



World

information that had been reported in the past was incorrect. One reason was the difficulty in getting accurate translation from Russian. It was not until 2008, at our 10th conference in St. Petersburg, Russia, that the Russian breeders were first able to attend. Their input has greatly added to understanding the ancient history of the Borzoi.

Whenever the word "Borzoi" appeared in Russian texts, the assumption was that it referred to the breed as we know it today. However, *borzaya* means the more general "Sighthound." *Psovaya Borzaya*, which means "long-haired Sighthound," is the Russian name for the Borzoi we recognize today. Many of the translations were actually about Greyhounds or other Sighthounds. Also, many of the Russian terms used prior to the Russian revolution no longer exist, making it almost impossible to find someone who can translate accurately. If the translator is not familiar with canine terminology, the translation is often confusing or completely wrong.

During the next 20 years, the writing of an international Borzoi standard kept the discussion at the conferences very intense at times. Some of the major breeders wanted the description to fit the dogs from their kennels. But over time, the breeders who kept attending the conferences started to think in terms

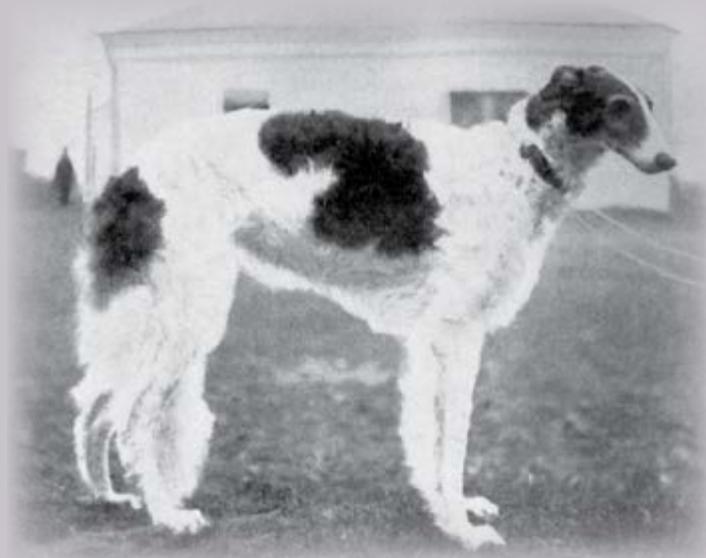


An international Borzoi organization was the dream of Arvid Andersen of Murugi Kennels in Sweden. In 1981, he organized the first meeting of what became the International Borzoi Council. Held just outside of Jönköping in southern Sweden, it was attended by 65 Borzoi breeders from six countries (Sweden, England, the U.S., Finland, Germany, Norway and Australia).

The International Borzoi Council has met every three years, moving around the globe: Sweden (1981 and 2002); the U.K. (1984 and 1993); the U.S. (1987 and 2005); France (1990); Canada (1996); Australia (1999); Russia (2008) and Switzerland (2011). The conference is scheduled to return to the U.S. in 2014.

Three goals were established at that first conference that would become the driving force of the meetings over the next several decades. The first was to establish the International Borzoi Council. The second was to record and study the history of the Borzoi. The third was to study the standards from the major kennel clubs of the world and to hopefully write one international Borzoi standard that would be recognized worldwide. At the conclusion of the first conference, it was decided that the group should continue to meet every three years, and during each conference a Borzoi specialty would be held.

Attendees found the historical aspect of the conference very educational, because little historical information on the breed in its native land was available unless one could read Russian. Breeders learned that some of the historical



Top left: French artist Louis Icart delighted in the Borzoi's flowing lines. But breeders should never allow the breed's elegance to compromise its functionality. Above: Perchino Bljestka. "I believe this bitch could be specialty winner in any country," writes the author. "The only thing I don't like about her is that I do not own her."

