

Race Training part II

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- pictures by KC Thompson

I want to remind the readers that I am not 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.

I stated in Part I of this race training series (European Borzoi Fall 2000 No 13 October – December) that I would include borzoi, 7 months to 24 months, and would cover agility, strength training, more speed training, and introduction to racing. After re-evaluating how I want to approach this series, I have decided to change the order. In this article, I will write about, awareness, agility, strength, and speed and will concentrate on the age group of 7 to 15 months old. The 7 to 15 month age group is probably the most important period of your dogs training and conditioning, and may shape the racing style of your borzoi for the rest of its life. I cannot stress enough the importance of free play, especially with other dogs of similar age and size, in developing awareness, agility, strength, and speed. This is the single most important part of your borzois training and social behavior.

Awareness of the body

At about 7 months old your borzoi puppy is still growing very fast. Now is the time to teach balance and confidence in their body. Believe it or not, many dogs are not very aware of their back legs or what they (the back legs) are doing. You can help to make them aware of their body. While you are spending personal time with your puppy, touch their hips, tail, rear end, and back legs often. Use a long strip of cloth to loosely wrap the rear legs a couple times a week for ½ hour periods. A couple times a week, take an old tee shirt and put

Strength

Free play – again the single best possible exercise for your puppy, and like in agility, your borzoi may benefit from some special exercises. A lot of owners encourage their borzoi to stand up with their front legs on their shoulders or chest. This is actually a very good exercise for your borzoi. By learning to do it on command, you not only control “jumping up” by your dog, but are doing two very excellent exercises. These are stretching and strengthening the hindquarters. Taking this one step further, I hang a sock, or some old cloth from different heights in trees. It has become a game to leap up to bring down the sock. These exercises will strengthen the loin, stomach muscles, and rears legs. To aid in strengthening the front legs, neck and chest, a game of “Tug-of-War” is a fun game. Again that sock (Race Training part I), that they have come to love, is held while the puppy tries to take it away. You must be careful to exert only enough resistance to keep the dog from taking the sock. Pulling or jerking the sock may cause damage to developing teeth or jaw. Let us not forget free play.



it on the dog from the back end. Place the tail through the neck hole and the rear legs through the armholes. This is especially helpful for puppies that are fearful and shy. This will help your puppy to become fully aware of their body movement and gain awareness of what its own body feels like. It is my belief that a dog, which is fully aware of its own body, is a confident dog.



Free play is very important.

Agility

A dog that is aware of its body, and has been given some concentrated agility exercises, might make the difference between a tragic collision or an effortless leap over an obstacle or another dog. You may think that with all the free play your puppy is doing, all the agility your borzoi will need is being learned on his or her own. This is partially true, but these tall lanky dogs can really benefit from some additional training from you, the owner. Simple things, like going up and down steps, are things that need to be practiced. Setting up a solid table, between 50 and 60 cm high, and teaching your borzoi to jump up on top and stack will also be very helpful.

While formal agility sessions (the picture shows Ambassador's father in a formal

Romashka's Aramis working those hind legs

Speed

One day you will watch your older borzoi puppy running and playing, and then all of a sudden he or she will take off and run faster than you have seen. I call this "finding turbo". Borzoi are not fast automatically. They have to learn to run at full speed in their classic double suspension gallop. The borzoi is one of the rare breeds that actually save a burst of speed for the kill. This feature can fool the inexperienced lure operator. Not all sighthounds can do this. Some borzoi never "find turbo", but there are some things you can do to help. If you follow the advice on awareness and agility you have already increased your borzoi's chance of finding turbo. They must have confidence in their ability to control their body or they will not – let it fly – so to speak.



Silkenswift Ambassador "finding Turbo!"

Along with the common games like, throwing a ball or a frisbee, for our long nosed friends, one of the best and safest ways to teach your borzoi to run fast is go to any of the tracks or coursing sites and let them chase the lure in a controlled setting. If your dog has become crazy about chasing that sock of yours around, then the lure should make your dog interested very quickly. I will address lure training in more depth in another article. However, if at around 7 to 10 months old your borzoi shows interest in the lure let him/her do some straight sprints of 100 to 150 meters long. No

training session) would be beneficial, they are not necessary to achieve results. While on my daily walks, I look for obstacles that my ZoiBoyz can go over, under, or on. I have them practice walking on narrow flat surfaces, jumping over park benches, and going under fence wires. Let your imagination set the challenges. After a while you will see your borzoi take on each obstacle you give him or her with joy. The more agility learned while young the better prepared they will be when they are adults.



DC SilkenSwift Blaze of Chaos, LCM4, SC, SORC, SGRC (7-95) agility training.

With my first two borzois, I used the forest as an agility training ground. I did this at the age when the desire for them to wander far on their own was not yet a problem. I would have them walk on, and jump over stacks of lumber. They would dash around, not at high speed, among the trees and learn to turn, zig, and zag. Once

more than two sprints in a session and they should be separated by at least 1 hour. A warm up/cool down period is recommended before/after each run. Warm up and cool down periods can be accomplished by brisk walking for 10 to 15 minutes. Offer plenty of water. During the warm up/cool down period pay close attention to the movement of your dog. If you suspect stiffness or pain, DO NOT LET YOUR DOG RUN. Always be certain that your dog is pain free before any sort of race training. If the dog connects pain to the race you may have a difficult time developing a confident and willing racer. Sprint training should be done no more than once per week. As your borzoi gets older and stronger we will change the distance and path of the lure, but for now be patient. One other thing I want to bring up at this point is track type. If you are training on a sand track, be certain to wash the feet, especially good around the cuticle of each toe, after each run. Tiny sand particles can find their way into the nail and nail bed and can develop into an infection. The grass track poses a different danger. Stopping too quickly for any age borzoi, especially a young one, is very hard on the leg and shoulder joints. A sand track is soft and provides a cushion for the stop, but a grass track is hard and provides no cushioning. On a grass track the lure operator should speed the lure ahead before stopping so that the borzoi will see that it is stopped and plan for his kill. A lure that is too close will cause the borzoi to overshoot his target causing a too abrupt stop and turn for the dog.

they got too fast, bold and too confident in their abilities, we stopped this game. Beware; the forest can be a dangerous place to play. Wild animals, hunters, and a number of other pitfalls can be serious and dangerous problems.



Tom and Ambassador looking for the next obstacle

The bottom line to remember is, training should never become stressful, painful, or boring. Keep any sort of training fun, interesting, and challenging and you have a good chance of bringing the best out of your trusted companion. The better trained and prepared your potential racer is the better the chances of reducing serious injury, on and off the track.

**The ZoiBoyz Racing Team
Tom, KC, and the Boyz
Silkenswift Ambassador
Ouragan des Princes de Kazan
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