

The Long and Short of Dog Grooming History

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Virginia Parker Guidry

Professional groomers have joined the show circuit, traveling state to state, even abroad, to shows where they compete for cash prizes, prestige and vacations. Groomers are judged on their technical abilities to work on specific breeds. Although you may not be aware of it, a grooming contest takes place somewhere in the United States just about every month.

It's wonderful to see groomers take such pride in their work and challenge themselves to do their best. Owners, too, can benefit from their competitive efforts by bringing home healthy, good-looking pets from the grooming salon. But grooming hasn't always been competitive or business-oriented. In fact, it probably started for very practical reasons.

By most accounts, the first dogs to be groomed were Curly-Coated Retrievers, clipped short by their 16th century European hunter-owners. The dense-coated water dogs, believed to be the ancestors of today's Poodle, were popular with hunters. But they had one drawback: Their thick coats hindered them in the water. To make swimming and dashing in and out of water after quarry easier, hunters clipped the coats shorter. It became standard practice to shave the dog's hindquarters; small tufts of hair covered the joints to keep them warm. The coat was left long over the neck, shoulders, ribs and chest for warmth and buoyancy. The hair on the head - the topknot - was tied up with brightly colored ribbon to enable the dog to see better. It was a very sensible solution to a problem.

In 1621, Gervase Markham commented on this in *Hunger's Prevention, or The Art of Fowling*, his book describing the use and training of water dogs. The water dogs "are ever more laden with hair on the hinder parts and in the summertime by the violence of the heate is very noysome and troublesome, and make him sooner faint and give over his sport. So, likewise, in matter of water, it makes a very heavy burthen to the dogge and maketh him to swim less nimbly. Now for the cutting or shaving from the navell downwards, and backwards, is two ways well to be allowed; that is, for the summer hunting. But for the shaving of a dogge quite all over from foot to nostrill, that I utterly dislike, for it brings such a tendernes and chillnesse over all his body that the water will grow irksome to him."