

The Finer Points of Judging

Borzoi

Recently I had the opportunity to judge a very high-quality entry at a specialty here in the United States.

While I was judging, I was sure people were thinking, What the heck is this judge looking at, when he put up all different styles of Borzoi for his final winners? This certainly must have seemed true from outside the ring, but under my hands the finer points of our breed were what determined who won the classes, no matter what style the dogs were.

Beyond the general aspects of type that make a great Borzoi a Borzoi—the silhouette, head, coat, movement, and breed character—there are several things that should be rewarded when you find them in your ring. Silhouette, of course, is evident from outside the ring. There should always be a smooth outline that doesn't change shape whether the dog is standing or moving—a flexible topline, with shoulders and hips neither sloping like that of a German Shepherd nor high in the rear. Tail-carriage should be an extension of the outline, with flowing lines from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail.

Up close and personal, the head should have a dark eye with an almond shape, soft in expression and not staring, bulging, or light in color. Teeth are large and strong, and there is a “U” rather than a “V” shape to the under jaw. The ears should be fine and held back in a rose—not heavy or coarse to the touch, but small and flexible and with a true rose shape. Ear shape can be hidden by coat or a clever handler who holds the ears back; if while assessing a dog you are unsure, ask the handler to let go of the ears to see their shape and how they lie on the back of head. They should not be low and heavy.

One thing not always evident from outside the ring is the prosternum, which should be in front of the point of shoulder, not sunken or “cathedral.” Shoulders should be well laid back, not high on the neck, splayed, or rotated down around the rib cage. A general rule is two or three fingers between the withers; anything more should give you pause.

Brisket should be deep, to the elbow, accompanied by well-sprung ribs and a gradual and evident tuck-up to the loin. Stifles are well bent, but not overly so. A dog sinking in the rear or one who cannot stand with his hocks perpendicular to the ground is not what our standard expects. Hocks should be low! Not simply trimmed to appear short. High hocks and weak pasterns are both undesirable, and both are particularly detrimental to function in the field. The tail should reach to the hock, and preferably well beyond. A short tail is incorrect just as much as a curl or kink. Foot timing, which I have mentioned in previous columns, is all part of what balance should be in a good moving Borzoi.

When you see the finer things in the breed, reward those traits regardless of what style the dog appears to be. Use your hands, not just your eyes. A good Borzoi should feel as good as they look and sometimes even better, as happened to me at this very assignment.

From outside the ring, just what was I doing with all those different styles? If only your eyes could see what my hands could feel! —

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