

THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

by

Peyton Allen Buie

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Thesis Supervisor:

R. Jon McGee

Second Reader:

Stacie McGee

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LEGAL & CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS .....	3
III. PHYSICAL HEALTH .....	8
IV. EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL HEALTH .....	14
V. CONCLUSION .....	18
REFERENCES .....	19

### **Abstract**

The task of responsible dog ownership, for renters, can be a difficult one. This is as true for the borzoi as it is for any other breed, and in some cases, more so. The challenges range from remaining compliant with all state and local laws and contractual obligations, maintaining the physical health of the dog, and ensuring proper satisfaction of the dog's mental and emotional needs. While it is by no means impossible to overcome these challenges, prospective borzoi owners, who live in apartments, must be conscious of them, to ensure they do not take on responsibilities they cannot fulfill, culminating in the surrender, abandonment, or death of the dog.

*Keywords:* borzoi, dogs, apartment living, pet ownership

# THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

## I. INTRODUCTION

The borzoi, known also as the Russian wolfhound, is a breed of dog that has long been prized for both its athletic coursing abilities and its regal, elegant appearance. According to the American Kennel Club (AKC), the borzoi is considered a large breed (American Kennel Club, n.d.). The AKC standard for the borzoi states that a fully grown male should be at least 28 inches tall when measured at the withers (or the point at the base of the dog's neck above the shoulders), while females should be at least 26 inches tall (American Kennel Club, 1972). In addition, its weight should range from 75 to 105 pounds for a male and 60 to 90 pounds for a female. Because of its size, the borzoi is not normally considered an apartment-friendly pet. However, with preparation a responsible borzoi owner can manage the needs of this large dog while living in an apartment. For a first-time dog owner or someone unfamiliar with the borzoi, irresponsible ownership can easily lead to the dog's premature death (Edlin, 1976).

The complications associated with keeping a large dog such as a borzoi in an apartment setting are varied and can generally be split into three primary categories: legal/contractual considerations, the dog's physical health, and the mental/social health of the animal. Therefore, the sections of this paper will be split up accordingly, with each discussing the difficulties imposed by apartment life, as well as how one can largely, if not completely, assuage these difficulties. It is important to note that this paper focuses on the apartment first and the borzoi second, meaning at times, the author will go over information that, while not specific to the borzoi, is important to ensure a dog's happiness and health, in an apartment setting.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

If the appropriate steps are taken and one has the resources at their disposal, it is entirely possible to keep a happy, healthy large breed dog in one's apartment from puppyhood onward. In August of 2019, I had the chance to experience this for myself when I adopted my first dog, a five-month-old borzoi named Archie. Over the course of our almost year together, we have shared a number of experiences that I hope will be valuable to those who read this paper. Additionally, I will be pulling information from my collection of borzoi literature, information from the webpages of organizations that support responsible pet ownership, and interviews with both a professional dog trainer and well-established breeder.



## II. LEGAL & CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

The first items for consideration, before bringing a borzoi into an apartment environment, are the legal and contractual obligations, in regards to animal ownership, that potential pet owners have to the state and municipal territories in which they reside as well as to their apartments. This includes state legislation and city ordinances along with one's own lease agreement with their landlord. Additional contractual obligations may come into play when one is actually in the process of buying a borzoi, as most sales of purebred dogs include signing a contract with the breeder. While this section addresses state legislation specific to Texas, the concerns raised are applicable to all areas in the United States and are helpful regardless of one's geographic location.

The first thing to consider is the legality of owning certain breeds of dogs at all, in the state and municipality in which one resides. Fear of dog attacks has led to breed-specific legislation (BSL) in many municipalities across the United States, such as Denver, Colorado and Miami, Florida, although many places that once introduced BSL have since repealed such legislation, because it was ineffective or an inefficient means of preventing dog bites (Jones, 2017). Despite this, BSL still exists in many parts of the United States and as such, is an important consideration. While borzoi, are not typically considered an aggressive or overly reactive breed, they are a large breed and as such, may find their way into BSL, simply for that reason.

In the state of Texas, BSL is of little concern, because Texas does not allow municipalities to set restrictions on the basis of breed. Chapter 822 (Regulation of Animals) of the Health and Safety Code of Texas does not include any BSL. Furthermore, section 822.047 (Local Regulation of Dangerous Dogs) in subchapter D

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

states, “A county or municipality may place additional requirements or restrictions on dangerous dogs if the requirements or restrictions: (1) are not specific to one breed or several breeds of dogs; and (2) are more stringent than restrictions provided by this subchapter,” (Tex. Health & Safety Code, 1991). As such, municipalities in the State of Texas are unable to restrict dogs from being kept within their jurisdiction on the basis of what breed they are.

