

LABRADOR COAT

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Looking back on all the Labrador Standards over the years, there isn't one comment involving coat directing us to moose, tease, backcomb or blow dry our Labrador Retrievers' coats in preparation for the breed ring. The more shows I go to, the more I've noticed dogs being presented with evidence of excessive grooming. Contrary to this popular trend, correctly prepared coats are simply clean Labrador Retrievers.

It puzzles me when I walk by owners' or handlers' trucks and see a grooming table occupied by a Labrador Retriever with scissors, shedding blade, hair dryer, chalk and all the other show dog paraphernalia. A Labrador's coat is one of the best things about them. They don't need anything done to them; nothing other than good nutrition, good breeding and good timing. They don't need their pants or bellies trimmed nor their whiskers cut off. If they are out of coat, there is nothing that can be done to make it look better that a practiced eye won't detect.

It doesn't matter which standard you read, which camp you belong to or whether you think all have some merit, all the standards describe coat in basically the same way: "It should be short, straight and very dense, giving a fairly hard feeling to the hand." Or "short, dense without wave or feathering giving fairly hard feel to the touch." The LRC Standard states that wave is permissible. Some breeders believe that wave is not only acceptable but indicative of a good coat.

Standards should be read with a sense of history and an understanding of the vocabulary of that time period. When our early standard stated that our dogs were not to have wave in their coats remember that in the early stages of breed development, outcrosses were made and some coated breeds were used to enhance the Labrador Retriever. There became an earnest attempt a bit later to avoid throwbacks to that particular coat's appearance. It does not mean that a Labrador's coat should not have any wave at all. It means it should only look like a Labrador Retriever and not any other breed. It should not resemble a Flatcoat's coat, a Golden's coat or a Setter's coat.

We are responsible for showing dogs in good coat. Don't try to fix it. Take them for a swim to clean them up a bit, but don't shampoo them unless you have finished showing for the season. If you can't avoid that sort of pre-show clean up, be prepared for an uncharacteristic soft coat. If you feel you have to, try shampooing just the belly and legs, hose off the body with water and take care not to ruin a good coat with soap. Shampoos will do that.

The Labrador Retriever is a natural dog. He should be shown that way.

Faith Hyndman, Buckstone Labradors
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