

LABRADOR COAT

It puzzles me when I walk by owner's or handler's trucks and see a grooming table with scissors, shedding blade, hair dryer and all the other show dog paraphernalia we generally think of for the more elaborate coated breeds occupied by a Labrador Retriever. The more conformation events I attend, the more I've noticed Labradors being presented with evidence of excessive grooming. In my opinion, a Labrador's low maintenance coat is one of the best things about them. They don't need their pants or bellies trimmed nor their whiskers cut off. If they are "out of coat," there is nothing that can be done to make it look better that a practiced eye won't detect. Why not use that time to stay home and do obedience, agility or run some hunting retriever tests?

In reviewing all the Labrador Standards over the years, there isn't one comment involving coat that directs an owner or handler to moose, tease, backcomb or blow coats in preparation for the breed ring. It doesn't matter which standard you read, all the Labrador Retriever standards describe coat in basically the same way: *"It should be short, straight, and very dense, giving a fairly hard feeling to the hand."* Although our breed standards give us no instructions as to the amount of coat preparation necessary before entering the breed ring, exhibitors have traditionally snipped the twizzle off the end of the tail and that's it. Correctly prepared coats are simply clean Labrador Retrievers . . . period.

The Labrador's short and straight coat still demands an undercoat. Thin, slick, single coats are incorrect. *"Form follows function"* and the purpose of the Labrador's coat is to keep the dog well insulated in icy waters while retrieving. A thick, dense undercoat keeps the dog warm, and a tight waterproof topcoat sheds water to keep the undercoat dry. All of these coat characteristics enable our dogs to withstand the cold-weather punishment of winter duck and goose hunts with the ability to dry off with a few good shakes.

Years ago some breeders could be heard to say, *"You can't have too much coat."* We had achieved beautiful coats and then gradually some began to appear long or open or so curly that the coat was not typical of the breed. We have seen such profuse coats over the past ten years that it seems to have become the norm. Then the long coat or fluffy gene appeared and made breeders realize that "more" might not be better or correct. While breeders are coming to terms with what is correct, it's important to not discount the correct short coats simply because we are not used to seeing them. A straight, short, *"hard to the feel"* coat with a good undercoat is what we should aim for, and a bit of wave down the back is permissible.

For those interested in continuing to show a dog that is rotating coat, it might be appropriate to mention *"summer coat,"* which is not the same as being *"out of coat."*

Summer coat is a term used to describe a dog, who has blown his full coat, but still has tail covering and a fair amount of pants remaining, along with healthy new coat coming in. It takes a bit of luck, but provided the coat is healthy and the dog has no flaws that need to be camouflaged, there is no reason not to show a Labrador in the summertime. Granted, there are not many who can do this successfully simply because so few Labradors in summer coat look filled in and substantial enough, but for those blessed with perfect bodies, it's worth a try during those times.

We are responsible for showing dogs in good, correct coat. Don't try to fix it. Take your Labrador for a swim to clean them up a bit, but don't shampoo or brush them right before a show. Shampoos will soften the coat and brushing will rob them of their undercoat, none of which you want before a show.

The Labrador Retriever is a natural dog. He should be shown that way.

Faith Hyndman

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