The next consideration that must be taken into account is the specific pet provisions in one’s leasing contract with their landlord. While breed-specific restrictions cannot be placed legally in Texas by municipalities, landlords are completely within their rights to ban specific breeds from taking up residence in their properties. A landlord can also place additional restrictions on potential canine residents. For instance, the leasing contract I signed in 2016 made the specific provision that “the following breeds of dogs are not permitted: German Shepherd, Akita, Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler, Dalmatian, Pit Bull, Chow, Wolf Hybrid or Bull Mastiff,” (Preiss Company, 2016). While the borzoi was not a part of the list for my leasing contract, this breed may find its way onto other, more stringent leasing contracts, due to its large size. Furthermore, many apartment complexes place a maximum size on their potential canine tenants. The same lease contract mentioned earlier also states, “animals over 50 pounds are not permitted,” (Preiss Company, 2016). This provision would restrict most borzoi, or at least those conforming to the AKC standard for the breed, which sets minimum weight for a fully-grown borzoi at 60 pounds for a female (American Kennel Club, 1972). Therefore, weight limits on a potential canine companion are the most real and impactful restriction, when a person is considering bringing a dog into an apartment setting.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

It is worth mentioning that while apartments can enact breed-specific restrictions and weight limits, some do not. All other lease agreements I have signed, subsequent to my 2016 lease, made no provisions for restricted breeds and no weight limits. Therefore, it is important for one to carefully read their own leasing agreement, to determine if a large dog would be permissible in their apartment complex. It is entirely possible to find an apartment that allows larger dogs, and if someone were looking into apartments while simultaneously considering buying a borzoi, or acquiring any kind of large dog, it would be in their best interest to seek an complex that does not place breed or size restrictions on resident animals.

The final contractual obligation to consider when purchasing a pure breed dog like a borzoi is the breeder's contract. When purchasing a purebred dog, it is common practice for breeders to write up a contract that includes provisions for the health and welfare of the dog they are selling. In fact, from the breeder's perspective, the primary purpose of these purchasing contract is to protect the dog that is being sold (A. Claggett, Personal communication, July 20, 2020).

To get a firm understanding of breeding contracts I interviewed a local breeder, Ashlee Claggett. Claggett is a Doberman breeder, recognized by the AKC as a Breeder of Merit and has, so far in her career, bred ten litters over the course of her almost fifteen years as a breeder. During the interview, she explained the provisions commonly included in breeding contracts. She explained that there are the basics of the transaction (purchase price and general information about the purchased animal), health information (vaccination records, etc.), and expectations the breeder has for the purchaser/owner (A. Claggett, personal communication, July 20, 2020). It is this last category that can cause

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

problems when one has decided to try to bring a borzoi, or almost any other purebred dog, into their apartment. “A lot, if not most, breeders require a fenced in yard,” says Claggett (personal communication, July 20, 2020). This condition, if included in a purchasing contract, can completely rule out the possibility of owning a large breed dog while living in an apartment, as apartments rarely, if ever, have fenced in yards attached to each unit.

While it is true that apartments rarely have fenced yards, Claggett (personal communication, July 20, 2020) further stated, “breeders will make exceptions for the right cases and right situations for the dogs.” Such was my situation when I finally had the opportunity to acquire my borzoi. After getting to know me, the breeder from whom I adopted my borzoi (who was not the first borzoi breeder I had contacted) agreed that she would feel comfortable placing a dog with me, because I had proven to have both the drive and capabilities to ensure my dog was well taken care of, regardless of whether I lived in an apartment or not.

This “interview process” with my dog's breeder, included meeting her in person, discussing why I wanted a borzoi, and providing references within the dog show community who could attest to my ability to care for dogs. Additionally, because I was interested in a show prospect (or a puppy that is sold with the expectation of being shown at dog shows once fully grown) she also observed me handling one of her borzois at a dog show. While this process was more involved than it would have been had I simply been looking for a companion animal, according to Scott (2006), it is standard procedure “to be interrogated by the breeder very thoroughly.” (p. 26).

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

In conclusion, it is completely possible for a large dog like a borzoi to be owned by someone living in an apartment setting. While the breeder's contract provides the largest of the legal hurdles, it is also the most flexible, as the law and leasing contracts are often much firmer as far as the consumer is concerned. From the point of view of the Health and Safety Code of Texas, it is completely acceptable. Potential restrictions such as a lease contract with a landlord and or a purchasing contract with a potential breeder can be remedied by being mindful of restrictions in the pet addendums in one's lease and being open and honest about one's ability to provide for a large dog's needs. Thus, there are no legal obstacles that would entirely prevent a renter from owning a large dog in the state of Texas.

