

Etiquette and education for examining a Borzoi

Of all the tools used to learn about a breed - the physical examine - can teach you more than all the books put together. Most exhibitors will appreciate, and accommodate someone who wants to learn by allowing them to go over their dog. Recently at a specialty, a friend asked me to evaluate the movement of their dog. After watching the dog on the side, I asked to go over the dog and showed the owner that a shorter upper arm in relation to the lay back, was restricting the dog's movement. Just looking at the dog on the move would not have been enough to identify the issue as hair and marking can hide a variety of faults. The visual and physical exam go hand-in-hand to identify how conformation relates to movement. Hunts held in Russia over a century ago included a physical exam of the dogs taking specific measurements of the dogs. Records exist today of the those details taken over 100 years ago.

There are a few rules you should follow when you examine a dog.

1. Always ask first, and preferably, after the dog is done competing..
2. Wait for the exhibitor to finish setting up the dog before starting the exam. It is not appropriate to start the exam before the handler has finished setting up the dog up.
3. Approach the dog from the front, in the line of sight of the dog. Never start from the rear or side. Always make sure the dog can see you approach, especially with sighthounds.
4. Do not stare at the dog, or take a long time to examine a dog. A quick exam is sufficient. The longer the dog stands, the more uncomfortable they become. Do not expect the dog to stand waiting for you. It is you that must be considerate of the dog.
5. Never push down on the topline, or bend the patella, or put pressure on the hocks. The dog may never have had this treatment, and it may spook or unsettle the dog, let alone do damage to the dog.
6. Use a firm hand - but use a light touch. If the dog reacts poorly to the exam, do not push the issue. Remember, if you ask to go over another person's dog, it is a courtesy to you, and return the favor by not being overly forceful.
7. To check for length of tail - follow the tail down to the hock. Do not wrap the tail up under the legs pulling the tail up over the loin. The standard states tail "to the hock". Gently follow the tail down behind the dog. This will be enough to check for kinks, curls and length.
8. Ask to see the bite. If you have not gone over a lot of dogs, it is much quicker and less likely to upset the dog to let the handler show you the bite.
9. Be courteous of both the dog and the handler. You should make the exam a quick and comfortable experience for the dog. If the dog appears not to want to allow the exam never force the issue.
10. Thank the handler!

You can learn a tremendous amount with your hands - as well as your eyes. Take advantage of a physical exam and you will learn more in a few moments than all the ringside observations done at a distance.

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