

Communicating Your Doggie's Hairdo Accurately

Being specific about the grooming style you want for your pooch is imperative.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. My dog Winston is a Cavalier King Charles, and today I took him to the groomer. I told them I wanted him trimmed up assuming they knew, as any intelligent groomer would, that trimmed does not mean the same thing as shaved. However, when I picked him up they had shaved everything but his ears and tail (he looks pretty funny now). I am concerned about his coat regrowing. I have read multiple articles; some say it will grow back fine, others say it is likely to grow back differently than before (coarser, thinner, etc.). I was wondering what you thought?

A. Your unhappy experience at the groomer illustrates how important it is for both the groomer and the client to communicate clearly when you take your dog to be groomed. I am not making excuses for the groomer, but "trimmed" could mean anything from a shaved-down smoothie to a fluffy neatening with just the flyaway hairs removed.

Since I did not see your dog, I don't know what kind of shape his coat was in. The ample coat of this adorable breed can become quite matted if it is not thoroughly and regularly brushed, and in such cases, the groomer sometimes has no alternative but to clip it down short.

The clipper blade must go underneath the matting to remove all those snarls and tangles. As a result, the dog's coat will be left very short. If this was the case, the groomer should've examined the dog's coat in your presence, letting you know what could be done and getting your permission to strip it down if necessary.

We never shave down a pet without the owner's permission because being surprised by a bare, naked dog when you come back to pick up your pup can be shocking and disappointing, as it was in your case.

It may also help to know that in grooming lingo, some words have many different meanings. "Stripping" a dog, can mean either clipping it right down to the skin or hand-stripping, the process of pulling out dead hair so the new coat can regrow. This is often done on the terrier breeds because it preserves the coarse texture, where cutting the hair with clippers leads to a softer coat and dilutes color, as well.

You will be relieved to know that the coat on your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel will grow back to its original condition. The only instances I have seen of a dog's coat being severely damaged by shaving involved Northern breeds such as the Samoyed, Keeshond, Chow, or the Pomeranian.

Because dogs of this category have thick double coats to protect them from the cold and render them virtually waterproof, if the dog's inner layer of fur -- the undercoat itself -- gets matted, it forms a solid pelt. If this coat is shaved down to the skin, the topcoat may not regrow or may come in patchy, ruining the coat's appearance and removing its protection for the dog.

Your dog has an undercoat, but it's not as thick as the dogs I mentioned. To keep him mat-free and beautiful, he should be thoroughly brushed and carded weekly. For brushing, I prefer a curved-blade, wire-bristled slicker. Work your way around his body in sections, making sure you penetrate the coat all the way to the skin, but taking care not to scrape his skin with the bristles, causing an abrasion known as slicker burn.

Double-check your brush work with a stainless steel comb to make sure you have not missed any tangles. Matting on a Cavalier often builds up behind the ears, around the neck or "ruff," and on the chest, thighs, and rear end.

Carding is a process of removing loose undercoat to leave the outercoat -- the guard hairs -- shiny, smooth, and closely conforming to the body. It also cuts down on shedding. Using a special carding tool such as the FURminator, stripping knife, or pumice stone pull the tool over the dog's back and sides with long, smooth strokes in the direction the hair grows.

Cavalier King Charles Spaniels continues to grow in popularity since being brought back from near extinction in England prior to the World War II. It was officially recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1995. It gained prominence as the beloved pet of Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

Previously known as Toy Spaniels, these dogs had been lap dogs of royalty four centuries ago, named for Great Britain's King Charles II, and often depicted in paintings of royal and aristocratic individuals and families. Bred primarily as companions, their coats come in four colors: Blenheim (chestnut and white); tricolor (black, white, and tan); ruby (solid red); and black and tan.

Although the AKC standard calls for Cavaliers to be untrimmed, many groomers use a snap-on comb attachment, usually a #1 or #2, to take some length off their flowing coats for easier maintenance. Their glamorous ears and flowing tails are left long.

Unlike most breeds, the hair on their feet is not supposed to be heavily trimmed, but some Cavalier owners in my clientele opt for a more cleaned-up foot, especially if the dog's body is getting a comb cut.