

### **A Perspective on Grooming**

Grooming I think comes under the heading of evolution. Like all things, it must change as our lifestyles and affluence change. Do you wear the same hairstyle you wore 15 years or 30 years ago or wear the same clothes? Well, maybe you do and perhaps you live in a time warp and not where the rest of us do.

Many years ago when I was rocking around the ring with some of the first Siberians in Queensland, it was the norm to run a dog under a hose and let him shake and dry overnight. Just a quick brush and he'd be right Jack. There are some that still do just that and still some breeds where the purists don't believe in bathing at all.

A couple of years ago in Denmark I had occasion to chat to a man with a rather good looking dog whose coat could have done with some attention. He assured me that this dog had never been bathed and I thought at first he hadn't understood my query. He took great pains to tell me it had never ever been bathed since it came from it's mother. Oh dear! I know it gets cold up there and maybe dogs don't smell as bad, but I was horrified.

I kept thinking of how the judge must feel touching a dog that had never been bathed. Can you imagine a doctor having to perform a medical examination on someone who hadn't showered that day? Yuk! I also remember starting hairdressing 30 something years ago and people would have their hair dry cut - no shampoo. I kept thinking about where their head had been previously! Nasty thoughts, but relevant.

The follow up to this exhibitor in Denmark was that the very next day, the lady judge gave this man a good public dressing down and told him to never bring an unclean dog into her ring again. Needless to say the dog didn't win and that was a shame as it was a very nice dog and she told him that too. This man had shown the dog previously and hadn't learned anything. He was quite insistent that it was better to leave this coat natural. I am still figuring out what was better about it and for whom.

Well, as I say, things change. People now have their hair shampooed instead of using Velvet Soap as in my grandmother's day, they now wear deodorant and blow dry their hair and generally shower at least once a day. Back in the 40's and 50's Jon, my husband, tells me that it was the rule in English boarding schools to bath only twice a week. Thankfully things change.

So, if indeed the lack of washing and titivating facilities had been the reason for hampering our pursuit of regular ablutions, then none of us have any excuse anymore and none of us have any reason to not wash our dog either! Have you ever stuck your nose near some of these traditionally "unwashed"

breeds? Pongey little devils. If the Komondor owners in America can manage to bath and dry and keep sweet smelling these hair care marathons, then anyone can.

Just as availability of hygiene preparations and home hair care and equipment have become regular every day items for us, then so have the opportunities to glamorize our dogs. I can't tolerate the notion that a breed should be shown natural because it's always been traditional! What rot! That would be like saying Miss World is a gorgeous natural beauty and we should send her out for the competition without make-up, her hair not done and wearing a day frock.

It's different if your standard specifically states that no fluffing around is allowed with this particular breed coat or you live and show in a country where the "thought police" are out and about and it is a mortal sin to even think to attempt to alter a dog's coat texture - technically that could mean no conditioner or shampoo as both of these items have an effect on coat texture. What do they suggest one washes the dog's coat with? Scotch mist? Amazing how many cans of hairspray I saw on the grooming trolleys in one of these countries. Of course one can ask, "when does a hairstyle overtake the dog?" Does a hairstyle then become the dog? Just how far can you push the envelope? When does reason go out the door and we lose perspective?

It's all about enhancement - using what is available and making the very best of it. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear but you can sure make a darned nice dog look a million dollars if you present it well. No one is suggesting that one should present a poor specimen and then doll it up to try to fool the judges. Who's fooling whom?

The Americans generally seem to have this grooming routine well in hand. Again I hear purists who think the American exhibitors over-do it. Do they? Or have they just evolved like the breeds have? Ever checked out an old Kennel Club year book from around the 30's? Pugs for instance, don't even resemble what is shown today. Time marches on.

I see breeds trimmed that were not traditionally trimmed in the past even though their standards make no mention whatsoever of trimming. Now surely if the standard does not say one shouldn't or must not trim, then that means you could trim if you chose to? Does it or doesn't it? I overheard a couple of irate exhibitor/breeders in the U.S. who go back always in dogdom and were very loud in their opinion that this particular breed that was being shown ought never to be trimmed. Now, armed with my trusty standard which I make it my business to carry if possible for whatever breed I am watching in the quest to learn, I was thoroughly perplexed as there was absolutely no mention whatsoever in regard to whether one should or should not trim. So, how could these experts say it must not be done? Tradition? I must confess I thought the breed in the ring looked fantastic trimmed a little

here and there. Perhaps this breed's club should petition the AKC to make changes to disallow trimming if it is so contentious?

Well, my own breed standard does not allow trimming and I for one am thoroughly delighted, as being a hairdresser I have trimmed more heads of human hair than I like to remember and the last thing I want to do on weekends with my hobby is to have to start trimming the darned dogs. However, I am thrilled to bath, shampoo, condition, blow dry, brush, shine and titivate my dogs each and every weekend. I love to see how good I can make them look, how great I can make that coat look and to look as healthy and shiny and spark-a-larkling as I can.

We are working I believe, with canine athletes to bring them to their very best performance and presentation. If you have a good dog conforming as closely to your standard as possible, you have fed and conditioned him and trained him to your very best, then it is down to the wire now with good, immaculate and state of the art grooming. If you don't know how, learn. Life is a university, every day. Heaven forbid we should deny ourselves the opportunity to learn something new, evolve and improve.

The judges will thank you. The judge won't need to wash his/her hands after every dog and perhaps your dog will look the better for it all.

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