

Keeping a Saint Bernard Cool in the Heat

Clipping the Saint Bernard's coat down might make him cooler in the heat, but shaving could damage his coat.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a rough-coated Saint Bernard who is miserable in the Texas heat. I can't even take him for a walk because he gets so hot. I have been talking to several people about whether or not to shave him. One dog breeder who used to be a groomer said to shave him. She used to shave hers before she started showing them. The rescue where I got him said not to shave closer than one inch, to do a puppy cut. What do you think? Where can I find a picture of a Saint with a puppy cut?

A. At our salon, we have shaved Saint Bernards at their owner's request, usually done as a last resort when the coat is too matted to be brushed out. In the case of such a coat condition, we need to use a blade that clips close enough to get underneath the matting, which adheres to the skin like a tight pelt. I don't like to use anything that cuts closer than a #5 or #5f blade, leaving about ¼ inch of hair on the dog's body. However, even with this blade, we warn the owner that there is a chance the coat will not grow back the way it looked before.

I would not use a #7 or a #10 blade because these would leave the dog naked and susceptible to sunburn, and would definitely increase the chances that the coat would not grow back properly. This is a double-coated dog breed and you could end up with just the fuzzy undercoat growing back instead of the harder, glossier topcoat, ruining your dog's appearance.

If your groomer can brush out your dog's coat, some version of a "puppy cut" or what we now call a "comb cut" could be done instead so the dog would look cute and stay cool. I am sorry I don't know where you could see a picture of this trim on a Saint. In the old days, we had to use scissors for such a trim, a long and painstaking process on a giant breed like yours, but thankfully we now have snap-on comb attachments as well as new blade sizes to give a uniform all-over cut.

We use a stainless-steel set of blade attachments made by Wahl that leave the hair at various lengths up to one inch, as well as a #3 blade by Oster or a #3 ¾ blade by Andis, both leaving about ½ inch. Unlike the plastic combs that attach to our regular clipper blades, they never snap off, leaving us with a resulting bald patch to explain to the owner. I agree with the person from your rescue that a one-inch trim would look best if you decide to trim him down.

Another alternative is what we call a "Thin and Trim," or "T & T," using thinning shears to de-bulk the coat and sculpting the outline by skimming with a #7 blade, using a comb attachment like a #1 or a #2, or our shears to downsize it all over without resorting to a strip-down. We do this on lots of our Golden Retrievers and it is enormously popular.