

The Art of Trimming

Owning a breed such as the Siberian which never is to be trimmed except for the feet and perhaps whiskers I had not delved into the intricacies of trimming or shaping a dog until required to assist others with breeds that necessitate such arts.

Now, as a hairdresser with over 30 years experience, this was relatively easy to accomplish. Just show me the picture and I will do it for you. That's what thousands of clients have requested over the years and it is second nature.

As long as you have the vital techniques then all can be achieved.

It really doesn't matter what breed of dog you are trimming or sculpting a shape into, you just need some basic guidelines.

Firstly, the eye can deceive. Experience can make an eye but for the novice that hardly helps. I often see steps and stairs chopped into coats that need not have been. I often see shapes that are not correct and shapes that do nothing for the dog but were taught by some well meaning mentor whose dog had perhaps different requirements.

Firstly acquire a picture of the ideal dog of your breed that makes your heart sing. Then pin it up to wherever you are working and study the elements of this shape and what it has done for that dog. Has it served to shorten a back that requires shortening? Has it carved a tuck-up when previously there wasn't enough? Has it allowed a visual line to be given attention, to indicate elegance and flow? Has it lengthened a neck? Has it given the illusion of hiding sickle hocks? Okay, so you get my drift.

Now, my most important message to you all is - it is not what you cut off but what you leave behind that is important! When in doubt, stop! don't cut another thing - walk away from it. Come back to it later and then re-evaluate your shape. Don't cut stuff off because someone else does it to their dog.

Secondly, purchase a great pair of thinning shears/scissors. These are to become your new best friend. This way, you only to get to chop off half of the coat instead of the whole lot in one go! You only get to make half a mistake! Our saying in hairdressing apprenticeship days, was little scissors, small mistakes. Thinning shears give a nice soft line and allow you to tip toe through the tulips. You can then go over the line or edge with regular scissors to take the wisps off. Takes more time, but so does growing a new coat.

Now armed with a good cutting comb with all teeth intact, your thinning shears, 6 inch scissors (because this is a manageable size and you can upgrade to a pair of hedge clippers later), dryer, electric clippers if necessary with attachments and styling products, you can begin. More about electric clippers another time but I do have the view that if it was that easy, then we could all whack a guard on the clippers and run them evenly all over the dog. That presumes there is a perfect shape underneath.

Let's for the purpose of the exercise use a Terrier such as a Lakeland where the leg coat has to fluff out and be trimmed to shape. Blow dry, working up with the fingers or brush to stand the coat up and outwards. Now using a

SMALL amount of Plush Puppy Sit N Stay, warm between the hands and lightly apply by running the hands and fingers through the coat and brush again. This helps the coat to stay where you want it. Now evaluate where the coat has to come off. For instance, if the leg seems to be too far forward, then cut more hair off the front and less off the back .

Stand well back and move the thinning scissors along the visual guideline you have estimated. I am assuming you have the dog secured in a neck and a belly noose to prevent him jumping all over the table whilst you do this. Now stand at the front of the dog and if he is too wide in front, then you remove the hair closer at the outer edges than the inner edges. Round all four sections off into one nice shape. Take the wisps off with your scissors. If he is out at the elbows in front view, then trim closer at the top of the leg and leave more at the bottom.

Truly, some dogs I have seen are great haircuts. It is up to the judges to evaluate with their hands and watch the movement to grade the dogs. Makes you spit doesn't it when they then change the order on the stack?

Flowing coats need to be dried straight and smooth with either Plush Puppy Blow Dry Cream or Plush Puppy Swishy Coat or both. The Swishy Coat gets rid of the wave in the coat and the Blow Dry Cream flattens out a boofy coat and allows the brush to glide through the tangles. If you need to do both, then use both. Then trim.

I like the flowing lines of elegance the pro groomer/handlers achieve with Setters. This wonderful curving line that arcs from the chest right through to the tip of the tail. Get a copy of a recent Canine Chronicle (U.S.A.) and check out the beautiful colour pics of some of these great dogs' hairdos.

Make sure you do all this trimming thing well before a show - like a week. Then you get to re-evaluate the job you have done again when you bath and dry for the big day.

Lastly, remember it our quest to present to our very best on the day. It is not our quest to present a poor specimen and doll him up to fool everyone, including ourselves. Your job is made easier if you start with a good dog but it is permissible and would be remiss if we didn't tweak him just a little.

CHERYL LECOURT

Don't forget to check out these products that relate to this article in our online shop:

Blow Dry Cream
Sit N Stay
Swishy Coat