

# Judging the Borzoi National Specialty, Russia 2013

by Bo Bengtson

Being offered the opportunity to judge the Borzoi national specialties in both the US and Russia in May and June this year was a double treat. This allowed me to compare the state of the breed in the two countries and would give me a good reason to brush up on all my old reading material. Over the years I have put together a pretty good collection of old books and magazines, from a first edition of Joseph B. Thomas' 1912 *Observations on Borzoi* through Nellie Martin's 1931 *The Russian Wolfhound* and Winifred Chadwick's 1952 *The Borzoi* up to Lorraine Groshans' 1981 *The Complete Borzoi* and Dr. Desiree Scott's 1999 *The Borzoi*. Studying how a breed developed into what it is today is not necessarily crucial for a judge, but it certainly adds a little more depth to the experience, and Borzoi have a more interesting breed history than most. I don't know about you, but I've always wished I could have been there when Joseph Thomas went to visit Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaiavitch at Perchino before the revolution. It must have been a fairytale experience, and we are lucky to have both his reports from his visits and Dmitri Waltzoff's detailed descriptions of "The Perchino Hunt" as reference.

I must also mention two wonderful Russian yearbooks, *Borzoi in the Native Land* (2011 and 2012). They are large size, 200-250 pages, with well over 1,000 color photos in each, and useful study for anyone who is interested in Borzoi in Russia today.

Two weeks after the BCOA national specialty I was in Russia, judging not only the Russian Borzoi Club's national specialty outside Moscow, but also some of the finals at an all-breed show held the same day, and specialty shows for Whippets and Greyhounds the next day. The Borzoi specialty and the all-breed show were held in a modern, attractive building with excellent light but the floor was slippery and without mats, and a cement post in the middle of the ring made it a little difficult for both the

dogs and myself to maneuver.

The mystique that's been surrounding the Borzoi in its native land is now mostly a thing of the past. It is well known that the breed did not initially fare well after the



Russian revolution in 1917; many dogs were put down as representatives of the defeated, aristocratic regime. Not much is known, at least not in the West, about how the breed developed during the Communist era, but it's clear that although many dogs have been imported from Europe and America, especially after 1990 and the fall of the Soviet Union, pedigree research shows that most of the top dogs in Russia today also go back at least partly to old Russian lines.

Language is often a problem: many young Russians speak pretty good English but older dog people seldom do and of course most of us in America (myself included) can't even read the Cyrillic alphabet, which makes deciphering show results and catalogs difficult. If the information in the following is a little patchy, that's the reason.

All-over, the general impression of the 87 Borzoi entered was like that at a high quality, medium-sized American specialty.

If I had expected fireworks I didn't find any, but on the other hand I'm sure a high percentage of the dogs that were shown could finish their championships in the US and a few could go a lot further than that. Most of the dogs were of basically good conformation, clean and well groomed, in the same fashion as you would expect at an AKC show. The handling often was less smooth than in the US but then that's the case in most of continental Europe as well. The big difference really is that while the BCOA entry constituted a high percentage of the total breed population in the US, the Russian specialty provided a smaller slice of a much larger total. Registration figures aren't available, but I was told that probably at least 1,000 Borzoi are registered annually in Russia. If that's correct what I saw was just a very small sample.

Borzoi in all the FCI member countries, including of course Russia, are judged according to the Russian Kennel Federation's standard. It doesn't differ much from AKC's in context, however, although it's a lot wordier (almost three times as long!), and there are restrictions on the allowed colours: "All colour combinations, but never with blue, brown (chocolate) and any derivatives of these colours."

Some readers would perhaps hope I would state that the Russian dogs possessed some unique characteristics that we've lost, perhaps even that ours score over theirs in some specific area. I can't really say that, however: the entry didn't look to me that different from what you would see in the US. If you need fresh blood there are certainly a number of talented Russian breeders who can probably provide what you need, if you're able to establish contact but most likely the dogs will be of at least part American breeding.

Of the leading kennels at this show one was Lunnaya Raduga, owned by Elena Balakireva and shown either by herself or by her young daughter. The other was

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Solovyev, owned by Marina Ostrovskaya, who is also a talented artist and has judged in the West (although not, as far as I know, yet in the US). I don't know the name of her talented handler but she showed perhaps half a dozen very typy, almost identical dogs that I know have done well under international judges on many occasions. Mrs. Balakireva and her daughter showed at least as many, many of them winning their class, and ended up taking home BIS with a lovely four-year old bitch named Ch. Lunnaya Raduga Afrodita. I'm told it was the fourth consecutive year this kennel won the national specialty.

