

Our guest contributor for this issue

is Kristina Terra.

History of the Borzoi PART ONE

The variety of types in Borzoi often baffles judges and can only be demystified by tracing the breed's history. The Borzoi ancestry is not as pure as some might think. In fact, many breeds were used in pursuit of developing the ultimate coursing hound that could hunt hare, fox, and wolf on more or less open terrain. As hunting practices and conditions evolved in Russia, so did the Borzoi. While always remaining a functional sighthound, certain characteristics, including some cosmetic features, changed.

The breed's origin was undoubtedly the combination of the Saluki-type dogs brought to Russia by the Mongol invaders in the 13th century and the native Nordic leggy wolf-like dogs that had been used as sight and scent hounds in Russia for centuries. The resulting cross produced a superior and elegant courser, an exotic dog that became a national treasure. Possessing erect or semi-pricked ears, which over generations turned into rose ears, and exhibiting a thick neck frill and long coat on the body, tail, and the backs of the legs, the original Borzoi had a curved topline, compact format, narrow but deep chest, rear legs set under him, straight tail, shorter neck, and gold sable or grey sable coloration, in both self or spotted patterns. At the time, great speeds on short distances were required for hunting on small cleared fields and forest meadows of Russia, so the ability to accelerate constituted the main selection criteria.

The Greyhound was first brought to Russia in the early 1500s. Much later, in the 19th century, it was systematically crossbred again with the Borzoi to increase speed. The brindle color in the Borzoi is the legacy of the Greyhound. In the early 1600s, the Chart Polski was introduced by the Polish nobles in the court of False Dmitry, the first imposter to the Russian throne. After crossbreeding those two shorthaired sighthound breeds with the original Borzoi, the Chistopsovaya Borzoi emerged. These were best at short-distance pursuits and differed from the original Borzoi in their lighter build, decent spring of rib, longer necks, plush coats, shorter tails, and elegant smaller heads with large eyes.

After the great Northern wars, Russia gained access to the Baltic region, home to the Courland Wirehaired Sighthounds, substantial and tall dogs with shorter legs, sickle-shaped tails, and coats resembling the Deerhound's. Russian hunters found the breed's size, strength, and fierceness impressive. The systematic Borzoi/Courland Wirehaired Sighthound crosses yielded a new breed in the 1750s, the Courland Long-Coated Sighthound, which was known for its fierceness, shorter legs, and coat that was smooth on the head, fronts of legs, and tail but profuse and very curly on the body. Since they were inferior to the Borzoi in elegance and speed, the crossbreeding continued, eventually leading to the emerging of the Gustopsovaya Borzoi.

The Gustopsovaya, which literally means "thick-haired," represents the next stage of the breed's development and dates back to the late 1700s. These tall and wide dogs had a supreme ability to

accelerate on short distances. The variety's features included high-set, small ears; chiseled, narrow heads with excellent veining; and thick, curly, and long coats furnished with profuse, wavy, or curly feathering—self-colored or spotted in all shades of gold and grey, with or without sabling. The rise to their topline began closer to the shoulders in males, whereas the bitches had flatter backs. —

K.T.

Thank you, Kristina. Part Two of this column will appear in the May issue. —

Jon Titus Steele; auroral@tm.net

