

# РУССКАЯ ПСОВАЯ БОРЗАЯ

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**T**he Russkaya Psovaya Borzaya, known in most parts of the world as simply Borzoi, is a magnificent hound developed by the Russians hundreds of years ago. Bred to chase and bring down game such as wolf, fox, boar and hare; the breed is not only functional but is arguably the most beautiful and elegant breed in dogdom. Known around the world and a favorite of artists, the Borzoi faced many challenges to his survival in his native land. Despite these challenges, the Borzoi has survived in Russia and exists there today much as he did hundreds of years ago..

Borzoi is a generic Russian word meaning "swift" or "fleet" and is applied to all varieties of greyhound type dogs. Even so, the best known is the Psovaya Borzaya and it is to this breed that the name "Borzoi" is applied almost universally. (CHADWICK 6) According to Sabaneev, "Psovaya" is from the archaic Russian word "psovina" which refers to a dog's coat or hair. (110) Herein, the term "Borzoi" refers to the Russian Psovaya Borzaya.

Originally sighthounds of varying appearance existed across the Russian steppe as hunting dogs of the nobility "... from nomadic chieftains to land-owning gentry ..." (MILLER 99) According to the historical summary preceding the Federation Cynologique Internationale's (FCI) standard for Borzoi, "the Russkaya Psovaya Borzaya has been an integral part of the national culture and Russian history for 9 centuries. The French Chronicle of the XI<sup>th</sup> century shows that three Borzois accompanied the daughter of the Grand Duke of Kiev, Anna Iaroslavna when she arrived in France to become the wife of Henri I." (ZOTOVA 214) Since the term "borzoi" in Russian is not exclusively applied to the Russkaya Psovaya Borzaya, this writer finds it questionable how much these dogs resembled the Borzoi of the seventeenth century onward.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Tatars living in southeastern Russia along the middle and lower Volga hunted with greyhound type dogs. (VLASOV) The first written record of coursing in Russia is from 1260 A.D. It discusses the dogs used to hunt hare at the court of the Grand Duke of Novgorod. (CHADWICK 10) Coursing refers to the pursuit of game with dogs who use primarily sight rather than scent in the chase. For centuries, coursing dogs were used by Mongol rulers and then Russian nobility for hunting and sport. As far back as Genghis Khan, long hounds were the principal coursing dogs. (AKC 151) Game was flushed from the forest and chased by the hounds followed by hunters on horseback. Tatar style hunting existed in Russia during the reign of Vasili III, the father of Ivan

the Terrible, who was a great fan of this type of hunting. The history of hunting with Borzoi began at the time of Russian liberation from the Mongols. In 1600, Boris Gudonov sent a pair of greyhound type dogs to Shah Abbas of Persia. By this time, the breed had probably become similar to today's Borzoi as Eastern greyhounds were of no interest to the Shah. By the mid-seventeenth century, the breed had become fixed as a national breed of Russia. (VLASOV)

The origin of the Borzoi continues to be a topic of conjecture and debate among fanciers of the breed. Several Borzoi authorities believed the Borzoi to be a cross between the Northern Lapphund and the Tatar coursing hound. There are several examples in Russian literature that



Russian hunt. Circa 1910

reported that the Tatars had brought coursing and sighthounds to Russia in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and these sighthounds were crossed with northern Laikas. (CHADWICK 10) Joseph Thomas, an American who traveled to Russia in the early 1900s and visited several Borzoi kennels, wrote that it appeared that all of the Russian Borzoi breeds came from a common root, that is, the crossing of the Eastern or Asiatic Borzoi which had developed in Russia hundreds of years before with "Northern wolf-like dogs, or even perhaps with the wolf itself." (THOMAS 15) Artem Boldareff, the owner of the famous Woronzova kennels, believed that the Borzoi developed through "a process of evolution from the long-coated, smooth-faced boarhound of early Russia," a dog which resembled the Laika of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but was larger. (CHADWICK 10) According to the American Kennel Club's *Complete Book of the Dog* the breed's ancestors "... probably include the long-coated, smooth-faced bear hound of early Russia; the Southern coursing hound of the Tatars; the Owtchara, a tall Russian sheepdog; and other ancient sighthounds." (COMPLETE 151)

