

Havanese With a Puppy Cut

The Havanese coat should be long and flowing in the show ring, but can be cut short on a pet.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. My friend is considering getting a Havanese puppy but she can't get a breed that sheds a lot. Does the Havanese shed? If so, would it be possible to trim the coat in a "puppy cut?"

A. If you have a Havanese that is a pet and not a show dog, trimming the hair is not only possible, but I think it makes it much easier to keep the coat in good condition. This low-shedding breed of the Bichon family originated in the Mediterranean, but was brought to Cuba on merchant ships where it became a beloved favorite of the ruling aristocracy. Over the centuries, this sturdy Toy dog – less than 12 inches in height and longer than it is tall – evolved from a pampered lap dog to a treasured family pet, smart, fun-loving and good with children. The Cuban Revolution threatened its existence, but some came to this country with owners who fled Cuba. The breed now has a devoted following in the United States, ranking 37th in registrations in 2007 according to the American Kennel Club (AKC.)

Offering protection against the heat of its tropical homeland, the abundant double coat is soft and light-textured, but it requires lots of brushing and combing to keep it tangle-free. As far as upkeep goes, this is a pet that requires regular grooming.

It is shown in full natural coat, the long hair on its head falling over the eyes or held in place with two small braids, or with its coat corded in long tightly wound tendrils over its entire body. In the salon, we either give these dogs a clipper trim or simply bathe and brush them – what we call a “B & B” – trimming the feet round. If owners want to keep them in full coat, they must come in on a monthly basis and also need to be brushed at home between appointments.

If they are kept in a “puppy” or “teddy bear” trim, we usually use a snap-on comb attachment to our clipper blade for the “rough cut,” leaving $\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 inches of coat, depending how much “fluff” the owner prefers. We perfect the haircut with our shears on the second go-round, after the bath and blow-dry. We like to see Havanese on a four-to-six week basis. Unfortunately, if this type of coat gets badly matted, the only alternative is to shave it down and start over.

When brushing, work your way systematically around the body, doing what we call “line brushing.” The “line” is the “seam” of the area being brushed, where the skin is visible. Pat and pull the hair towards you, section by section, and do not move on to the next area until the brush slides easily through the area worked upon. Then, check your brush work with a stainless steel comb to make sure no mats have been left in, as they will only get bigger and more tightly set once the pet is bathed. Use a light conditioner after the shampoo and mist with a moisturizing or anti-static spray as you blow the coat dry.

That remarkable Havanese coat comes in a kaleidoscope of colors; cream, gold, chocolate, black, blue, silver, and white, as well as combinations of these hues. Being Toy dogs, they don't require a lot of space but they love to romp and do crave daily exercise.