### III. PHYSICAL HEALTH

Having discussed the legality of owning a large breed dog in an apartment, it is now time to consider the health problems apartment life may cause a large breed dog such as the borzoi. Much of the complications discussed in this chapter are also affected by other variables in one's life – especially resources available at the apartment complex or in one's community, whether or not the dog owner has roommates, and whether or not the owner has a job. These will all be discussed together with the general health and welfare of an apartment-dwelling borzoi.

Most of the basics of dog ownership do not vary between apartments and homes with fenced-in yards. One would be able to provide food, water, and a safe, comfortable place to sleep to a dog, regardless of whether they live in a home or apartment complex. The one factor missing, a yard, is what makes the difference. Anything a dog would do in their back yard becomes more complicated, including a dog's ability to relieve themselves and get sufficient physical exercise, if a yard space is not available.

Once a dog is fully grown, the first of these two activities, giving the dog a chance to urinate and defecate, can be easily satisfied by taking a dog for a few daily walks. Puppies, however, because of their poor bladder and bowel control, impose a larger challenge.

For a puppy, the need to go outside can be much more urgent, requiring them “to be taken outside every time [the dog] wakes up, about 10-15 minutes after every meal and after every period of play – all day long, from first thing in the morning until his bedtime,” (Scott, 2006, p. 91). This can mean having to take a puppy out a dozen times or more per day, until they learn bladder and bowel control, so almost constant supervision

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

is required to prevent accidents in one's apartment. Once a puppy learns to control their bladder and bowels, they "will need to relieve [themselves] only four to five times a day," (Edlin, 1976, p. 100). This can still be a difficult task for someone living in an apartment, depending on their profession and whether or not they live alone. If one works eight to ten hours throughout the day and lives alone, it would be nearly impossible to singlehandedly care for a new puppy. However, if a person's schedule permits breaks (such as the schedule of a college student) or if they have a roommate with an alternate schedule who agrees to help, caring for a new puppy in an apartment can be manageable. If neither one's schedule, nor their roommate situation, permit frequent trips outside for a puppy to eliminate, they might consider utilizing a doggy daycare. This can be a costly solution, however, so one may also consider speaking with the breeder and putting off bringing their new puppy home, until the dog is old enough to hold its bladder for more than a couple of hours at a time.

Hannah McGee, CPDT-KA (Certified Professional Dog Trainer, Knowledge Assessed), states that an adult dog's needs are much more manageable than that of a puppy (personal communication, August 2, 2020). In my experience with Archie, an adult borzoi can get by being taken out only twice a day (so long as the dog both urinates and defecates on those two occasions). This, however, is not a humane situation for the long-term, as it implies that the only reason a dog needs to go outside is to relieve themselves. This is not the case. Dogs are social animals who require social interaction and mental stimulation (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020). Although eliminating waste may be *the owner's* primary reason for taking their dog for a walk, a

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

dog also needs to be taken outside to give them an opportunity for exercise and to explore their environment.

The issue of physical activity is much more breed-specific than the need to eliminate. The borzoi, for example, bred to course (or chase) after prey, is a very active, athletic breed. While they “do not always need miles and miles of walking ... a sedentary lifestyle is as harmful to a dog as it is to a person,” (Scott, 2006, p. 73). While many breeders are equipped with kennels that have sizeable runs and many homeowners have a yard sufficient to easily supply a large breed dog with space to exercise, a person living in an apartment can find exercising their dog a particular challenge.

The first thing to consider in matching a dog to an owner’s lifestyle is the owner’s activity level. For some people, a borzoi would make the perfect jogging companion, allowing owner and dog alike to fulfill their need for exercise. For other dog owners, however, this may not be the most desirable way to get their dog its daily exercise. Even joggers may find it difficult to keep up with their dog’s needs – while few joggers run every day of the week, a sight hound, like the borzoi, does not take days off from their exercise regimen. Perhaps the best way to exercise a dog like a borzoi is to “[l]et [them] loose in the wide open spaces,” (Gordon, 1974, p. 83). The borzoi, while happy to accompany one on a walk or jog, is at their most joyous when able to run at their own pace, which can reach up to 35 or 40 miles per hour (American Kennel Club, n.d.).

