

Grooming The Irish Setter Show Dog

For those of you who do not know me, I am a professional Canine Beautician of over twenty years I run my own High Street Grooming Salon in Leicester, apart from pet dogs we also have a regular clientele of many breeds of show dogs, and together with our Thendara Irish Setters, I also own and show Afghan Hounds, the ultimate challenge in coat care and presentation!

It is important to remember when reading the following that these are my opinions, others may do it differently with equally good results, and there are those that sculpturing and preening of coats is objectionable. My view is that today's show dog has to be presented to advantage if one wants to compete at the highest level, take a close look at any group at a general championship show, note the top dogs, look at their presentation, believe me, they were not just thrown in the bath the night before and quickly hacked at on the bench before their class!

Regardless of how much long feathering the individual dog carries, the crowning glory of the Irish Setter is his unique and beautiful red coat, which should gleam like a new conker.

Length and quality of coat is genetic, I do not believe there is anything you can feed to a dog which will make its coat grow longer than its own genetic make up will allow.

Coat condition is dictated by the animals general health and diet, how it is cared for and seasonal changes, some will moult in the summer months, and the majority of bitches are difficult to keep in condition when they come into season or after a litter, most will drop a lot of coat around that time and the condition will be lost for a while. When my own Bitches are dropping coat, I bath them every few days and brush and brush until all the dead hair is removed, the sooner its gone the sooner the new hair will start to come through.

From the many questions I am asked the main concern for a lot of exhibitors is how to accomplish trimming, but before I go into that lets look at something far more important. BATHING.

I do not hold true with the belief that to regularly bath a dog will 'ruin its coat', 'is not good for it', or 'will wash all the oil from the coat'. 'Get real' you cannot change how your dog is made but you can ensure its presentation can compete with the best, learn to cherish every hair.

Look after what you have.

Never brush or comb the long feathering hair when dry, especially when dirty. Always shampoo and condition first and brush out when towel dried. This should be done at least once a week, or on a male dog it should be done every 3 days. When brushing out at a show always mist the coat first with water.

What to use and How to do it

Every coat is different, so trial different products until you find one that suits. You will probably find you will need to use a different shampoo and conditioner on the body to that of the feathering.

If your dog has thick strong hair with a course feel to it and or a certain amount of wave in the top coat, use a shampoo and conditioner that is rich, such as Plush Puppy conditioning shampoo with evening primrose or one made for long flowing coated breeds i.e. Afghans, Llasa Apso etc.

Where the feathering is fine use a much lighter shampoo, Plush Puppy Body Building shampoo will help boost the volume without flattening the hair, if conditioner is still required use a very diluted, silk protein conditioner.

To use something richer as those mentioned above will make fine hair lank.

On the head and body I prefer to use something like Plush Puppy's all purpose shampoo with henna, it gives a great shine, or if there is a build up of conditioning products and or dirt the best clarifying shampoo is Plush Puppy Deep Cleansing shampoo, Which will leave a gleaming coat.

When shampooing it is imperative to saturate the dog with warm water, for the first wash dilute your shampoo and rinse through the coat, shampoo the head and body first with your chosen body shampoo and rinse thoroughly now work in the conditioning shampoo through the feathering and

rinse out. Cover the entire feathering in conditioner, if there are any tangles work out with your fingers and then brush through with a bristle brush, (wet hair can take far more punishment than dry) dilute some more of the conditioner and pour over the body and rinse out until the body feels squeaky clean, then gently rinse out the remaining conditioner through the feathering until you can feel just a trace left.

Squeeze excess water from the coat and towel dry.

Tip. Water Temperature can affect the finished result, on thick coats a final cold rinse will give a sleeker look, on finer hair hotter water will maximise the coat.

Brushing

I recommend only two types of brush to be used on a show coat the first is a good quality bristle or bristle and nylon type, although expensive I find the best is a Mason & Pearson, the second is a good quality cushioned pin brush. Combing should be done very carefully and only on fully brushed out hair.

After towelling start brushing out the long hair with the pin brush, always start from the ends and work up towards the body, use the bristle brush on the body.

If you intend to blow dry the coat wait until the coat is just damp, blow-drying very wet hair will knock the body from it.

If your dog has quite a short flat body coat, leave to dry naturally, or with maybe just a little warm air being brushed through in the wrong direction this will lift the roots slightly and give more movement to the coat.

On thick or wavy types blow dry thoroughly brushing the coat downwards as you go.

Now go on to drying the feathering, I start with the front legs working with the brush from the bottom of the leg, brushing each section until dry working up towards the body, I then usually go on to the chest area back legs and tail and finishing on the more delicate under body hair. The coat can then if needed be gently combed into place.

There is no point perfectly blow drying your dogs hair the night before a show if you are going to let it have a free run in the fields before you leave (Jeremy!) you will just have to get up a couple of hours earlier and do it in the morning, perfection is never easy!

Looking after the coat In between shows

Assuming your Irish Setter has access to what he loves the most i.e. fields, rivers, filthy swamps, woods, & mud you will have had to deal with trying to remove all manor of lovelies from the coat! All of these things do nothing for the condition of the show coat, however if removed correctly coat should not be lost.

To remove sticks grass and sticky thistles, saturate the dry coat in any neat conditioner and remove with your fingers, pulling apart any tangles, follow by brushing in the conditioner, start from the ends of the feathering working up towards the body, rinse with warm water.