Other dogs I liked a lot were the powerful veteran male Ch. Zagar Iz Razdolia and his son Ch. Bush Iz Razdolia, who won a class of half a dozen champion males. (There was both a Champion class and a Club Champion class for each sex.) Best Junior was the promising bitch Solovyev Taman, who won the same award under AKC judge Desmond Murphy at the all-breed show, where her dam Ch. Solovyev Gvardia Belaya also won the Sighthound group under me. In the bitch champion class at the specialty she was 2nd to Ch. Lunnaya Raduga Legendia Rossii, indicating that the specialty entry was more competitive and

much larger than at the all-breed show.)

A couple of imported dogs did well. A dog sired by a French import from du Grand Fresnoy won the Open class and a Borscana import from Sweden won the Intermediate class. The Solovyev winners have a bit of Canadian Sirhan blood on their sire's side and descend through their dam from the Belgian import Ch. Atamanka van Wisinskaya, BOB at Crufts in 2007 and of part LeiCro's heritage from Sweden (which means American blood further back).



*Junior Dogs: Solovyev Truekurov, Solovyev ??? (litter brother), Abricos (by a Borzowski's import), Philadelphian Sabanna Dobromir.*



*Junior Bitches: 1st Solovyev Taman (other names in Cyrillic in catalog)*

The BOB bitch is of mostly Russian breeding for several generations but her sire is a grandson of the American dog Ch. Avatar Incarnation, who if I understand it correctly was owned by a Frenchman who lived in Russia for a while. Incarnation was born in 1999 and sired by Ch. Mariza Rising Star Forever out of Ch. Cordova Mishkova Warwings, FC.

I hope I haven't blown any myths about Russian Borzoi, good or bad. It may be presumptuous for an American judge to go to Russia and comment on their proud, native breed but although Borzoi have a long history in their own country, Western-style dog shows and breeding are a fairly new innovation. One of the presents I was given after the show was a beautiful book

in Russian that obviously outlines the breed's early history. I can't understand a word, although the illustrations are priceless. Perhaps Irina or Kristina Terra could help translate it for American readers?



*Intermediate Dogs: 1st Borscana Beste Ven (imp. Sweden)  
(other names in Cyrillic in catalog)*



*Intermediate Bitches: 1st Lunnaya Raduga ??? (by a Solovyev dog x a Staraja bitch), (other names in Cyrillic in catalog)*



Open Dogs: 1st: name in Cyrillic in catalog but sired by Bayard le Chevalier du Grand Fresnoy, 2nd & 3rd not marked in catalog



Open Bitches: Lunnaya Raduga Afrodita (BOB), Solovyev ??? (name in Cyrillic), Omnia Stepowy Goniec (by an "av Fjascho" dog from Norway), 4th name in Cyrillic



Working Dogs: 1st Borzi-Senavian Zmey (by a Lunnaya Raduga dog) (other names in Cyrillic in catalog)

I learned to recognize some names and prefixes which were sometimes written in Cyrillic, sometimes not... Solovyev was one of them. The dogs' names were sometimes written in Roman letters, sometimes in Cyrillic. Very confusing!

Also, there were several dog in this class but since I didn't give them an Excellent rating they were not eligible to be placed!



Working Bitch 1st Solovyev ??? (name in Cyrillic)



Catalog cover

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Winner class is not like Winners Dog in the US but a separate class; I think they needed to have won the equivalent of maybe a major to enter this class.





*Champion Dogs: 1st Bush Iz razdolia, 2nd Solovyev Giacint, 3rd ???, 4th Lunnaya Raduga Luchiy Iz Luchshih*



*Champion Bitches: 1st Lunnaya Raduga Legenda Rossii, 2nd Solovyev Gvardia Belaya, 3rd name in Cyrillic, 4th Vega Shelk Rumyana (by a Solovyev dog x a Seabury bitch)*

*Best Veteran, Zagar Iz Razdolia;  
BOS Veteran Rusich Osennee  
Solsnyshko, nearly 10 years old.*





Russian book cover

Champion NKP Dog (= Club Champion, I believe), Aragon Baloven Fortuny (by Bayard Le Chevalier du Grand Fresnoy)



Champion NKP Bitches: Ch. Lunnaya Raduka Unikalnaya, Barynya Iz Razdolia (x an English bitch from Manitias, Borzie-Senavian Derzhava)