
Borzoi

THE BREEDER'S PICK: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DECISION-MAKING

I have written before that familiarity has a huge impact on people's breeding programs, whether intentional or not. Both consciously and subconsciously, we seek out that which is familiar over something that is new. When you pick a stud dog, often it is to complement your bitch, but seldom is it to change your type.

I had regularly bred with an old-time breeder and never had a problem picking puppies. My wife and I picked puppies who were a combination of both lines, and the other breeder picked puppies who looked like their dogs. Perceived or not, this

breeder's intention was to pick the puppies who looked familiar, and over time the style of this breeder's line was kept intact. The focus of our program was to introduce new influences, and we picked for puppies who were a blend of both parents, and our lines have changed over time. Not always was it successful, but in the long run our dogs are much better now than they were 25 years ago.

The art of choice is not easy. A combination of intelligence, experience, and gut all play a role in breeding. Emotion is also a key element that can cancel out any of the other three factors. People try to repeat breedings to get a dog who resembles a dog from the past. Borzoi, unlike some breeds, come in a huge variety of colors and patterns, and that influences the decision as well. I think a lot of breeders see color and genetics as having some form of relation, although the genetic markers for color and conformation have yet to be confirmed.

If you really are going to be unbiased in picking a puppy, you have to put aside the tendency to pick from color, markings, and your personal emotions. You have to fight against the tendency of familiarity and not necessarily pick on first impression. If you look at successful businessmen, you see people who are successful over long periods of

time. This is not just random good luck but due to sound decision-making. Breeders are the same, and there are many breeders who have been able to repeat their success over time. Often these successful breeders share some common elements, research, dedication, experience, and failure. Failure is a part of success, especially when you use that failure to improve. There is a relevant quote from an episode of *Game of Thrones*: After a character lost a battle, his mentor said, "So you failed; now get back out there and fail again." Sage advice, and I think failure is a building block of success.

Maybe it is failure that helps hone that gut decision. Experience can only happen with hard work and time. Dedication is a commitment that lays the foundation over time. Research is ongoing, and doing your homework is vital. How we pick a puppy to carry on our breeding program is so important to the longevity and success of that program. It is a constant struggle to fight the tendency to seek out the familiar. If comfort equals familiar, then maybe we all need to venture outside our comfort zone if we are to succeed.

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