Perhaps one of the most popular and persistent accounts of the Borzoi's origin comes from the 1954 edition of the AKC's *Complete Book of the Dog* quoted by Stedman Shumway Hanks in his own book, *The Borzoi: The Most Noble Greyhound*. Hanks was the son of Charles Stedman Hanks who brought Borzoi from the

Tsar's kennel to the United States in 1890 and founded Seacroft Kennels:

... at the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain duke of Russia, a great hunter who loved swift dogs, imported a certain number of Arab greyhounds, probably gazelle greyhounds. They were very fast runners but their thin fur would not permit them, it seemed, to survive the rigorous Russian winters and they died quickly. The duke ... sent for more dogs, which he carefully crossed with a native breed of Russian dog, near to a Collie but more robust and of a different appearance ... (10)

The first detailed standard for Borzoi was published in 1650 and it is not far different from the standard used today. (HANKS 20) Writing in the July 1916 issue of *House and Garden*, William Haynes stated that the pure Borzoi was distinguished by several characteristics: 1) the Roman nose where "there is a slight but distinct bump instead of the greyhounds stop between the eyes ..." 2) the coat is rather curly at the shoulders, on the back and on the hindquarters, long and straight on the chest and long and wavy towards the end of the tail, 3) a long tail and very small, fine ears covered with short hair, 4) larger than the greyhound with a deeper brisket but flatter ribs and 5) hare shaped feet, not the *cat feet* of the greyhound. (HAYNES) These characteristics correspond well with the current Russian national breed club and the Federation Cynologique Internationale (FCI) standards.

Borzoi are considered a giant breed and height is generally mentioned in literature regarding the breed. Prince Obolensky, a cousin of the Yusopov princes and an officer in the Tsar's Imperial Horse Guards, reported that the average height of a male Borzoi was from 28 to 29½" at the withers. Apparently Obolensky favored dogs that were not overly large, as he went on to write: "It proves to be the case that for working purposes, the smaller dog shows itself to excel in speed, pluck and tenacity." (MILLER 104) The 2001 Russian standard and the FCI standard of 2006 both state that the height at the withers for males should be 75 to 85 cm (29½ to 33½") and 68 to 78 cm (26¾ to 30¾") for bitches (ZOTOVA 166, 214), considerably taller than the average reported by Obolensky over 100 years ago. The American standard calls for a minimum height of 28" at the withers for males, 26" for bitches. (COMPLETE 153)

The coat is long and silky and can be flat, wavy or curly but never wooly. Most standards allow any color, or combination thereof. The 2006

FCI Standard, however, considers it a fault to have flecks of color in the coat the same shade as the ground color. Flecks on the body of another shade than the ground color is considered a severe fault. Furthermore, the standard states that all color combinations are allowed except for blue or brown (chocolate) or any derivatives of these colors. (FCI 6-8) Coat color has often been a subject of debate throughout the breed's history. Colonel Tshebeshoff disqualified blacks, black and tans and white dogs with black spots. Boldareff felt that the typical coat colors were "only white, grey, yellow and white-spotted with grey and yellow." (MILLER 102) Although speed, strength and courage were of primary importance, most of the early Russian breeders preferred white dogs and those with light markings. The white dogs were considered to look more aristocratic and additionally went well with the white leads and gloves used by the huntsmen (HUTCHINSON 166) Those breeders who defended the solid and dark colored dogs pointed to old paintings showing packs of Borzoi, including those with solid and tricolor coats, hunting wolves. (MILLER 102)

Borzoi tend to be very quiet and are generally aloof towards strangers. Raised within a family, Borzoi are friendlier, more affectionate and obedient and often more whimsical than their kennel raised counterparts. Although the Borzoi should be aggressive in the hunt because of its nature and purpose, that is, its "instinctive drive against the wolf ..." or other game, it is rare that they are aggressive towards people. (SABANEV, 142) Or as the Borzoi Club of America's *The Borzoi* states, "... with all his grace and gentle, companionable ways, the Borzoi is by instinct, breeding and character, a coursing hound." (BCOA 8) Thomas Howard gives an excellent description of the character and appearance of the Borzoi:

