

# COMMENTS ON COMBOUT

## by bbird

Teaching the art of a good combout is one of the more difficult tasks for the grooming coach. That's because everyone thinks they can do it while few people have actually mastered the task on their own. The coach or mentor is faced with repeated having to say, "Not good enough, Grasshopper." The student, of course, feels picked on. Home groomers or owner-groomers have their own challenge without a coach or someone to go over their work.

There are two common mistakes made by the novice groomer, "top brushing" and viewing through a wide angle lens. "Top brushing" means one is brushing or combing over the top of the coat and not reaching the depths. A wide view lens results in not seeing the work in enough detail. For example, a leg is not just a leg, it has four distinct sides each of which needs to be addressed separately, front, back, outside and inside.

Another thing that can be a problem is using a comb that is too fine for the coat. A fine comb will have more difficulty getting through a thick or coarse coat, and it will pull out too much hair. I remember our first Lhasa Apso: My mother combed that dog so much with a fine toothed comb that she removed the entire undercoat. It never grew back! My choice of comb for most grooming and coat maintenance is a coarse/medium, and I use the coarse side much more than the medium. I use a medium spaced or fine comb only to get out very tiny stuff, around the mouth, and on soft, fine, coats.

The best result is obtained by combing in small segments which overlap, working from the bottom (feet) up, and back to front. If you work this way, you will be combing over your already done work and not skipping any areas. Work in small layers. You can brush a whole leg and then layer comb or you can brush and comb in layers. Generally the brushing loosens and the combing actually separates the hair. Try to be as systematic as possible not jumping from one part of the dog to another which leads you likely to miss areas. Also, dogs like predictable routine,

and if they can anticipate the process they tend to be happier. I am a right handed person and I always start with the left rear leg and work my way up. I get the inside of the opposite leg by lifting the left leg up and I reach under the dog. Oh yes, the dog is standing. They can stand or lay on their sides, but no sitting.

Once I get the back leg and rear end of the dog combed, I begin working my way along the top line (top of back), from tail to neck. Then I come back to the flank, get that area well and do the side coat from bottom to top. Next comes all four sides of the left front leg and front, shoulder and neck. At that point, I usually start the other side, beginning with the right rear foot and working all four sides of the back leg, flank, sides, and right front leg. A small dog I will lift up by the front legs and comb the undercarriage from back to front. Before I go to the head, I will go over the whole body checking that all my parts have been thoroughly combed, especially the flanks, armpits and front of leg where it meets the chest. Those are problematic areas as is right behind the ears. I do comb out the head separately and save the tail for last. The exact order is optional, the most important thing is to work from the bottom up and the back to the front.

A dog is thoroughly combed when you can run the comb through every inch without a snag. Anything else is not complete. On any styled dog, the final result completely rests on the foundation of the combout (and fluff-dry). If the coat is not properly prepared the result will suffer.

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