

Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier Grooming

This dog's cut is a challenge even for an experienced professional groomer.

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Q. I have two Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers which I groom myself. The most difficult area to get right is the face, which I like with the fall. Any help you can provide would be greatly appreciated.

A. Getting the head and face just right on the Soft Coated Wheaten is a challenge even for experienced professional groomers so I can understand why it is difficult. The first step in grooming any breed correctly is to be able to visualize the results you are seeking before you begin. Looking at other expertly-groomed Wheatens at a dog show is a good place to begin.

The Wheaten head should look rectangular in shape. To find the right balance, the length of the bearded muzzle and the trimmed portion of the skull atop the head should be the same, the “stop,” or point between the eyes where the nose stops and the front of the skull rises, being your measuring point. The top of the head is usually clipped with a snap-on guard comb—a #1, #1 ½ or #2 drawn backwards towards the face. The demarcation line for the distinctive “fall” of hair that cascades down the nose and blends with the full beard is the eye socket rim.

Just below the back corners of the eyes, the fur is clipped short, usually with a #7f or #5f blade, but the line should be soft and well-blended with thinning shears. When setting the beard, use the back corners of the eyes and the whisker nodule on the cheek as your guidelines and simply “connect the dots.” The ears are left with more coat than many of this dog's terrier counterparts, shaved with a #7f from the fold down on the outside but you may carefully shave the inside with a #10 or #30 blade. The ears are edged with scissors but be careful to point the tips of the scissors to the tips of the ears for safety's sake. The throat is trimmed with a #4f, #5f or snap-on blade attachment to point three or four fingers above the breastbone. Since the hair at that spot forms a natural cowlick, blend this area in with your thinners. While its finished look is every bit as full of character and dignity as the Schnauzer or Scottish terrier, the finished Wheaten head should never look as sharply defined as those terrier cousins.

On the body, the pattern lines should also be subtly blended. The back or body coat may be left as long or short as you prefer and the legs which fall like cylindrical columns should be slightly longer with feet neatly rounded to the same width. The dog's rump should be tight to show off its well-angulated hindquarters and muscular thighs. The hair under the chest and belly should be angled up to the tuck-up to promote its energetic and springy look.

This dog gets its name from its lustrous silky coat with its gentle wave and wheaten colors that range from buff to red. Happy and sometimes a bit scrappy, this robust medium-sized family favorite was not the creation of the landed gentry like many other terriers from the British Isles but was the hard-working companion of Ireland's poor. Under the harsh penal laws of the 1700s, tenant farmers were prohibited from owning any dog whose value exceeded five pounds so this little vermin hunter, guardian and jolly companion came from humble origins. So while your pets' ancestry may trace back several centuries, their forbears were not recognized as a distinct breed in Europe until 1937 and were not seen sashaying around the show ring in the U.S. until accepted by the AKC in 1973.

Because it is single-coated and a minimal shedder, the Wheaten is a good choice for those with allergies but needs lots of exercise to keep healthy and happy, competing with characteristic enthusiasm in agility, obedience, and earth dog trials.