

Bits and Bites

How important are bites? In a standard that calls for either a scissors or level bite as acceptable there can be differing interpretations of just what is correct. Starting with a headpiece that is long, rather narrow yet with powerful jaws we are already walking a thin line of genetic evolution. The borzoi head is an exaggeration of the canine genus. With no perceptible stop and planes that are level to slightly down in angle the delicate balance of a correct bite is already at risk.

Lorraine Groshans in her book **The Complete Borzoi** (published 1981) writes that "teeth must be set in a powerful foundation". The 6 incisors fit neatly and closely over the lower six incisors forming a scissor bite while in a level bite the upper and lower meet edge to edge. A wry bite occurs when the teeth do not line up top to bottom or side to side with undershot on one side and overshot on the other. A wry bite is a serious fault and one that should be penalized. Not only should the bite be correct concerning the incisors but the 4 canines should mesh neatly top to bottom and also not interfere with the closure of the jaw. Canine teeth that either flare out at an angle from the mouth or in some cases the lower canines actually are inside the uppers causing the tips to interfere with the palate are incorrect.

Not mentioned directly in the standard is the shape of the lower jaw and incisors. The 6 incisors should form a "u" shape when looking at the lower jaw. Often you will see a "v" shape to the lower jaw where as the dog ages the two center incisors will pop out in front of the uppers while the other four remain in a scissors bite. While undesirable this is not an undershot bite. Breeders need to be careful of not only the depth of under jaw but the width of the under jaw. Considering the difference in pressure that the tongue places versus the tissue on the outside of gums over time the two center incisors can move forward out of alignment. Certainly popped teeth are not desirable but an older dog would be more acceptable versus a young dog. It is a very difficult head to get right as we are already at the extremes in width and length from most other breeds. Too narrow and you would question the strong jaws that the breed needs to do its job, too wide and it loses its elegance.

There needs to be width of the under jaw as well as depth to form a powerful foundation for the teeth. Narrow snippy muzzles are unacceptable for the job of catching and holding their prey. Breeders need to hold strong and fast and not accept anything less than a good bite when considering a breeding. In a breed that balances on a thin line between strength and beauty, elegance and function a waver here will set the stage for disaster later. If you don't think bites and jaw shape are genetic then how do you suppose we got these heads to begin with?

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