

Basics of Bouvier Grooming

Grooming a Bouvier des Flandres requires proper styling and technique, or an experience groomer.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. We are the new proud owners of a 4-month-old Bouvier des Flandres named Jackie (Jacqueline Bouvier Breeze des Warrior). I'd like to take her to a groomer who really knows how to groom a Bouvier so they can show us all the proper (brushes, techniques, nail clipping, beard, etc.) things to do. Do you have any pointers, or tips for finding a groomer?

A. Congratulations on acquiring your beautiful Jackie! The Bouvier is a formidable and versatile breed with an amazing history. Originally a cattle herder, cart puller and farmer's helper in France and Belgium, this was an ideal working dog. With their harsh double coats protecting them in all types of weather, these dogs performed every task asked of them. Today they are beloved watchdogs and guard dogs as well as steady companions who still love to work in agility, carting, herding, obedience, tracking, and search and rescue.

Although Bouviers were "outdoor dogs" in ages past, today they love sharing our living quarters, viewing their people as members of their "pack." Since this is a longhaired double-coated breed, they must be kept clean and well-groomed. Maintaining a healthy coat takes good nutrition and a thorough weekly brushing, section by section, all the way to the skin, followed by a good combing to make sure the coat is free of mats and tangles.

You might think a big rugged dog like this is easy to groom, but there is an art involved in styling her properly to give her the correct look, especially the head. Inexperienced groomers sometimes trim them to look like Giant Schnauzers, but with their broader heads, stockier bodies, and fuller, rounder beards, Bouviers have a unique look all their own. The coat should be left approximately 2½ inches long with a level topline. Scraggly hairs should be removed and legs left in full columns. The hair between the toes is removed with either blunt-tipped scissors or clippers and the feet are rounded to the same width.

If you plan to show your dog, hand-stripping is the correct way to have her groomed, plucking excess coat with a stripping knife or the fingers when it's ready to come out so the topcoat will remain hard and wiry. Many pet owners opt to have their Bouviers clipped instead, often trimmed shorter all over for easier maintenance.

Learning to brush and comb your pet thoroughly is more than half the battle, but I think it takes a skilled professional groomer to execute the proper trim on this breed. To find one in your area or to find other Bouvier owners to learn who they use, try contacting your local breed club through The American Bouvier des Flandres Club at www.bouvier.org, or call Jeffrey L. Reynolds, executive director of the National Dog Groomers Association of America at 724-962-2711, to ask for the name of a Certified Master Groomer in your area.

Meanwhile, keep brushing and combing, making it an enjoyable time for you and your big girl. If you spend an hour or less every week and systematically brush her from head to tail, you will maintain her in the best possible shape and she could go eight to 10 weeks between grooming appointments. Getting a large grooming table for home use would make your job a lot easier.