Here ... comes this royalty, this fleetness, this lean and coiled power. The long nose, the deep chest, the tail curled between the legs, the shaggy coat, ... the floating gait, the thin silhouette – he passes on his way like the Grand Duke in his progress. He does not waggle brightly at every passerby like lesser, more hopeful dogs. He is not asking for pats, scratches and attestation from these people. He is not a good doggy; he is not a doggy at all. Every step is a potential spring, taken with that awesome grace that belongs only to restrained power, the same that you sense ... when Nureyev walks to the rear of the stage before a solo ... He seems to have appeared only now from a feudal court, or from leaping across the steppes. (25)

Coursing game with a small number of swift dogs is one of the oldest and most widespread sports. In Russia, coursing hunts were larger, more frequent and more developed than elsewhere in the world. (CHADWICK 9) Hunting or

coursing wolves with Borzoi became the Russian national sport and "no expense was spared in developing the pastime." (HUTCHINSON 166) Quarry was usually what was available in the specific locality – wild boar, deer, wolf, fox and hare. The ultimate game was, of course, the wolf and it was in pursuit of the wolf that the hounds and kennels were judged. (CHADWICK 19) If the preferred game was not plentiful enough in a particular locality, it was often stocked and provided food to encourage increased numbers. (MILLER 99) Breeders bred for conformity as much as practical and dogs were matched in size and color when used to hunt. The Borzoi were bred to hunt and hold their wolf quarry. They were not expected to kill the wolf except in self defense. Sexes were often mixed as the bitch usually attacked the foe at the neck and the male attacked at the hindquarters. Often the female was faster, turned more quickly and demonstrated more courage than the male. (CRAVEN 12-13)

Since the time of Ivan the Terrible, "the Imperial Kennels have never housed less than fifty grown hounds and even larger kennels have been maintained continuously from father to son on the estates of some of the greater nobility." (HAYNES) Several visitors to pre-Revolutionary Russia reported that the Russian Borzoi kennels were very modern and up to date and were run by large staffs with people on duty around the clock. (HUTCHINSON 166) Typically at the Tsar's kennels there were fourteen or more caretakers on duty at a time, all of whom were employed to train the dogs in hunting the wolf. (HANKS 16) The best dogs commanded very high prices if the owner was willing to sell any of his hounds. Improvement of the breed for hunting was of prime importance. The owners of the large kennels carried this out by well-planned breeding programs, optimum feeding regimen and training of the dogs. (HUTCHINSON 166)

To be successful at catching and holding wolves, the Borzoi had to use the proper techniques which were learned through encouragement and practice hunting young wolves. It was felt that hunting young but free wolves was better training than their chasing captive-raised wolves. The captive wolves did not have the smell of wolves of the wild, did not run as well and stopped and snapped at the hound chasing it. (SABANEV) Training usually began between the ages of 10 and 12 months. A wolf would be released into an enclosed area and two young hounds were then slipped or released. A huntsman supervised to ensure that it was a positive training experience for the hounds. (CRAVEN 13) Russians considered the fox hunting practiced in Great Britain as much too formal and pre-



*Wolf Hunt. Artist's interpretation.*

ferred to hunt wolf, bear and elk. Hunters rode out on horseback followed by others leading the Borzoi [author's note: Like the word deer, Borzoi can be either singular or plural, though some authors add an "s" to make it plural]. The kennels came to life with the start of the hunting season which lasted until the frosts came. The gallery, huntsmen and hounds would be followed by a wagon carrying provisions for breakfast. Upon returning to the estate in the evening, the kill (hares and wolves) would be shown off and the evening would be filled with music, games and dancing. (MASSIE 295)

