

Borzoi

The Surprisingly Versatile Borzoi

If you have read any of those “How smart is your breed?” articles, you can stop looking for the Borzoi—they will never be listed. Borzoi are smart, and they are excellent problem-solvers. The question is one of amiability. If they are interested in what you want to teach them, they are quick learners; if not, you may as well find something else for them to do. Borzoi were bred to think for themselves, on hunts that occur at distances and at speeds far outstripping their owners’ abilities.

So just how versatile are they? Let’s look at a few things that might surprise you.

First, there is Patti Neale, who has been carting with her Borzoi for years. She uses her dogs in pairs that pull her in a cart, which is great exercise for them. At the AKC/Eukanuba event in Orlando’s “Meet the Breeds,” Patti has been seen in full Russian dress giving cart rides to kids in the exhibition hall, to the delight of the spectators. And

yes, her Borzoi love it.

There is Christa Wagner, whose Borzoi Ira lives at a school for girls and has taken to dock diving. She has posted videos of her dog enthusiastically anticipating his chance to jump into the water. There are many other Borzoi who have also competed in this event with great success. Borzoi have deep, narrow chests and large lung capacity in a rather narrow body, which makes it hard for them to be great swimmers. Their chest rises out of the water, and the long, muscular loin and rear quarters sink. It takes great work for a Borzoi to be an avid swimmer—but once they learn the balancing part, they can be strong swimmers. At our summer home, all our Borzoi swim, some better than others. A few will stand on the bottom with their hind legs and splash with their front legs with little to no forward motion. Others surprisingly have become excellent swimmers.

Being sighthounds and supposedly having better sight than scent, most would not expect them to be able to achieve a tracking title, but Linda Beisswenger, DVM, has achieved the Tracking Dog Excellent, Variable Surface Tracker, and Champion Tracker titles with Ch./CT Romanoc Gerhard’s Gase of Coburn, GRC, CDX, BN, RAE, JC.

Linda Cantoni Sarman has added course lure trials to her list of Borzoi accomplishments. Course lure trials are part lure trial, part obstacle course. She has even started training for search and rescue. It will be interesting to see how that goes, as the number of hours to obtain certification may be far beyond a Borzoi’s attention span.

As for movie stars, the Borzoi featured in *The Hunger Games* are owned by Lou Avant, and she is just one of many Borzoi owners who have lent their dogs for the silver screen. In ballet, the production

Giselle has featured Priscilla White-Lineker’s Borzoi, with the dogs eating up the stage and relishing the photo shoots. Not to be left out is Karen Staudt-Cartabona, who has had her dogs featured in many fashion magazines and advertisements over the years.

Borzoi can also excel at therapy work. They are docile, quiet, and sensitive, and thrive when socialized to do hospital and nursing home visits. They are aloof, yes, but smart enough to know someone in need versus someone whom they can’t be bothered with.

The list of versatility goes on, including my amiable dogs who love being crew members on our boat. Riding in the open bow, with their hair blowing in the breeze, there’s not a dog I can think of that would make a better figurehead. The key to training any task for a Borzoi may be to let them think it is their idea.

Borzoi may not be your first choice of a versatile dog, but given the training and chance, they may surprise you.

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