Piece

CRAFTING THE INTERNATIONAL BORZOI STANDARD WAS A GLOBAL EFFORT



“Lesta,” gray-black bitch, born 1910 at Perchino, 1912 golden medal at the jubilee show of the Imperial Hunting Society in Moscow. “A bitch that has good underjaw, length of neck, front legs set under her body, excellent feet, pasterns and length of leg. She appears to me weaker in her rear, with her rear feet pointing outward, and she stands with her rear too far under her body. She lacks muscling in her thighs. Hocks that stand parallel would enhance her topline.” — Sillers

of promoting the breed instead of just their individual dogs. Studying the history of the Borzoi over the last several centuries, we have learned that to be historically correct, the Borzoi must be a functional breed. In writing one international Borzoi standard, those members representing the different major Borzoi standards that existed at the time needed to compromise to preserve the functional Borzoi.

“At the first conference, people said that if you put the British and the Americans in a room together to discuss the topline, there would be blood on the walls!” remembers Jean Clare of Ryazan Borzoi in England, who has attended all of the International Borzoi Conferences. “In fact, it was all quite amicable. In my group, we passed around various photos, and finally found a bitch with a topline we all liked. This was Eng. Ch. Shelbor Red Velvet. Karen Staudt-Cartabona was in the group, and she drew some sketches of acceptable toplines. Later, all of the delegates met together, and it was agreed to change the word ‘arch’ to the softer ‘curve’ with reference to the topline.”



Black-brown marked bitch named “Podruga,” of the type of Boldareff, another famous Borzoi breeder/kennel in Russia at the end of the 1800s. “This bitch has a long, lean head with good underjaw. Her neck is of good length and she stands with good return of upper arm. Her body is substantial. Lower hocks would make her look more pleasing. If shown in the U.S., she would be groomed to give her a more pleasing shape, and therefore a different look.” — Sillers

Clare notes that the various standards have their strengths and weaknesses. “The American standard gives a brief description of the breed, but is very short on detail, although the General Appearance clause is excellent,” she explains. “In the American standard there is no clause describing temperament, the description of the back is poor as it does not identify the position of the highest point of the curve, and there is no mention of the desired front angulation other than that the shoulders should be sloping. The English standard is written on the same lines and contains rather more detail.”

The most detailed of all is the FCI standard, she continues, “and the Important Proportions clause at the beginning is excellent. But the FCI standard can be rather difficult to read and places an unnecessary emphasis on faults. A well-written standard should concentrate on the desired attributes of the breed, and so make the listing of faults unnecessary.”

By incorporating all the strengths of the various standards, the International



“Raketa,” black-brown bitch, born in Perchino, bred by crossing Chodlik, Serdetschny and Tsharodjei. “Raketa is a bitch with good substance and muscling. She has good length to her neck and balanced angulation. I like her feet, pasterns and depth of chest. She appears to be snipey and lacks underjaw. Stands slightly longer than tall.” — Sillers



“Rogdai,” black male, born in Perchino in 1909, type of Perchino dogs of dark color. “Rogdai has good underjaw and length of neck. He stands balanced, but is balanced with lack of front and rear angulation. Has nice length of leg and good feet and pasterns. His head is long and lean, but downfaced. The curve to his topline starts too far forward. Has depth of chest but stands square.” — Sillers

Borzoi standard is the best of all. Clare concludes, “which is hardly surprising, as a number of enthusiasts have done a great deal of work on it. They have attempted to incorporate much of the detail of the FCI standard into the more easily assimilated format of the American and English standards.”

In the early to mid-1900s, Borzoi were used in the art of Louis Icart, who owned Borzoi and was a Borzoi fancier. Much of his artwork depicted beautiful women with Borzoi and was not drawn in a realist style. To enhance the dogs’ beauty, he exaggerated their elegance, movement and flowing lines. Many breeders today like this Art Deco expression of our Borzoi. However, if this exaggeration is carried too far in a breeding program, the Borzoi usually are very elegant, but no longer have a flexible topline to remain functional.

Indeed, the topic the present council is most concerned about is the Borzoi topline. We are concerned that many judges evaluate an entry and make their placing solely on the topline instead of evaluating the entire dog. They tell us that the Borzoi topline is the hallmark of the breed, and that the more curve is always better – without regard to the location of the curve on the topline or if the dog’s topline is flexible (meaning functional).

