

Race Training part I

von / by Tom Golcher <http://communities.msn.com/TheZoiBoyz>
- photos by KC Thompson

Recent successes on race tracks throughout Europe, and a kind request by the publisher of this magazine, Evelyn Kirsch, prompted me to write about our race training program and techniques.

I am by no means an expert in dog training, dog racing, canine health, canine growth, or canine nutrition. I will, however, be glad to share with the reading public, the training program that helped our borzoi to achieve the level of success that they have had.

KC and I cannot really take credit for the training techniques we use because it has been mostly „listening“ to experience that has guided us. Listening to those in the sport that have been successful, without being cruel and mistreating their animals. We listened to our competitors, listened to those with other breeds that race successfully, and listened to the breeders of our borzoi. We also gathered as much information about nutrition and growth conditioning as possible. Most of all, we tried to be always aware of the overall health and well being, mental and physical conditioning, of our potential racers, they are part of our family first and racers second.

My goal will be to write a series of articles for European Borzoi Magazine, that will cover the different phases of racing/coursing training. The training that you would give a 8 week old puppy is a lot different than for a 6 month old, a 9 month old, 1 year old, and a licensed racer. This program will not be correct for every borzoi, but will simply describe our program and try to demonstrate the reasoning behind it.

First however, what is a successful racer/courser? A successful racer/courser is a dog that consistently, over time, completes oval or coursing competitions, without interfering with competitors, staying focused, maintains conditioning that keeps the risk of injury to a minimum, and above all, loving the game. It does not require first place finishes, titles, or record breaking runs.

To have a successful racer, first and foremost, racing must be fun. Your borzoi will have to want the lure more than anything else. Noises, other dogs, other animals, muzzles, silks, the start box, and just about everything under the sun should be second to the lure. Many things can and will go wrong on the track or coursing field, but if the game is only to catch the lure then permanent bad results from the misfortunes might be avoided.

The first rule to keep racing fun, your borzoi must be fit and confident. A dog running in pain or nervous, cannot be having fun and will want to do it less or not at all. So how do we get our borzoi to want the lure more than anything else? Read on, and see what has worked for our ZoiBoyz.

Part 1 will deal primarily with puppies less than 28 weeks old. It is very important to be careful in these early weeks and months. Young borzoi need the proper balance of nutrition, rest, and exercise. Too much of one and not enough of the others can adversely affect the bone development, that in our breed, can take longer than two years, to complete. Bones that grow too fast can be too soft or not dense enough for a racing borzoi and lead to pain and injury prone animals. I believe that genetics will determine the final size of your borzoi. Slower growth is better than fast growth because the bones will tend to be stronger and more dense. Guidelines on what this balance should be is beyond the range of my knowledge. It is enough to say that each young borzoi will require a balance that is best for the individual.

Nothing is better for the young borzoi than frequent, natural, and spontaneous play. Preferably in open areas with few hazards such as holes, narrow openings, low branches, to name just a few. Strength, agility, and confidence is gained from open field play time. A young puppy will want about ten minutes of play every half



Lure toy play with Ambassador



More lure toy play with Ambassador



Open field play in Niefern, D. left to right Dimitri, Aruma, Aramis, Ninoska, Ouragan, and Ambassador.



Ambassador with siblings playing tug of war, at the home of SilkenSwift breeder, Bonnie Dalzell MA, in Hydes, Maryland USA



Aramis, sprint training, playing the come to me game

Another excellent training exercise to begin at around 20 weeks is the „Come to Me“ game. This game will start building up the speed

hour, sleeping the rest of the time. For most of us that is nearly impossible to provide unless we can provide a large, fenced, open area to roam and play in. If space is limited, make every attempt to get the puppies out 4 or 5 times a day for supervised play.

As soon as your borzoi has its eyes open and moving around and showing interest in objects around him, in addition to the natural play times, you can start encouraging the instinct to chase. An old sock on a piece of string is sufficient. Drag it around, individuals only, not around the entire litter. This is important. Each pup must have the success of catching their prey, in this case a sock. If this is done, with the entire litter at once, the dominate ones will succeed and the others will learn to wait for the dominate one to finish. If a less dominate one reaches the sock first, the dominate one may take it away, possibly discouraging the lesser one's future desire to get there first. The domination ritual will happen enough in normal play and is the natural course of things, but for lure play this should never happen. Ever see a dog, you know is fast, not pass a slower dog? The slower dog in front is probably a more dominate individual. Lure play should happen no more than twice a week and then put completely away from the pups. They will soon learn that when the lure comes out, the fun begins.

At about 4 months, the bones in your borzoi are a little stronger, and should be stressed a little more. Care must still be taken not to overstress the young bones, but clinical studies have proven that lack of use, i.e. running, will result in less bone density, increasing the risk of injury during hard racing that occurs on the oval tracks. The sock can still be used, if there is anything left, for the next level of lure toy play. We used a plush toy snake with a bell in one end. We tied this to a 2 meter long pole, with about a 2 meter long string. A horse buggy whip works really well for this. The reason for the long pole is to separate the human from the game. The 4 month old borzoi should be only interested in the lure toy and not the human on the other end of the pole.

Again, lure play should be solo - one pup per session. Sessions should be only five minutes maximum and only once or twice a week. Make sure the pup catches the lure toy several times. Then put it away somewhere it cannot be retrieved accidentally.

muscles. This can be done fairly easily with 2 people, a releaser and a catcher. Have one person, the releaser, stay with the dog. The other person, the catcher, should be the dogs favorite human, with the lure for added incentive. This person should walk about 100 meters away then call the dogs name. Use lots of encouragement and start moving the lure toy around. The person with the dog should then release the dog, also with encouragement. If all goes well the dog will have enjoyed a 100 meter sprint with a reward at the end, i.e. the lure toy and lots of love and good words from the catcher. If the dog comes to the catcher instead of the lure that's ok, but do a quick play time with the dog before petting and congratulating him. The idea here is to make the game a chase to the lure. Again, like with the lure toy training, only do this once or twice a week. One sprint is sufficient until the young borzoi is a little older and stronger. As your borzoi gets older and stronger, slight variations to this game can be very advantageous to conditioning, both mental and physical. I'll cover those variations in part 2.

Part 2, will include borzoi 7 months to 24 months, and will cover agility, strength training, more speed training, and introduction to racing. I'll also discuss choosing oval, coursing, or both.

Tom Golcher and KC Thompson are proud to owned by four very special borzoi, they fondly call the ZoiBoyz.
Silkenswift Ambassador - 2000 WM, 2000 EM, International Racing Champion
Ouragan des Princes de Kazan - 1999 BW LRS, 2000 BRS, #2 2000 WM, #3 2000 EM
Romaska's Aramis - Borzoi in training.
Silkenswift Bonne Chance- Borzoi in training.

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