 1924 he returned to Westminster to repeat this win. Mrs. Janet Patterson, Romanoff Kennels from Brantford, ON, was also building a reputation to become legend.

There were many breeders over the next few decades that helped build the foundation and the reputation of the fine Canadian Borzoi you see today. Olive Dewsbury, Dewsa Kennels, from 1954 bred quality Borzoi for several years, then in 1961 her son Fred Dewsbury established his own Duchenka Kennels in Rockwood, ON. Audrey Benbow, Sirhan Kennels started breeding Borzoi in 1960 - the Sirhan line can be found behind many of today's finest Borzoi kennels. Others include Jean and Jack Vandongen's Bordonsky Kennels, primarily working with Dutch lines; Laura Nels, Lanel Kennels, and Dr. Dick Meen and Dr. John Reeve-Newson - all helped to build the fine reputation Canadian Borzoi have today in the world today. Their dogs definitely exemplified the expression "Unmistakable Elegance!"



Judging Borzoi

Great attention should be given to sound running gear and the condition of the dog. A Borzoi was meant to run and have great strength so an animal should be shown in top shape and make that impression whether moving or standing still. When you put your hands on them they should feel strong and firm.

The average size for males is 28 – 32 inches and between 75 – 105 pounds, and bitches should be about 2 inches less and from 15 – 20 lbs less in weight. A scissors bite is preferred but a level bite is acceptable. Full dentition is preferred.

Flat top lines, gay tails and incorrect movement should be penalized to the degree of the short coming, and its detraction from the function of this athletic hound. The full CKC standard can be viewed at www.borzoicanada.ca

Form and Function

Their general appearance could best be described as a long haired greyhound. They should always maintain an appearance of elegance with great power.

Their coats are most impressive. Males normally carry it long, wavy or curly with a somewhat silky texture. Females often have a more plush coat and not as long and profuse as the males. Any colour is acceptable and occasionally whole coloured dogs appear which are most definitely allowed.

The neck is powerful and slightly arched. Their chest is rather narrow but the brisket is deep and you should still be able to put a good hand width between the front legs but never barrel shaped or too slab sided. They should have a good spring of rib. The back rises OVER THEIR LOINS in a graceful curve; never exaggerated and not flat backed. They have a good tuck up, allowing free action of the hind legs for quick turns. The hind-quarters should be muscular and powerful with well bent stifles.

The tail is set low and carried in a graceful curve. The feet of a Borzoi are hare-shaped with well arched knuckles.

The Borzoi develops slowly and is seldom mature until the age of three – four. Young dogs should not be expected to have the depth of brisket called for in the standard until such age is reached.

They should possess good reach and drive when gaiting and this effortless movement should display a floating, easy gracefulness that exemplifies athleticism. The front should never prance, cross over, or turn in/out. The rear is wider than the front but they will converge to center at faster speeds.

Borzoi are known for their speed and agility in overtaking such quarry as wolf, hare, fox and coyotes and are quite likely to pluck a bird out of the sky if within range. However, Borzoi should always be gentle, trustworthy and most content with people. They are very gentle with children when raised with them.

Health

The Borzoi is a relatively healthy breed. Common health tests include eye exams (PRA primarily), heart testing for Cardio myopathy, as well as thyroid levels. Given their physiology, they are not prone to dysplasia of the hips or elbows. Occasionally you will see poor patellas. They are also known to experience Bloat/Gastric torsion, a condition associated with large deep chested breeds. While there are no definitive genetic markers, some breeders feel that feeding a good meat based dog food or a natural diet will minimize any torsion problems that could occur. For the most part, however, Borzoi are healthy, with a lifespan of 10 – 12 years of age.

Overview

The Borzoi is a breed that can easily fit into anyone's life – they are that easy going and adaptable. They are not usually noisy, and rarely bark. They love to run, but love to sit on the couch or floor beside you. They are not known for chasing sticks and balls but every now and again one will. They loved to be loved and will return it to you two-fold. Brush them lots in the spring and fall, and you'll have one of the best most endearing friends you could ever image. They love to go on walks, meet people, sit on the couch, run after the bunny and in general be that old hound dog that sits beside you – wrapped in beauty!