

Grooming and Over Grooming

A topic that draws controversy in the Borzoi fancy is grooming, too much or too little. At a recent breeder forum there was a strong response from the audience when it came to the question of grooming. Hair distribution and length on a borzoi can vary from dog to dog, and even on the same dog depending on age. Males that at 4 years of age have just enough coat, at age 6 may have a coat that is out of control. Bitches depending on the time of year can have wonderful plush coats and a month later appear so sparse that they look moth eaten. With a breed that has a distinct silhouette, the coat can both accentuate and detract depending on how the dog is presented.

While some people believe that the dog should be shown naturally, there is nothing in our standard that substantiates that claim. It is common sense that the dog should be clean and free of staining, nails trimmed and teeth cleaned. There are however certain traits that should not be groomed out of the dog. One is the neck frill that should be profuse and rather curly. Having this frill is part of what protects the dog. If the coat is sufficient the result in a fight is a mouth full of fur rather than flesh. If you scissor the hair on the nape of the neck you disregard one of the functions of the breed. Borzoi are a double coated breed. Long guard hairs help protect the breed from the elements, and a profuse undercoat keeps the breed warm in the inclement northern winters.

One quote from the standard "The Borzoi should always possess unmistakable elegance with flowing lines..." The coat can both accentuate and detract from those flowing lines. Some trimming is appropriate when the coat is too long or distracts from the ideal topline. But trimming the coat to make a topline where there is none or change the topline is not appropriate. Often when excessive trimming is done as the dog moves you can see that the shape changes from the side and usually not for the better.

Two points that for some reason have become popular are shaving the hocks and trimming the patterns. Both look wrong and in the standard when it mentions "broad hocks" why would you trim to make them look just the opposite. Trimming the pasterns to the stop also gives the dog a chopped look and can detract from the appropriate look of "pasterns strong".

Ears should be trimmed so that the head is neat and clean not rough and unruly. The ears should not be shaved since they are supposed to be "small and fine and when in repose when the tips thrown back almost touching behind occiput". They should almost disappear in the rough of the neck not shaved and exposed and an easy target the wolf to grab and hold.

The trend of over grooming is not new, nor is the lack of grooming. Borzoi that are heavily campaigned often have more grooming than class animals. In the Group and BIS where competition is very tough you have to do more to be competitive. It is not always the fault of the handler but the judge's expectations that drive behavior. Grooming should always be to compliment not accentuate the breed.

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