Understanding the history of the breed leads to an appreciation of how a given standard has evolved. I always wondered why the English standard prior to 1986 described the curve of the back starting as close to the shoulders as possible. Kristina Terra of Zabava Borzoi in Washington State gave a lecture at our most recent conference in Switzerland this July that described the development of the Borzoi



“Kaissack (1892) is more compact in structure and carries a heavier body coat. This coat gives the appearance of a short neck and makes it more difficult to appreciate his flowing lines. He does have a shorter length of neck when compared to the other Borzoi photos. If he had more rear angulation, not so steep a croup and lower hocks, he would stand more balanced. He stands high in rear.” — Sillers

starting in the 13th Century. From that I learned that during the early 1800s, as Borzoi were crossed with other Sighthounds, one strain produced dogs in which the rise of the topline began closer to the shoulders in males, whereas the bitches had flatter backs.

This does not explain why the English standard written prior to 1972 describes the curve of the topline starting at the withers. Those that I have asked about this so far have not been able to answer this question. I just find it interesting that all of the other Borzoi standards during this period described the curve as being further back on the topline. Why was the English standard different? At least from Kristina Terra’s presentation I have an explanation on how it was genetically possible to select for it in our gene pool.

Historically, Borzoi have always varied in type. Their owners were only concerned about their hunting ability, so at times bred them to other Sighthounds. Early on, Scenthounds were used to chase the game into small clearings where the Borzoi were waiting. They needed instant speed to capture their prey before it escaped back into the woods. As the hunting terrain changed, so did the structure of the Borzoi, so they would be able to catch game over a greater distance.

“Over time there was a difference in the terrain where Borzoi were used for hunting. As the country was gradually de-forested the Borzoi structure also gradually changed,” Kristina Terra writes. “Most Borzoi (or *Psovaya*) were bred in the central part of Russia. In the beginning, the dogs were used on meadows and small clearings, and so what was required of the dogs was a burst of speed (*brosok*, or in some literature the word used is *brassok*) on short distances. As the country was deforested, the hunting style changed to match – bigger fields required dogs with more stamina. Different Sighthound breeds were added to make the original Borzoi have more strength on long distances. So, the differences in Borzoi types were not really geographical; they were more ... chronological ... Some kennels kept Borzoi with more influences of the older lines, whereas others had more of the new blood in them. Central Russia is enormous in size. When you consider how difficult travel was during this time, you can understand when the Borzoi were crossed with neighboring Sighthounds; the results were a variety of types in the breed, and this variety still remains today.”

In 1861, Russia’s serfs were emancipated, which resulted in a decline in the number of Borzoi. Without serfs, the large estate owners could

International Borzoi Standard

This standard, while accepted by the International Borzoi Council and intended as an aid for judges and breed fanciers, is not recognized by the various national kennel clubs, and does not replace the AKC, FCI and KC standards.

Adopted 2001, internationalborzoiconference.org.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Well balanced, graceful, aristocratic, dignified and elegant flowing lines.

CHARACTERISTICS

A coursing hound which must be courageous, powerful and of great speed.

TEMPERAMENT

Alert, self assured with quiet dignity.

HEAD AND SKULL

Head long, lean and in proportion to dog's size and substance. In females, finer than in males. Well filled in below the eyes. Measurement from inner corner of eye to tip of nose equal to or very slightly greater than measurement from inner corner of eye to occiput. Skull very slightly domed and narrow, stop barely perceptible. Head fine so that direction of bones and principal veins can be clearly seen. Jaws long, deep and powerful. Nose large, black and slightly overreaching. From end of nasal bone, nasal cartilage slopes slightly down to nostrils. Lips black rimmed, thin well stretched along the jawbone. Viewed from above skull would look somewhat narrow and somewhat oval shaped, converging very gradually to tip of nose. Occipital process accentuated.

MOUTH

Jaws strong with perfect, regular and complete scissors bite. Eg: Upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to jaw. Full strong dentition desirable.

EYES

Relatively large, dark and expressive. Set obliquely and placed well back, not too wide apart. Eyelids black and forming an almond shaped opening. Eyes not bulbous, staring or sunken.

EARS

Small, pointed and delicate, set high. When in

repose, folded back along the neck with the tips nearly touching the occiput. Should be active and responsive, may be erect when alert, tips sometimes falling over.

NECK

Slightly arched; reasonably long and well muscled widening gradually to shoulders. Free from throatiness, flattened laterally, set at an angle of 50-60 degrees to the longitudinal axis of body. Length of neck should be approximately equal to length of head.

