

A Question of Topline

The most frequently asked question about borzoi has often been, “explain the correct borzoi topline”. I have been asked more about the Borzoi topline than any other breed characteristic both by prospective judges, and new enthusiasts. Surprisingly, there are only ten words about topline in our breed standard. Other breeds, for example, the Bulldog, have paragraphs on topline, the borzoi has just 10 words. So is it important? Maybe, but certainly topline is not as important as our emphasis on sound running gear. The standard reads “Rising a little at the loins in a graceful curve”. A borzoi is designed for speed and endurance, to course over open terrain, to overtake and hold their quarry. Borzoi are one of several breeds that excel at the double suspension gallop, which is powered by strong a loin.

If the heart is the engine, it is the loin that is the drive train and the transmission that powers the breed. This athletic function is a result of the compression and release of the full body allowing the rear legs to come up ahead of the front legs, followed with a full extension of the legs and body with all four legs off the ground at the same time.

If you understand what the dog is designed to do, you understand the need for flexibility in the loin and strong muscling. The topline is made up of the 8 vertebrae of the Withers, 5 vertebrae of the Back, 7 vertebrae of the Loin and 3 fused vertebrae of the Croup. Where the loin attaches to the back begins the point where the rise of the topline occurs. The word “arched ”is not in the standard, unlike the definition of well arched in the Dandie Dinmont Terrier or the Bulldog. It is important to note that too much rise - without flexibility - is just as incorrect as too flat without strong muscling.

I have observed judges who push on the topline to check for flexibility. Pushing down on the back does not show you the flexibility for field work. A flexible topline can be seen while the dog is moving on the side. Too flat, and there is not enough power in the loin conversely too rigid, and there is not enough mobility to fully compact and extend in the double suspension gallop. Not everyone has the ability to observe Borzoi in the field, and hopefully you will never see the double suspension in the show ring. A show ring is, however, a fair proxy to evaluate flexibility on the move. There is a good discussion, and photos of topline in the “Visualization of the Borzoi Standard” published and available from the Borzoi Club of America.

The borzoi topline is a direct result of the need for athleticism, function and purpose of the Borzoi Breed. It is more important when looking at the breed to see a well muscled dog, with a slight rise, then a micro examination of where the rise starts or the highest point of the topline occurs. A correct functioning topline will be flexible and strong, while a weak or rigid topline will not give the framework for the powerful transmission that drives this athletic breed.

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