Never try to brush the above out dry; the hair will break, only the body coat can be brushed dry with a bristle brush.

When maintaining the coat between shows always use a clarifying shampoo to remove excess conditioning products, oils and other maintenance products, grooming sprays and dirt, then go on to the conditioning shampoo rinse thoroughly and then saturate in conditioner and rinse but leaving some still in, the coat should feel rinsed but slick, alternately a leave in oil treatment such as Plush Puppy Sea Breeze Oil can be used, follow their instructions.

Trimming

The equipment required is a 46 tooth pair of thinning scissors, a 5 to 7 inch pair of straight scissors a stripping knife and a rubber finger pod. Your scissors should always be very sharp, obtain the best you can afford.

I have no problem with the use of electric clippers on the backs of ears and necks if they are used correctly and done at least a week or two before the show, but I would never use them anywhere else.

Before trimming your dog, take a really good look at him, work out in your mind just what you are trying to achieve and remind yourself of the standard. If for example his neck is very long and you then take the hair away right back to the skin his neck will look even longer but weak. Remember you are trying to enhance his outline not emphasise his faults.

The Irish Setter coat is made up of two textures softer lighter coloured undercoat and a glossy darker coloured topcoat of harder primary hair the feathering falls between the two. If you cut into the topcoat you will ruin the appearance as all that will show is the undercoat, it is a mistake that is often made around the neck area, and it is this area that I am asked most often for advice.

Always trim your dog when he is freshly bathed, if nothing else dirty hair will blunt your scissors. If your dog has dull soft undercoat breaking through the top coat carefully strip out with your finger and thumb always working down the lay of the hair, from the back of the head to the tail, a very fine toothed metal comb can also help remove it. Soft fluff that can appear on the front legs, stifles and head should also be stripped in the same way

This picture of 'ken' illustrates how when stripped Correctly the appearance should look completely natural.

Feet should be trimmed with the straight scissors, start by trimming away the hair on the pads, brush up the hair between the toes and cut off level with the foot, brush down and blend any ends with the thinners, take the straight scissors and neatly trim around the foot, then take the leg in your other hand pull the leg feathering down to the foot and trim off the ends level with the back pad, this will taper the feathering into the foot.

Have someone else stand your dog and look at the lengths of the coat, too much length on the chest will make him look unbalanced, any odd lengths underneath can be trimmed in to give an even line and the hair on the back of the leg and stifle when combed down can be trimmed from the inside top of the hock following the stifle so it blends evenly up to the body coat.

Ears and the amount of hair taken off should suit the individual dog, long low set ears can take more barbering than smaller higher set ones, I always try and leave some length to the front and top of the ear as this gives a softer natural appearance.

The easiest way to trim them is to brush the hair up backwards and with thinners pointing upwards cut under the hair to remove a lot of the bulk, keep brushing down again to check for evenness, then with the stripping knife strip away any excess so the finished result is smooth with no trace of scissor marks and the hair from the head blends naturally into the ear, trim the length to follow the line of the ear, if the ears are on the smaller side leave a little more length, finish by carefully blending the length with the thinners

The neck area is probably the most difficult to get right, the hair tends to become thicker on the sides of the neck and sometimes curls back, and where it meets the throat it changes the direction in which it grows.

With your dog sitting in front of you, start by removing excess thickness from the sides by inserting the thinners up and under the coat so as not to cut the top coat, lift the ear and cut off the 'wings' underneath blend with thinners following the lay of the hair, trim off any stray long hairs on the throat, now sit your dog on the floor between your legs and with thinners trim away excess hair down the neck to the breastbone, always trimming downwards following the coats direction, keep the scissors just off the skin and continuously comb away trimmings, keep standing your dog to check on the progress you are making in achieving the required outline.

With the rubber finger pod on your thumb gently pull out long untidy hairs around the neck and shoulder, if there are a lot and they are curling back trim with thinners but do not go any deeper into



the coat than where it might change colour, the aim is to achieve a natural blend around the neck into the throat, what may seem thick and excessive when you are working up close to it, as long as it has been blended neatly into the neck will not be so obtrusive when the dog is stood in profile.

All trimming is best carried out at least three days before a show. The modern equipment available today to help with stripping and trimming is time saving and effective; however, always remember that a properly prepared dog will never look trimmed.

Never cut across the coat, always cut and comb and avoid scissor marks at all costs.

Regular trimming of nails will ensure they stay at a reasonable length, and don't forget about keeping the teeth and ears clean.

Oh how easy this Dog Showing lark is!

Have fun.

Dee.

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But PLEASE, if you would like to print or copy this article may I request a donation of any amount be sent to **The Irish Setter Rescue group** c/o Mrs M.Hurll link on main site

And, Or -

Northampton Greyhound Rescue tel. Mandy Hooker 01327 830250. The Old Red Lion, 4 Banbury Road, Litchborough, Northants, NN12 8JF

Please don't forget to send something, both rescue's do such great things for helpless Irish & Greyhounds, the many people like Maureen and Mandy who selflessly give so much of their time and hearts to these schemes , really do deserve all the help & support we can give.

(xmas 2005, there were over 40 Greyhounds at Northampton, filling their kennels to capacity)

Thank You

Dee