A dog’s need for activity is one of the main problems of apartment life: that is, few renters have easy access to a safe, fenced-in field adjacent to their complex that would allow a large dog to free run at their leisure. This is where local resources in different apartment complexes or communities can be incredibly valuable. Many



## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

apartment complexes have dog parks or other fenced in areas that may be used to give a dog some valuable running time. One must be cautious, however, with dog parks. I discussed the risks associated with dog parks with Hannah McGee, CPDT-KA. First, bringing a collection of different dogs, from different homes together, increases the risk of dogs contracting a harmful illness. Second, there is the problem of an aggressive dog or a dog that does not respond to their owner. All dogs develop their own play styles and while “rough-housing” may be one dog’s style of play, another dog may prefer a simple game of chase. A dog unused to rough play or unfamiliar with other dogs may misread the signals of other dogs in the park and respond aggressively. Therefore, care must always be taken when approaching a dog park. One should always keep an eye out for a dog that may exhibit signs of illness and be observant of play activities to ensure their dogs safety (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020).

Perhaps the best solution to the problem of exercise for an apartment-dwelling large breed is finding a nearby park that is large and open and finding simple games to play with one’s dog. Gail McRae (1990) in her book, *Borzois*, states:

Dogs that are house-bound, particularly those that live in apartments, need to be walked out-of-doors after each meal... Owners can make this daily ritual more pleasant both for themselves and their canine companions by combining the walk with... a bit of fun and togetherness. Whenever possible, take a stroll to an empty lot, a playground, or a nearby park. Attach a long lead to your dog’s collar, and let [them] run and jump and tone [their] body through aerobic activity. (p. 78)

While in a large, open area with one’s dog, it is best to keep them occupied with games or other such activities. “Borzois are coursing hounds and it is their nature to chase

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

any living moving object,” (Gordon, 1974, p. 84). For instance, my parents have two outside cats and anytime I take my dog home for a visit, he is always on the lookout for them. He has gone streaking after these cats on a few occasions, and once he is engaged in the chase, he is difficult to quickly recall. This tendency to chase whatever moves has led many borzois to their premature deaths by way of running into a busy roadway and being hit by a car (Edlin, 1976). To learn more about how to curb this tendency, I consulted with canine trainer, McGee. McGee states that a dog’s tenacity in chasing other creatures can often be easily transferred into a fun game of fetch. Furthermore, McGee explains that this game serves two purposes: first, it is an excellent source of exercise and engagement for the dog, as well as an excellent way of strengthening their bond with their owner. Second, while the dog’s attention is focused on the ball, it decreases the possibility they will see something else to chase (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020). However, it is my opinion that it is always best to err on the side of caution and keep one’s dog on an extra-long lead if the area they are in has wildlife or traffic and lacks a fence. While having free reign of a wide, open space would certainly be any dog’s preference, in my experience, a 26-foot retractable leash (the longest type sold) would give them plenty of room to romp while keeping them safe, so long as you are willing to jog with them a bit to ensure they do not hit the end of the lead at top speed. Otherwise, an enclosed space is practically required for the dog’s safety.

When it came to exercising my borzoi while living in an apartment, I found that he was happiest when playing with the dog owned by a friend of mine. Almost every day, I would take him to her duplex, where she had a large, fenced area and we would let our dogs out to run and play together. This was a fantastic experience for him, as it not only

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

gave him the opportunity to burn off a little steam, but it also gave him a chance to socialize with another dog. If my friend was busy or unavailable, I would often take my borzoi to a nearby park with a large, fenced area and we would play a game of fetch with a tennis ball until he was no longer interested in the game. If no suitable parks or fields are accessible and the owner has no desire to exercise their dog daily, the owner should re-examine their situation and consider whether or not it would be better to wait until their lifestyle or residence changes before taking on a large breed dog, such as a borzoi.

While apartment life presents its own challenges to life with a large breed dog, such as the borzoi, they are by no means insurmountable. The lack of a fenced-in yard presents challenges to the owner of a such a large dog. However, given the local resources available to many people residing in apartments, it is entirely possible to satisfy these needs as well as they would be satisfied in a home.

#### IV. EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL HEALTH

The final consideration to be taken when judging the viability of keeping a large breed dog in an apartment is their emotional and social well-being in such a setting. Some breeds, such as the borzoi, are rather social as they are bred and raised to work well with other dogs and people (American Kennel Club, n.d.). On the other hand, some herding breeds, such as the Great Pyrenees, are much more content, living away from people and other dogs. Their need for social stimulation is met by the herds they watch over, and as a result, Pyrenees do not have the same degree of need for social stimulation with people and other dogs (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020).