The hunt would begin early in the morning. The line of mounted hunters holding the leashes of Borzoi were followed by a pack of Anglo-Russian foxhounds. The master of the hunt would station the hunters at approximately 100 yard intervals until the entire grove of trees was surrounded. The hunting horn was blown and the pack of foxhounds were sent into the grove to flush the game. The hunters dressed in Russian traditional attire "with fur-trimmed hats, booted and spurred and equipped with hunting horn, whip and dagger and mounted on padded Cossack saddles ... on Kirghiz ponies ..." presented a dashing picture. Once the game was flushed, the nearest leash of Borzoi was slipped. The Borzoi were generally slipped in a team, two dogs and a bitch, or in a pair, typically a dog and a bitch. (THOMAS 57-58)

One method of hunting wolves involved the use of two Borzoi, matched in strength, courage and running ability. The dogs would chase the wolf and seize it behind the ears, each dog taking a grip, on either side, at the same time. Once down, the Borzoi would have to hold the wolf until the huntsman arrived to dispatch the wolf or tie and gag it. The huntsman would, more often, gag the wolf by "a piece of wood was held close to the wolf's mouth; it would seize it and the wood was pulled back by cords attached to the sides, the cords being fastened together behind the wolf's head." (HUTCHINSON 166) Typically the point of the Russian wolf hunts was not the killing of the wolf but in its capture. The wolves were usually released or taken back to the estate

for training purposes. The merits on which a dog's skill was measured were speed, cleverness and tenacity. (MILLER 99)

In the winter months, when families of wolves were reported in a locality, Borzoi would often be taken by "a low sled, arranged with a blanket screen, to a position near the runway which the wolves are likely to use in passing from one covert to another." (THOMAS 61) Beaters or foxhounds would be sent into the grove and would drive the wolves out. Once a wolf was out in the open, the blanket screen would be drawn back and the Borzoi released. (THOMAS 62)

Coursing game with Borzoi was widespread from the time of the first tsars until serfdom was abolished in 1861. (AKC 151) There were numerous hunts which resulted in competition between the various kennels. Estates often had several hundred hounds and one, that of Samsonoff in Smolensk Province maintained 1000. Because of the vast distances separating these estates, coupled with the difficulties of travel, made breeding between the strains of the estates difficult. Additionally because of the number of dogs maintained, little need was seen for outcrossing. Furthermore, each owner was fiercely proud of their kennels, believing their dogs to be the best and frequently refusing to part with any of them. Selling dogs for money by noblemen was considered disgraceful. Although enormous sums were occasionally paid for Borzoi, the owners of the large hunts would not part with an outstanding hound for any price. M. Arapoff, the owner of Perchino prior to the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaivich, was able to add 80 acres of valuable meadowland to the estate, by trading a pair of Borzoi to the neighbor who had been reluctant to sell the land. (CHADWICK 16-17)

Anna Tolstoy wrote that the Russian landed nobility of the early nineteenth century "... had everything for their needs on their estates ... Dogs and horses played a large part in the lives of these landed proprietors. They took pride in their high-spirited mounts and hounds, [and] made a show of smart turnouts ... " (MASSIE 307) Her father, Leo Tolstoy was at one time an avid hunter and described in detail a hunt involving wolf and hare coursing in *War and Peace*. (HANKS 43) His admiration for the Borzoi is apparent as he describes the movement in pursuit as one of terrestrial gravitation; that the Borzoi moves not like a dog but like an arrow or a bird in flight which the eye cannot catch. The spectator's spirit is grasped and the heart catches. (ZOTOVA 10)

The great hunts of the eighteen and nineteen centuries often lasted several days. Different kennel owners would bring their best dogs and huntsmen, as well as family and other guests. Each of the guests and hunters had their own pair or leash of Borzoi. In the evenings, after dinner, various dogs would be brought inside and the merits of their hunting skills would be discussed. (HANKS 15) A hunting kennel typically included Borzoi, horses and huntsmen, cooks and other attendants. In the hunt kennels of Peter II there were 420 dogs. The Borzoi were used to hunt hares and foxes but were especially valued for their ability to hunt wolves. (VLASOV) Young Tsar Peter II and Princess Elizabeth enjoyed hunting with Borzoi. Peter despised St. Petersburg and preferred the forest and the fields of the countryside. (MASSIE 109)

