
Borzoi

FROM THE BORZOI FANCY: WHAT JUDGES NEED TO KNOW

In preparing a small handout for judges, I asked 14 breeders for five priorities that they feel judges should consider in their evaluation of our breed. In this group there is a combined 500 years of breeding experience. The contributors are breeders of hundreds of champions, Best in Show and specialty winners, and group placers, as well as veterinarians and AKC judges of the breed, the Hound Group, and Best in Show. I even included comments from the late Asa Mays through his writings, compliments of Karen Mays. The following is their priorities and concerns.

The most often mentioned breed element was topline. There was a consensus that judges still do not reward the best toplines in the ring. "Slight rise over the loin with flexibility evident on the trot." Too stiff, too far forward, or nonexistent is wrong.

The second most-mentioned element was gait, which is very important for this breed.

Most often mentioned in the comments was "free and easy movement, not hackneyed, mincing, weaving or crossing." There is a general frustration with judges who put up restricted movement or poor movers, thereby doing this breed a huge disservice.

Third was elegance. This element was not always mentioned as a separate item but was always interlaced throughout the comments when describing overall balance of the dog, both standing and moving.

Tied for fourth were neck-set and missing teeth, with an equal number of responses. The neck-set should be a smooth transition into the shoulders. The dog should not be goose necked nor with the neck set too low; the neck should be strong and powerful for taking down their prey.

There were several comments on judges who are "tooth fairies" who miss the overall better dog because of one missing tooth. The standard was changed to include missing teeth, and the problem of multiple missing teeth should be discouraged, but one or two missing was not an issue for most of the respondents.

Followed behind the above elements were condition, coat, head, ears, bladed bone, feet, and size. Borzoi should be in good condition, with muscling appropriate for a working hound.

Coat came under two categories, type and grooming. First, there are several types of coat,

from wavy, to straight, to curly and short, plush body coats—all acceptable. A special note was that bitches blow their coats and should not be penalized for lack of coat in late spring or summer. The second topic on coat was a consensus on over-grooming. Borzoi should be clean and tidy, but not over-groomed. Scissoring off guard hairs or sculpting-in a topline is not necessary. Do not reward the over-groomed dog with incorrect structure to a Borzoi with a rougher appearance. This is a breed you have to feel with your hands and get into the coat to evaluate structure, not go by what the handler wants you to see.

Ears should be small and rose, not hanging nor with thick leather. Several breeders believe small, tight ears lead to better ligaments for fieldwork.

Size: Bigger is not always better. The standard is 28 inches for males, 26 inches for bitches. For the Borzoi to be under standard size a serious fault.

Borzoi have bladed bone, not round. Feel for it on the forelegs if you question the correct shape. Feet are hare shaped; they are not cat feet, nor splayed.

Other important elements mentioned in the survey were color, tail-set, tight ligaments, shoulders, and temperament.

Concerning color, preference and distribution is unimportant. Markings can mask conforma-

tion; don't get lost by a marking that is in contrast to the underlying structure.

Tail-set should not be high. Borzoi will use their tails at speed for counter balance, but a ring or gay tail is an issue.

Regarding temperament, this breed should have courage but never be aggressive nor shy. Borzoi can be aloof. Don't be surprised if they appear uninterested in being examined—it is part of breed type. Historically they worked in teams, and they should get along with other dogs.

These 14 Borzoi breeders all felt that judging has not improved in recent years. With so many new judges, these breeders would rather see better judges who understand that the Borzoi is not easy to breed. With their large size, long bones, sound movement, distinctive topline, and coats for surviving the harshest of climates, Borzoi are a fine balance between power and elegance. Their heads are long, with good fill in front of the eyes and small, rose ears adding to that elegant profile.

The future is in your hands. Please use your hands—not just your eye—to evaluate our breed. Our future is in the decisions you make in your ring.

The entire responses will be available online—please e-mail me, and I will be glad to supply the originals.—Jon Steele

jonaworral@gmail.com

Borzoi Club of America