FOREQUARTERS

Shoulders muscular but not loaded. Shoulder angle of 110-120 degrees. Fine at withers and not accentuated. Forelegs clean and straight. Seen from front, narrow like blades; from side wider at elbow narrowing down to pastern joint. Elbows in vertical line to withers and directly backwards, neither turning in or out. Pasterns slightly sloping, strong and flexible. The distance from withers to elbow is almost half the total height.

BODY

Chest, rib cage relatively long, of narrow oval cut, great depth of brisket reaching to elbows, giving great heart and lung room, especially in mature dogs. Breastbone slightly pronounced with adequate width between elbows and abdomen, very tucked up. Back rather bony, muscular and free from any cavity, rising in a graceful curve prolonged by a well balanced fallaway. Highest point of curve is situated over the last rib. Curve is more pronounced in dogs than in bitches. Loins broad and very powerful with plenty of muscular development. Fallaway long, broad and well muscled, widening over hip joints. Width between pelvic prominences at least 9 centimeters.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters wider than shoulders, ensuring stability of stance. Thighs long, well developed with good second thighs; hind legs long and muscular; stifles and hocks well angulated, hocks broad, clean and low. Posterior line of hock vertical. Seen from side, legs slightly set back, where a line can be dropped from the end of the pelvis through the knuckles of foot. Legs straight and parallel viewed from the rear.

FEET

Hare foot, neither turning in nor out, hind feet

longer. Toes close together and well arched over strong thick pads. Removal of dew claws optional.

TAIL

Long, rather low set, tailbone reaching well below hock joint, or measured between thighs reaches top of nearest hip bone. Well feathered, carried low in a graceful curve. From level of hocks may be saber or slightly sickle shaped but not ringed. In action, not rising above level of the back.

GAIT

Front, straight with long reach, pasterns springy. Hind, straight with powerful driving hocks. When trotting legs converge towards the centre line. Viewed from the side appearance in action should be that of effortless power with noticeable drive and ground covering stride. A flexible back is desirable.

COAT

Silky in texture. Can be flat wavy, or rather curly. Short and smooth on head, ears and front of legs; much longer on body with heavy feathering on backs of legs and hindquarters, tail and chest. Neck carries a large curly frill. More profuse in dogs than in bitches. Undercoat dense, soft, subject to seasonal and climate changes.

COLOR

Any color of pattern acceptable.

SIZE

Desirable height at withers: dogs 32 inches (81 cm), bitches 28.5 inches (75 cm). Dogs and bitches which diverge from this ideal size are not to be penalized as long as balance and efficiency are maintained. Height at withers equals height at hips or withers slightly higher. Length index is about 105 for males and 107 for bitches.

FAULTS

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree of functional significance.

NOTE

Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

Comments on Borzoi, Then and Now

In June 1937, the seventh rotational show of the Pure bred Dog Fanciers Association of the Leningrad area took place in Leningrad, Russia (now St. Petersburg). The Borzoi expert Mr. A.A. Mesenzev judged the Borzoi. I have included photos of some of the Borzoi that he judged to show the variation in topline in the entry plus I have included the comments he made about the topline in his critique. My comments follow. — *Sillers*



NOJAN

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Mesenzev: “Nojan is an excellent, exceptional dog. Excellent topline. The back is correct, starting from the shoulder blades, the protruding lumbar muscles merge seamlessly into a long, straight small of the back. Wider in the rear than in front. The chest lacks depth, still needing the width of three fingers to reach the elbow joint. 2nd Gold Metal.”

Sillers: “Nojan is a dog that stands balanced, has a pleasing head and length of neck, his front is set under his body, has good length of tail, and strong pasterns. He has flowing lines over his topline as well as his underline. I can see power in his rear, which might be why his croup looks too steep. His topline appears to be flexible. He appears tense and I think when he relaxes his topline would not look so steep in croup. I would wait to evaluate his topline until he is moving.”