The period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until 1861 was one of uncertainty which fostered experimental outcrosses. (AKC 151) After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, many Russian nobles who had been paid by the state for land relinquished to the serfs, quit their estates and moved to the city. The kennels were oftentimes completely given up or fell to ruin in their absence. (THOMAS 25) Many of the hunts ceased and only a few dedicated hunters continued to breed and hunt with Borzoi. (CHADWICK 13) Few Borzoi of the ancient type remained. In 1873, the Moscow Hunting Society for the improvement of hunting dogs was organized. The society's first exhibition took place in 1874, which caused a rise in interest in the Borzoi breed which had suffered since emancipation. It was here that Borzoi owners were able to exchange ideas. The older Borzoi breeders became interested and foreign fanciers provided an outside market. The best known breeders of this period were P.M Machevariakov, N.P. Ermolov, S.V. Ocerov and D.P Valtsov. A standard written by Ermolov was adopted by

the Moscow Hunters Society in 1888. (VLASOV)

In 1887, the Perchino kennels were acquired by the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, a field marshal of the Russian army and uncle of Nicolas II. (HANKS 17) For the 30 years prior to the Revolution, the greatest hunt was located at Perchino in Tula

Province. Dmitri Walzoff, who previously owned his own kennel was put in charge of the Perchino hunt. (CHADWICK 17) The hunting lodge which had been built for the previous owner, M. Arapetoff, a century earlier, overlooked a broad prairie interspersed with coverts. The rooms of the lodge were hung with trophies killed by the Grand Duke. Walzoff acquired a small number



**Borzoi owned by Tsar Nicholas II, 1897.  
Note the short coat.**

of Borzoi of the ancient type by searching in remote parts of Russia and it was from these that a selective breeding program was carried out. (THOMAS 44-46)

The hunts of Old Russia were grand and extravagant undertakings. In 1922, Princess Cantecuze and Countess Speransky wrote an article for *The Saturday Evening Post* about the hunts which had formerly taken place at the village of Bouromka:

The hunting itself was one of the most typical occupations of old Russia and all its ceremonial was most complicated, carried out as it had been through centuries past. The race of our borzoi, or wolfhound, was apparently as ancient as the land itself and the costumes, saddles and all the paraphernalia were of design and material rooted in traditions too ancient to be dated at all. (113)

The day, which began early in the morning, was filled with excitement, eyestrain, fatigue, delight at triumphs and occasional short tempers. The steppes were dotted with marshes and forest where the game could hide. The men and boys standing with 2 or 3 straining Borzoi wore Cossack caps of scarlet and black fur. The buttons on the coats of the huntsmen were silver or gilt filigree. Their engraved daggers were made from the finest Damascus steel. Watching the hounds awaiting their prey "... made one feel conviction that a more splendid animal than the borzoi watching, one could not imagine. Elegance personified, with his long, shaggy, silken fur covering, the graceful strength of back and limbs, alert head and enormous eyes intently turned to the horizon ..." When the prey broke from cover, a precise distance [typically 200 yards] was calculated from the nearest leash of Borzoi. The dogs would be slipped and they would fly across the field with the rider following and shouting encouragement. If the chase was long or if a hound became fatigued or injured, another hunter would slip his hounds and they would join in the pursuit. (CANTECUZE 113)

An English army officer serving in Russia in the 1890s related his experience with Borzoi of the Imperial kennels:

Twelve chasseurs, each leading a fine wolfhound, rode in advance, four attendants



**Bistri of Perchina acquired by Joseph B. Thomas from the Perchino Kennels. 1903**

with a pack of common hounds followed. Next came a big iron cage, drawn by four horses, in which the captured wolves were to be put ... all the largest are kept for the young wolfhound to practice upon ... the common hounds were sent into the underbrush, hares and foxes came rushing out but the boars and wolves were harder to start. The chasseurs had taken up good positions along the edge of the forest ...” (GORDON 9)

