

Bearded Collies March 2011

“Shaggy” Means Shaggy

Our standard clearly says the Beardie is a “natural” breed, with a “shaggy” coat of “medium length,” “allowing for plenty of daylight” and “following the natural lines of the body.” It says that the coat should not to be “so profuse in length or density as to obscure the dog’s body,” and that to ensure the natural appearance of the breed, “trimming and/or sculpturing is to be severely penalized” by judges in the conformation ring.

It is fairly accepted that a mature coat will hang flatter, and that with regular grooming, the coat may grow beyond “medium length.” It’s what you do with that coat that has become the issue.

This is neither the time nor the place for Dog Show Grooming 101; let’s just say that although a dog may have a mature coat of length, it should still maintain a *shaggy, natural* appearance and follow the lines of the dog’s body.

What the coat should *not* look like is a flat-ironed curtain of hair that has been trimmed just before reaching the ground, nor should the beard and ears be trimmed in a rounded fashion, like for the Bichon Frise. Unfortunately, the issue of trimming has reared its ugly head before in the breed.

When newly AKC-recognized, the trimming of the breed became a battle, as more handlers (professional and amateur) began grooming dogs for the show ring the way they groomed other breeds. There was scissoring of feet similar to as done with the Cocker Spaniel, plucking around the eyes as with the Bichon Frise, and the making of an artificial part down the back as with the Maltese. Judges were unsure of this new breed, so handlers were allowed to shape our breed’s ring appearance because they won with the dogs, and in order to compete, losing exhibitors would soon follow these grooming trends.

Over the years, the skilled groomer who understands how to balance length of coat while maintaining a more natural outline has evolved. Unfortunately the recent trimming trend includes not only scissoring the feet and stifles but making blunt cuts to ear-fringes and beards.

Trimming is a severe fault that not only ruins the dog’s outline, it destroys type.

Judges must take a stand for the Bearded Collie and the years of work that breeders have committed to protecting this natural, shaggy breed. As long as judges continue to put up sculptured dogs, professional handlers and owner-exhibitors will continue their trimming ways. Being severely penalized and thereby potentially losing will not help pro handlers earn a living nor amateur exhibitors receive awards sought, thereby forcing all to abide to the breed standard. Judges enforcing the standard is the only solution to this manmade offense.

People who know and love the breed understand the importance of not sculpturing a Beardie. The casual owner or observer they may see this scissoring as a more polished look. To the judges in the ring however, it should only be considered a severe fault that alters the breed's correct appearance. —Gail Miller Bisher, New York, N.Y.; gailmiller1@mac.com