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Feet for Thought or of Cats and Hare.

In this column, we will consider some food for thought when it comes to the standard on cat feet versus the correct hare foot for a Borzoi. The standard reads “Hare-shaped, with well arched knuckles, toes close and well padded”. What exactly is Hare shaped? A foot that is longer from front to back, rather than side to side. Everyone has seen a key chain of a lucky rabbit’s foot. A cat’s foot on the other hand tends to be round in shape rather than oval. Some standards such as the English Foxhound, calls for “in all cases should be round and catlike”. The purpose of the foot is to provide purchase, and propel the dog forward, and in the case of a Borzoi over long distance in rough terrain. The pads are the shock absorbers, along with a pastern that is springy so as not to have a jarring and inefficient motion on the move. On the other hand, a foot that is flat and splayed does not hold up in the field, and certainly can not provide shock absorption.

We have all been in the ring with a flat footed handler, and I have yet to see someone light on their feet when they have no arches. Most standards call for “toes close and well arched” like the Whippet Standard, or the Greyhound standard “more hare than cat feet, well knuckled up with strong claws”. The hounds that are closer to the Greyhound call for a hare foot, rather than those like the Mastiff which states “feet heavy, round and compact with well arched toes”. One should never confuse long toes that are arched with a flat foot. Almost all standards of breeds designed to travel long distances want toes that are close and well arched.

Often, a cat foot will be found on a dog that has a straight pastern and an under angled shoulder assembly. If the foot fails — so does the athlete. Why would Nike™ or Reebok™ spend millions on foot ware if feet were not so important in sports. A breeder should be just as cognizant of the feet of their dog, as an athlete is about their shoes. Form follows function which impacts speed and endurance of a Borzoi in the field. Hare feet, strong and springy pasterns with bladed bone defines a Borzoi not a cat.

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