The officer goes on to describe the wolfhounds as appearing to have as much interest in the sport as any of the hunters and spectators. As sounds of the baying and barking common hounds drew nearer, the Borzoi stood, not making a sound or moving a muscle. It was only at the sight of the wolf that the dogs began straining at their leashes. The dogs were not released until the wolf had a 200 yard clear start. The dog which the naval officer was holding was given the signal and he was off, his feet barely hitting the ground. The dog caught up with the wolf in less than a minute. Seizing it by the neck, the two tumbled over and over until the dog brought the wolf to a standstill. The mounted hunter arrived, dismounted, gagged the wolf and took it to the iron cage. (GORDON 9)

Some of the better known kennels participating in and holding hunts in the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were Perchino, owned by Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich; Woronzova owned by Artem Boldareff; and Gatchina, the Imperial kennels of the Tsar. Hanks felt that because the Tsar had neither the time nor the desire to spend as much time with his dogs, the Perchino borzoi were stronger, more agile and more thoroughbred than those of the Imperial kennels. (15)

Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich often entertained guests. “One or two special trains with couchettes and kitchens for his guests, as well as cars for the horses, the huntsmen and the dogs ... were frequently provided. It was considered it a point of honor ... to surpass all other Borzoi of Russia.” (HANKS 17) He rarely sold his hounds and dogs which did not meet his standards were eliminated. Regarding the setup of his kennels, there were twelve adult dogs, matched in size and color, to a kennel. Sets of three dogs were used in the hunt and they were often interchanged to maintain compatibility between the dogs. A special pack of the fastest and most beautiful Borzoi could be seen from the block of houses belonging to the Grand Duke, the superintendent of the hounds and the special hunters. Typically this pack consisted of 8 to 9 bitches and 16 to 2 dogs. All together, the Grand Duke typically maintained a kennel of about 160 Borzoi, 100 parforce hounds, 15 English greyhounds and 80 to 100 hunting horses. (HANKS 17, JOHNSTON) The horses were all of a similar shade of roan. Everyone on the Duke’s manor wore similar hued green livery on the

hunts. It was traditional for each of the major nobles to be associated with specific colors of horses and livery. (MILLER 103)

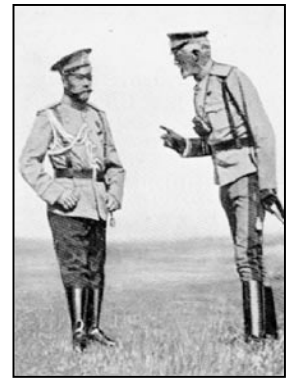
The Woronzova kennels were owned by Mr. and Mrs. Artem Boldareff. The impressive estate occupied 10,000 hectares (almost 25,000 acres). (THOMAS 57) Their dogs were of high quality and the Boldareffs were often guests at the Perchino hunts. Many of their dogs were exported to Holland, Germany, England, the United States and other countries. Maria Alexeyevna Boldareff was “highly esteemed at Perchino because she yields nothing to her companions. She rides admirably, directs her dogs impeccably and surmounts easily all of the difficulties of the course ...” (HANKS 20)

Joseph B. Thomas, kennel manager of the Valley Farm kennels in the United States, went to Russia in the early 1900s and visited Perchino, Woronzova and the Tsar’s kennels. He was greatly impressed with the quality of the Perchino and Woronzova Borzoi and was fortunate to be able to bring some of these dogs to America. They went on to become the foundation of many of the finest Borzoi kennels in America. (HANKS 17)

The Russian Revolution resulted in a period of uncertainty for the breed. Stories abound regarding slaughter of Borzoi because of their association with the aristocracy, however, there is little concrete evidence to indicate that this occurred, particularly not on a large scale. Three Borzoi were shot after the execution of the Tsar and his family, apparently because they were howling inconsolably over the bodies of their masters. (POZDNIAYEV) After 1917, kennels were abandoned and most of the Borzoi transferred into the hands of rural hunters. Indiscriminate breeding caused a loss of type and only a few pure specimens remained in the hands of a few dedicated fanciers. (VLASOV) Later the government recognized “the value of Borzoi for commercial hunting and the State began to exert some control, notably with the establishment of government controlled breeding programs. Perhaps the best known such program was at Engels in the Saratov Oblast. The number of breedings allowed each year was limited to a certain number in each region in order to maintain the standard as close to the original as possible. (CHADWICK 28, 30)