KAPRISA-DIVENSKAYA

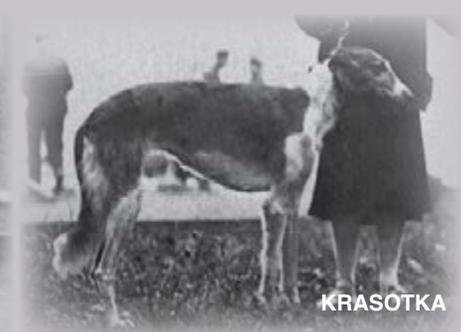
Mesenzev: “Kaprisa is an exceptional bitch. Neck long, horse-like. Excellent construction.

The curve of the back starts at the shoulder blades with no sign of a sunken area. Strong lumbar muscles merging into a broad small of the back. 1st Gold medal and Champion title.”

Sillers: “She looks very ‘houndy’ and gives the impression that she can run like the wind. Excellent underjaw, lean head, balanced neck,



KAPRISA-DIVENSKAYA



KRASOTKA

long tail and low hocks. Beautiful flowing lines. The curve of her topline is a little too far forward for my interpretation of the standard.”

KRASOTKA

Mesenzev: “Back curving into a good top line. First Silver metal.”

Sillers: “A photo of a bitch of a different type. She stands balanced and has a moderate topline. The standard at the time mentioned that the topline in bitches can be flat. She needs more depth of chest and underjaw. The front legs are positioned too far forward on her chest. Compare the thickness between the top of her skull and her throat to the other photos. It is too thick for my liking. Her tail length is short in length. Ears are attached more to the side of the skull.”



TIRANKA II

TIRANKA II

Mesenzev: “Ears set too low and slightly too big. Excellent neck, chest and ribs; a typey and sound bitch. Presented in wonderful condition. 2nd Gold Medal.”

Sillers: “Obviously, this bitch is out of coat. I include her in this article to show the extremes in topline in Borzoi at this show and how the judged still ranked them. She stands balanced. Has a rose ear but it is set low and to the side of her neck. The Borzoi standard describes the ears in repose as folded back along the neck with the tips nearly touching behind the occiput. She has length to her rib cage and a good tuck up.”

no longer care for the large number of Borzoi in their kennels. (Some kept around 400.) Many owners just left their estates and moved back to the larger inhabited communities. Then the number of Borzoi diminished even more when it became fashionable to hunt on horseback with guns.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Grand Duke Nicolai Nicolaiovitch, the uncle of the Tsar, wanted to hunt with Borzoi in the fashion and grandeur of the past. He sent his men all over Russia to bring back good examples of Psovaya Borzaya. These dogs were the foundation stock of his famous Perchino kennel. [See also *Sighthound Review*, April 2011 issue, pages 72-81.]

The first description of the Borzoi in print was written in 1888 by Nikolai Petrovich Ermolov. The Ermolov family had bred Borzoi for more than 200 years, and Ermolov was considered an authority on the breed at that time. The

description of the Borzoi that he wrote was approved by the Imperial Hunting Society. In it, he said, “We have to keep in mind that at the time, all Sighthounds were first and foremost functional animals that hunted and were selected on their ability in the field.”

Ermolov also wrote in the introduction to the standard: “There no longer are any purebred Borzoi, as all modern Psovaya Borzaya had been crossbred with either shorthaired Sighthounds or mountain Sighthounds. Chart Polskis were brought from the West (Poland); but the near-eastern Sighthounds were added to the breed in the Volga region earlier, most likely in the 1700s. During the fourteen Imperial Hunting Society exhibitions, not a single purebred Borzoi was shown. Since it is clear that we do not have the breed in its original and pure form, now we should only be preserving and improving the breed through correct selection, as well as treat shorter dogs (26.25 inches / 67 cm for bitches

and 28 inches / 71 cm for dogs) with great width and lean muscles the same as tall dogs with flat muscles and ribs, as long as such dogs do not have narrow chests and narrow rears.”

In the late 1800s as today, Borzoi breeders did not always agree on the correct description of the Borzoi topline. At future International Borzoi Council Conferences, this topic will be researched, and we hope to eventually develop educational material that will be available to all Borzoi judges from around the world. The curve of the Borzoi's topline adds to its elegance, but if it becomes exaggerated, or if the curve is positioned too far forward on the topline, the Borzoi is no longer functional and its movement is not effortless.

