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Diversity and Judging in the Borzoi Breed

Diversity in the Borzoi breed can create a perplexing problem to judges in the show ring. With a standard that has very few exact numbers and definitions, no matter what part of the country, a great variety of size, substance, coat, and color can be seen in almost any ring. Other than for minimum size, 28 inches for males and 26 inches for females, there are no exact numbers or angles mentioned in the standard. In any one class you can see a borzoi from 28 inches to 36 inches, although those at the extremes are not the norm. Certainly a 20 percent difference from the largest to smallest can occur in any one class.

So what do you do when you look at the class in front of you and see such diversity? How is it possible to make sense of all the variation? It really is quite simple. At the end of the day, which dogs would you take on hunt to coarsely large game, riding across vast terrain with the hounds at your side to find your quarry. It would be grand if your final choices for the winners all matched in size, coat and color, but that is not what most dog shows present. It is not really necessary that all your winners look like clones. What is important is balance, and sound running gear. It is much more important how well the parts work together than any one breed point.

It is important that the judge consider each point of the Borzoi standard, but each of these breed qualities needs to be noted and evaluated, and weighed against the whole picture. If you have a dog with a well angulated rear and a straight upper arm it would be out of proportion. A dog that is too tall for its length, or a dog that is long through the body and short on leg, all are not in balance. How the lay back of shoulder, and return of upper arm match with the length of first thigh to second, and the bend of stifle all play an important part of understanding this breed. Understanding how length of head to neck length, and how those fit into the shoulder are just as important as how long the length of back to length of loin and the angle of the croup form an efficient structure for a running hound.

Over emphasizing the term “moderate” in evaluating a breed can lead to awarding a common and mediocre dog. Rather, I think weighing “balance” in the judging of Borzoi is much more important when judging a breed with such diversity. A small sound moving dog can be as balanced as a large borzoi, if on the move all the parts work together. Standing is only part of the equation, more importantly; it is how all these parts fit together that makes a great example of the breed.

At the end of the day, I would rather have my winners all move alike, then look alike, because I know somehow under all that coat, it is expected they will all be built alike.

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