An Introduction to the Borzoi


Illustration by Patti Wilcox-Neale

History

The Borzoi, once known as the Russian Wolfhound, was bred in Asia for hundreds of years. There are accounts of hunting expeditions of Mongolic rulers from the time of Genghis Khan, in the thirteenth century, in which long hounds were mentioned as principal coursing dogs. In Russia, the precursors of the Borzoi were thought to encompass several different types, including the long-coated, smooth-faced bear hound of early Russia, the Southern coursing hounds of the Tatars, a tall Russian Sheepdog, as well as other ancient sighthound types. By 1260, the coursing of hare for sport is mentioned in connection with the court of the Grand Duke of Novgorod.

In 1650 the first Borzoi standard, which did not differ greatly from the modern standard, was written. By 1861, hunting game such as wolf, fox, and hare with Borzoi became the national sport of the Russian aristocracy.

The Borzoi was developed to meet the criteria of the hunt, which included courage, speed, agility and strength. Although he still retains his instincts and abilities for the hunt, today's Borzoi is also highly prized for his beauty, intelligence, and gentle nature, making him a wonderful companion.

Borzoi in General

The Borzoi is a very tall, fast, agile, and elegant hound with a long to medium length silky coat, that can be straight, wavy or curly. Unlike most breeds of dogs, the Borzoi can do a double suspension gallop, and therefore needs a rather narrow but deep chest, bladed bone and a topline that is SLIGHTLY arched over the loin. They are considered a giant breed, with an average height at the withers of 26 to 32 inches, weighing 50 – 100 pounds, depending on gender. Even though Borzoi are large dogs, they are graceful animals that make great house dogs.

They can come in any color or pattern of colors. Borzoi are sighthounds, which are dogs bred to course (chase) game by sight. Borzoi like to run and they are very fast. That is why they should always be in a fenced area or on a leash. It is never advisable to allow a Borzoi to run loose in an unfenced area. Being sighthounds, they are apt to chase any small animal that runs, especially cats. Your Borzoi may be fine with your indoor cat, but may change his attitude outdoors when the cat runs from him. The Borzoi is a gentle dog that is usually well-mannered and seldom barks. They are quite catlike (independent and undemanding) in the house as adults, sensitive, and very affectionate with their owners.

Small children should always be supervised when around a Borzoi (and with any dog). Due to their sensitive nature, most borzoi do not enjoy rough-housing. Borzoi should get along with other dogs. They should never be aggressive or shy but may be reserved. A young puppy will not look like a miniature adult and usually doesn't reach maturity for three or four years.

Grooming

Regular brushing and bathing are necessary to maintain the Borzoi's lustrous coat and keep shedding to a minimum. Grooming should always be a pleasant experience. A good pin brush is excellent for the coat…not a slicker brush (they have bent pins and will break and tear the coat). Toenails should receive regular attention and not be allowed to get too long. Ears and teeth also need to be kept clean. Borzoi should always be shown clean and groomed. All trimming should be in moderation.

Training

The key to training is consistency and patience. Borzoi need to be taught to walk on lead, to come when called, and to greet other dogs and people politely. Useful commands are sit, down, stay, and leave it. Leash training a Borzoi pup is not always easy as they are very independent, free-thinking hounds. In the beginning, use a treat to make him forget the leash and come with you. Be firm and gentle and never lose your composure, as this only leads to frustration on your part and a terrified puppy on the other end of the lead. If frustration sets in, quit, and try again later. A martingale collar is preferable because borzoi have narrow skulls, and a buckle collar can slip off their heads. Borzoi are gentle, sensitive dogs, and harsh corrections

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should not be needed. Make the training fun for your Borzoi with praise, treats, and petting.

Health Concerns

As a breed, Borzoi have relatively few health problems. Hip Dysplasia is rare. More common are various kinds of cancer, heart problems, bloat and torsion. Your breeder should have tested the parents for thyroid function, heart disease, eye disease, and Degenerative Myelopathy. You should to talk to your vet and become familiar with the symptoms of bloat, and seek immediate vet attention if you suspect it.

Some Borzoi are very sensitive to certain types of anesthesia, and if your Borzoi has to have surgery, your vet needs to be aware of this. Because of their lack of body fat, Borzoi may respond to drugs differently.

Borzoi grow slowly, and sexual maturity is typically 12-18 months or later. For health reasons, BCOA recommends delaying spay/neuter until sexual maturity. Show dogs must remain intact. Regular veterinary care, proper feeding, and adequate exercise are vital to maintaining your dog's good health. Follow your veterinarian's advice for vaccinations, and parasite control.

Many Borzoi Club of America members support health research for the Borzoi through the AKC Canine Health Foundation—a nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to help dogs live longer, healthier lives. For more information about Borzoi health, call 888-682-9696 or see

www.akcchf.org

Identification

Protect your Borzoi in case he is lost with permanent identification. A microchip or tattoo can be registered with AKC Reunite. For information, call 800-252-7894 or

www.akcreunite.org

Reputable Borzoi Owners/Breeders

Breeders and owners who are members of the Borzoi Club of America are required to abide by the BCOA Code of Ethics.

www.borzoiclubofamerica.org/code-of-ethics.html

This includes: abiding by the rules of BCOA and AKC; providing the best possible environment for their dogs' physical and emotional well-being. As a new owner, hopefully you have purchased from such a breeder. If so, we recommend that you keep in touch with your dog's breeder and use them as a resource for advice and guidance. If you need additional help, feel free to contact any BCOA officer of regional governor for assistance:

www.borzoiclubofamerica.org/about-officers.php

Fun Activities with your Borzoi

There are so many activities you can enjoy with your Borzoi, including lure coursing, conformation (dog shows), agility, obedience, racing, tracking and therapy work. Information on these can be found on the following websites:

- The American Kennel Club: **www.akc.org**
- The American Sighthound Field Advisory (ASFA): **www.asfa.org**
- The Large Gazehound Racing Association (LGRA): **www.lgra.org**
- The National Oval Track Racing Association (NOTRA): **www.notra.org**

Resources

The best source for information about Borzoi is the Borzoi Club of America website:

www.borzoiclubofamerica.org

On the main page:



- "Inside BCOA" (Constitution and Bylaws, standing rules, officers, committees, membership application forms, guidelines for breeders, regional clubs' officers, locations and dates of regional specialties).
- "About Borzoi" (information on showing in conformation, obedience, agility and lure coursing, breeder referral, information on owning & caring for Borzoi, the Borzoi Standard, books, articles and videos).
- "Breed Welfare" (lost dog help, placement assistance, rescue flyer),
- "Events" (National Specialty, futurity, triathlon, regional specialties, trophy supported events).
- "Health" (CHIC, Holter, Borzoi health news, research, sudden death survey).
- "History" (national specialty results with pictures, dogs pictured in the pedigree books, titles earned by borzoi).
- "Programs" (Judges education, members education seminars, junior showmanship, Registry of Merit, Versatility annual and lifetime awards).
- "Publications" (*The Aristocrat* a free online quarterly magazine published by the Borzoi Club of America, *AKC Gazette* columns, BCOA pedigree books, the Unique Zoitiques articles, and The Visualization of the Borzoi Standard. The color Visualization can be purchased online as a booklet, as a CD or as a pdf file. The Visualization of the Borzoi is a highly acclaimed guide on the Borzoi standard and a must for fanciers and judges.
- "Shopping" (pay dues and make donations to health and rescue online, purchase publications about Borzoi, purchase items with Borzoi on them).