Accompanying this article are early photographs of Borzoi, many taken at the Perchino Kennel in Russia. I choose them to demonstrate the difference in Borzoi type that existed in the late 1800s and early 1900s so one can appreciate why we have such variation in Borzoi type today. The history presented at



“Tuman was born in 1897 in Germany. He is a Borzoi with curves. He has flowing lines, balanced angulation, good length of leg. I would want to evaluate his outline moving, as standing it appears the curve of his topline starts too far forward” – Sillers.

the International Borzoi Conferences has given me a greater appreciation for these Borzoi, which at first glance do not look as pleasing to the modern eye. I have judged Borzoi specialties in nine countries, and I see Borzoi today with similar structure and type as those in these photographs. The short critique on each dog is my personal opinion.

Unfortunately, many Borzoi breeders around the world are not interested in our international conferences. When the topic is mentioned, their response is “What has the International Borzoi Council done for me?” If you just stand at ringside waiting for the International Borzoi Council to do something for you, it will never happen. What you learn from the International Borzoi Council is directly related to your input into the organization. The knowledge I have gotten from talking to breeders from around the world, plus the Borzoi history that has been presented at our conference, is priceless.

The International Borzoi Council is trying to establish a list of e-mail addresses of interested individuals from around the world so we can keep them informed of our endeavors. You can be added to the list by contacting Wendy Finlayson at mayvaleborzoi@xtra.co.nz

Please visit our website at internationalborzoiconference.org.

Reconciling the Standards

The four major Borzoi standards in 1981 were the Russian, FCI, British (KC) and American (AKC). Arguably the biggest conflict among them was in describing the topline. I am sure it is because of the International Borzoi Conference that the English changed their standard's description of the Borzoi topline in 1983, bringing it more in line with the other three standards.

Here are the various standards, and the progression of the British document:

KC Standard (1972)

Back rising in a graceful arch from as near the shoulders as possible with a well balanced fall away. The arch more marked in males than females.

KC Standard (today)

Back ... rising in a graceful curve with well balanced fallaway. Highest point of curve is situated over last rib. Curve is more pronounced in dogs than bitches. Loins broad and very powerful with plenty of muscular development. Fallaway long and well muscled. Width between the hip bones at least 8 cm.

The International Borzoi Standard (adopted 2001)

BODY: Chest, rib cage relatively long, of narrow oval cut, great depth of brisket reaching to elbows, giving great heart and lung room, especially in mature dogs. Breastbone slightly pronounced with adequate width between elbows and abdomen, very tucked up. Back rather bony, muscular and free from any cavity, rising in a graceful curve prolonged by a well balanced fallaway. Highest point of curve is situated over the last rib. Curve is more pronounced in dogs than in bitches. Loins broad and very powerful with plenty of muscular development. Fallaway long, broad and well muscled, widening over hip joints. Width between pelvic prominences at least 9 centimeters.

FCI / Russian

Back: Broad, muscled, elastic, forming with the loin and croup a curve which is more pronounced in the males. The highest point of this curve is situated ahead of the middle of the loin or in the region of the 1st or 2nd lumbar vertebra.

Loin: Long, prominent, muscled, moderately broad.

Croup: Long, broad, slightly sloping. The width of the croup measured between the two hip bones (iliac crest) must not be less than 8cm.)

American (AKC)

Back: Rising a little at the loins in a graceful curve.

Nikolai Petrovich Ermolov's Borzoi standard (written in 1888, as translated from then Russian by Kristina Terra):

“Back and topline: The back should be wide. Males should have more of an arch to their topline, whereas bitches should have a level topline with the top of the rise situated somewhere over the position of the kidneys. The hips should be wide, allowing a palm of one's hand to fit between the hipbones. It is desirable for a dog not to have a protruding sturgeon-like backbone, but, instead, to have a groove running the entire length of the backbone. However, we cannot be strict in requiring this of all the dogs, just like we cannot ask that all males have an arch to their backs and all females have level backs. A bitch with a prominent topline, as long as it's not too steep and as long as her back and hips are wide, can be very well put together. Also, a dog that has a level topline, as long as he is not long proportionally but rather is compact and taut as a bow, can indeed be a good producer.” — Sillers