

## Borzoi

### Bits and Bites

How important are bites? In a standard that calls for either a scissors or level bite as acceptable, there can be differing interpretations of just what is correct. Starting with a headpiece that is long and rather narrow yet with powerful jaws, we are already walking a thin line of genetic evolution. The Borzoi head is an exaggeration of the canine genus. With no perceptible stop, and planes that are level to slightly down in angle, the delicate balance of a correct bite is already at risk.

Lorraine Groshans, in her book *The Complete Borzoi* (published 1981), writes that “teeth must be set in a powerful foundation.” The six incisors fit neatly and closely over the lower six incisors, forming a scissor bite, while in a level bite the upper and lower meet edge to edge. A wry bite occurs when the teeth do not line up top to bottom or side to side, with undershot on one side and overshot on the other. A wry bite is a serious fault and one that should be penalized. Not only should the bite be correct concerning the incisors, but also the four canines should mesh neatly top to bottom and not interfere with the closure of the jaw. Canine teeth that either flare out at an angle from the mouth or are positioned as in some cases with the lower canines actually inside the uppers, causing the tips to interfere with the palate, are incorrect.

Not mentioned directly in the stan-

dard is the shape of the lower jaw and incisors. The six incisors should form a “U” shape within the lower jaw. Often you will see a “V” shape to the lower jaw where as the dog ages the two center incisors will pop out in front of the uppers, while the other four remain in a scissors bite. While undesirable, this is not an undershot bite. Breeders need to be careful of not only the depth of underjaw but also its width. With the difference in pressure between the force of the tongue pushing on the teeth versus the “holding power” of the tissue on the outside of the gums, over time the two center incisors can move forward out of alignment. Certainly popped teeth are not desirable, but in an older dog this would be more acceptable than a young dog.

It is a very difficult head to get right, as we are already at the extremes in width and length from most other breeds. Too narrow, and you would question the strong jaws that the breed needs to do its job; too wide, and it loses its elegance.

There needs to be width of the underjaw as well as depth to form a powerful foundation for the teeth. Narrow, snippy muzzles are unacceptable for the job of catching and holding their prey. Breeders need to hold strong and fast and not accept anything less than a good bite when considering a breeding.

In a breed that balances on a thin line between strength and beauty, elegance and function, a waver here will set the stage for disaster later.

If you don't think bites and jaw shape are genetic, then how do you suppose we got these heads to begin with?

—Jon Steele, [jonauroal@gmail.com](mailto:jonauroal@gmail.com)

Borzoi Club of America website: [borzoiclubofamerica.org](http://borzoiclubofamerica.org)