According to Kearn (2019), it is recommended that “dogs spend no more than six to eight hours alone,” during the day, and their social time is an important element of their behavioral needs (section 4, para. 3). One’s ability to provide this kind of social time in an apartment, depends not as much on the apartment itself, but more on one’s job and whether or not they have a roommate. If the owner of a dog has roommates, the problem of providing a dog enough social time can be dealt with rather easily. A roommate can provide a dog social time while the owner is away at work or school. If that roommate has a pet of their own, finding social time for one’s dog becomes much easier as even when people are away, the pets will at the very least, have each other’s company. Although roommates are not a given for living in an apartment, and many complexes place limits on the number of pets one can keep, a roommate is still a convenient solution to an owner’s absence. This has often been my solution when I have been busy with work or school. When I had a roommate and I knew I would be gone for more than three or four hours, I would ask her if she would be around later that day to care for my dog’s

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

needs. If she was busy and would not be around, I knew I would have to either find a little time to swing by the apartment myself or ask another friend with a key to our apartment if they could come by when they had a chance.

If one is living in an apartment alone and works eight to ten hours a day, another possibility is a doggy daycare or having a dog walker come in the middle of the day to exercise the dog and allow them time to relieve themselves. Even a neighbor or nearby friend could be called upon to give one's dog some social time, by walking them while the dog's owner is at work. Regardless of how it is accomplished, it is important a dog gets enough social time to ensure their emotional well-being.

Insufficient social time can lead to a dog having long-term behavioral issues. If a dog isn't receiving "the interaction they crave, they may turn to other things like potentially destructive exploration... to compensate," and more importantly, "[i]n the long term, the consequences may be dogs who do not know how to play or interact with humans appropriately, who may be more likely to be apprehensive, avoidant, or anxious around strangers," (Kearl, 2019, section 5, para. 4). For example, I was once watching the dogs of some close family friends while they were away on vacation. Among their many dogs was a pumi, a small Hungarian herding breed. She was under a year old at the time and had not yet attained an adequate level of socialization. On the third day of watching the family's dogs, I was bending over to pick up the pumi to return her to her crate when she bit me on my right hand. This reaction was likely caused by a mixture her insufficient socialization and the fact that she was cornered at the time, which caused her to interpret my approaching hands as a near-unavoidable threat. This caused a fear-based reaction, leading her to assume that biting me was an appropriate response to what she saw as a

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

risk to her safety. Such a reaction is precisely what Kearl is alluding to when she references “apprehensive, avoidant, or anxious” behaviors (Kearl, 2019, section 5, para. 4). The pumi displayed avoidant behavior in her initial attempt to escape me, which led to her cornering; she then displayed anxious or apprehensive behavior in her attempt to evade what she perceived as certain doom by biting me.

Proper amounts of social time are especially important for the cognitive and social development of puppies, as they require socialization to develop into well-tempered adults. Loraine Groshans (1981), author of *The Complete Borzoi*, states:

Training of various types is best started at [eight weeks of] age. If adequate socialization has taken place between eight weeks and three months, the puppy is well prepared to start the next phase in which he starts to declare his independence. Adolescence is between nine months and fourteen months in the Borzoi. At times a dog that has been under-socialized prior to this will suddenly react adversely to strangers or strange situations (p. 245).

The importance of proper socialization cannot be over-estimated when an “adverse” reaction might mean a dog bite. Having plenty of opportunities to interact with strangers of both the human and canine variety is very important in a dog’s socialization, especially to a young puppy. Socializing a puppy can be as simple as taking a couple of trips to the dog park a week to meet and socialize with new dogs and people. It could also mean taking your dog to dog-friendly stores such as Pet Smart or Tractor Supply (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020). A number of creative solutions can be devised to ensure a large-breed puppy attains a proper level of social interaction and one need only look around their own community to find these opportunities.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

While many would focus on the physical needs of their dog and gloss over something like social time, its importance in a dog's life cannot be emphasized enough. Dogs, much like humans, need adequate social time to satisfy their emotional needs (H. McGee, personal communication, August 2, 2020). This social time can easily be attained regardless of whether one lives in a home with a full-sized yard or in an apartment.

## V. CONCLUSION

The borzoi, like all breeds, has its own set of needs that must be satisfied in order to maintain physical and mental health. The requirements to fulfill these needs in an apartment setting presents many problems, whether those be legal issues or complications to the task of maintaining the physical and social health of the dog. These difficulties, while by no means insurmountable, do present some novel challenges to anyone but an experienced dog owner. In order to avoid the possibility of being responsible for a dog's premature demise, the prospective borzoi owner/apartment-renter should examine whether or not they would be able to fulfill the needs of the breed. Responsible pet ownership begins long before one brings their new pup home.



## THE EFFICACY OF THE APARTMENT BORZOI

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