Dog shows were held and hunting with Borzoi continued but on a much more limited scale. (CHADWICK 26) The Great Patriotic War once again hurt breeding programs. After the war, efforts to maintain the integrity of the breed renewed. (VLASOV) By the 1950s, the Soviet Union was annually arranging exhibitions, shows and trials in which judges used uniform standards and rules for judging physical features and field qualities of various breeds of sporting dogs, including Borzoi. The best examples of each breed were listed in the All-Union and breeding subsidy

pedigree book. The best specimens of the sporting breeds were exhibited “in the special dog breeding pavilion of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition.” (CHADWICK 27)



***Tsar Nicholas II and Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich***

The fur industry was an important part of the Soviet economy. A large portion of the game taken, especially foxes, was with Borzoi. The Borzoi could chase down and kill the animals with little or no damage to the skins, whereas trapping in snowy conditions was impractical and shooting damaged the skins. (CHADWICK 28) The main hunting season in most areas of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was in November and December. It was prohibited earlier and later the snow was too deep. The hunting season lasted much longer in the southern areas such as the steppes of the Northern Caucasus, southern areas of Kazakhstan and the Central Asian republics. (KAZANSKY 43) According to V. E. Kazansky, who wrote a small book about hunting with Borzoi in 1957, the best weather for hunting with Borzoi is when it is cool and dry, although the ground can be somewhat damp from recent rain. He considered temperatures from 5-10°C (41-50°F) to be optimal. Hunting during hot weather or strong rains and fog was nearly impossible. Additionally, running dogs on icy, harvested fields was dangerous as the stalks turn into sharp ice sticks and dogs can be cut badly. He regarded virgin steppe lands or soft grassy areas as the best places for successful hunting. There visibility was good and the terrain better for running horses and dogs. He does cite a couple of instances of prey running onto less than desirable terrain and the Borzoi pursuing and catching it there. In 1946, in the Saratov regional tests, a bitch, Kara, owned by Gordeyev, chased a hare over varied terrain for 3 kilometers and caught it along a railroad line. In 1950, in the Rostov competitions, a male named Geroy chased a hare over several types of terrain and caught it in a forest belt. (45-46)

Most hunters in Russia consider hunting fox more interesting than hare, primarily because of the fox’s evasion skills and that it usually does not leave the Borzoi’s field of vision. Additionally, chasing and catching a fox requires greater skill and courage of the Borzoi. Occasionally a Borzoi of light color is able to stealthily approach a fox. Each time the fox looks up, the dog lays down. The Borzoi proceeds in this fashion until it is close enough to rush the fox. One hound well known for its

disciplined hunting on fox was Porchai, owned by P.L. Romanov. (KAZANSKY 48-49)

Currently, many lovers of Borzoi in Russia are concerned about the fate of the breed. Many city dwellers own the dogs for decoration with little concern for its ability to run hard and to demonstrate ferocity, strength and hard discipline at the capture of game. M. Vlasov, A.V. Kamenitsky and I.M. Medvedev suggest that regular coursing meets on artificial hare be arranged and the issuance of Level III diplomas only be to dogs with sufficient stamina and harassment of game. The number of breedings should be increased, focusing primarily on dogs successful in taking game. (VLASOV)

The official website of the Russian Borzoi Club introduces the breed by saying that the Borzoi is the top breed of domestic dog

breeding, the national pride of Russia, a part of its history and culture and that almost lost, it has been found again. The site continued by stating that the Borzoi is of unsurpassed beauty and unique character and causes feelings similar to worship – the embodiment of Old Russia – a comrade in riding away to the fields – a

symbol of the landowner's life and the valiant entertainments of the Russian aristocracy. It is the purpose of the National Borzoi Club to unite fans of the breed and of hunting with the breed across all of Russia. (РУССКАЯ)

In an interview with Galina Viktorovna Zotova (1997), an internationally recognized expert on the breed, in the publication, *Russian Hunters*, she discusses the National Club and field activities involving Borzoi. According to Zotova, the National club includes hunting and breed clubs and plans competitions and races. Additionally, many Borzoi earn certificates in field tests. Borzoi can be awarded certificates in chasing rabbits but in order to receive a certificate for hunting fox, the dog must actually catch the fox. "The dogs are designed with a genetic, predestined hunting instinct. For a long time we placed Borzoi on the couch. Nevertheless, it still has its strong hunting instinct." (МУРОМЗЕВА) It is not likely that the complete revival of the hunts of Russian noblemen will come about, however, efforts are being made to provide more opportunities for Borzoi owners to hunt their dogs on wild dogs. (ЛЮТИН)

In 2003 the Russian Kynological Federation (RKF) joined the Federation Cynologique Internationale (FCI). The FCI is the World Canine Organization made up of 84 members (one per country). FCI insures that pedigrees and judges of the members are recognized by all FCI members. The RKF was unanimously

accepted as a federated member of FCI on May 26, 2003. In order for a dog to receive the title Champion of Russia, it must be a Champion in one of the FCI countries and must obtain one National Challenge Certificate (CAC) title in Russia. In the Champion class at FCI shows in Russia CAC and Russian CAC titles are awarded. A Junior CAC title is also awarded to both the best junior dog and the best junior bitch in Junior Class.(RKF) It is interesting to note that the artwork within the RKF logo is the head of a Borzoi, even though the organization represents all recognized breeds.

Zotova (1997) believes that the quality of Russian Borzoi today is excellent and dogs with serious defects are rare. Occasionally a problem at the joints is seen. One issue facing the Borzoi in Russia is that local and regional clubs are too isolated in their breeding and rarely go outside of the area for new blood. It is also a common practice for owners to breed their dogs without asking the advice of experts in the breed. She states that the most prominent breeders and owners of Borzoi in Russia belong to the Moscow Hunter Club and that, in addition there are a number of clubs in the

St. Petersburg area which are having a positive impact on the breed. Unfortunately, because of the vast size of Russia and the expense of travel it is difficult to organize meetings with fanciers from different areas.

The International Borzoi Council will hold its 2008 International Conference in St. Petersburg. The conference, which is held every three years at different locations, will be attended by fanciers from all over the world. The conference begins on Friday, June 27<sup>th</sup> and ends on July 1<sup>st</sup>. The Russian Borzoi Specialty show will be held on Yelagin Island on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June. The international conference will give Russian Borzoi enthusiasts an opportunity to meet with and exchange ideas with breed fanciers from other countries. Hopefully, the conference will also provide a forum for the sharing of ideas with breeders and owners from different parts of the Russian Federation.

If the Borzoi shown at the Specialty on Yelagin Island on June 3, 2007 are representative of the breed in Russia, then it is in very good shape. There was an entry of 82 Borzoi in the regular classes. Many of the hounds were outstanding representatives of the breed, being not only beautiful to look at but appearing physically and temperamentally sound enough to do what the breed was bred to do. There were several hounds which had toplines with too much arch, however, this is a problem not just in Russia but in other countries as well. Regarding the back

or topline, the American Kennel Club standard states "rising a little at the loins in a graceful curve." (COMPLETE 153) Both the Russian and FCI standards indicate that the back should be "broad, muscled, elastic, forming with the loin and croup a curve which is more pronounced in males. The highest point of this curve is situated in the region of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> lumbar vertebra. (ZOTOVA 217) Most of the dogs exhibited had very good toplines but some appeared to be almost wheel-backed. Heads, for the most part, were outstanding and temperaments of the dogs appeared to be good. With diligence and good breeding practices, the Borzoi should be around for many more centuries.

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**Sorva of Woronzova, 1903. Acquired from Woronzova Kennels by Joseph B. Thomas.**