

BBIRD TALKS TO PET GROOMERS SELECTING SHEARS



Are you ready to graduate into a “better” grooming shear, but uncertain what is the best choice? Don’t feel alone. Most pet groomers learn to groom with mediocre or hand-me-down scissors and are rarely taught much at all about this tool. Scissors are perhaps the single most symbol of our craft. Go figure! This article will clarify your understanding of the various features of shears so as to empower your decision-making.

What is the difference between cheap scissors and the pricey models?

Two things: the quality of the metal and the workmanship. Inexpensive shears are made of inexpensive steel that will not hone to as fine an edge as a better grade, more expensive, metal. This affects the sharpness of the scissor blades and how well they hold an edge, as well as the smoothness of the blade action. You want sharpness in order not to bend the hair while cutting, and to provide good definition in your cuts. The action of the two blades determines the amount of effort it takes to open and close the blades as well as the smoothness of cutting strokes. The workmanship is another factor influencing the scissoring action. Cheap shears are assembly line produced with much of the work done by machine. The best shears are handcrafted by trained craftspersons (much like master groomers) who take responsibility for each tool from start to finish.

The truth is that some groomers can achieve fantastic results with cheap scissors. A talented master can compensate. But the extra work that is involved in such compensation is paid for in accumulated stress to the hand and wrist. Many average or better groomers don’t see their scissoring results “take off” until they use higher quality shears.

Convex edge or bevel edge: Japanese or German? Which type of shear is best?

Perhaps the biggest decision you have to make in purchasing shears is whether to get a “Japanese style” convex edged, or the “German type” bevel edge. Convex edges are hollow ground to an extremely sharp edge, giving a very quick and smooth action, sometimes referred to as “butter cut”. Bevel edges are often serrated which gives them a somewhat more firm, or crisp cut. Which is best is a matter of taste, comfort, and scissoring technique. Hollow ground, convex edged shears are great for full body sculpting such as bichons and poodles. They also work very well on thick coats and are great for scissoring down cockers. These scissors are extremely sharp and fast, and can be more than you are ready for.

High quality stainless steel blades with beveled and serrated edges are my choice for

scissoring soft schnauzer type coats and super fine coats like maltese. The serrated blade holds the hair while the other edge cuts. They are also a good choice if your scissoring technique does not open the scissor blades very wide. I would recommend this type of shear for the beginning groomer.

Curved or straight blades?

Although you can do everything groomers need to do with straight shears, curved blades can really help with topknots, faces, ears, feet, and rumps. Turned upside down, they can help you set angulation, tuck-ups and terrier underchests. I have a small 5.5" curved shear that makes defining Schnauzer eyebrows a snap. They are also the best tool I have found for scissoring around bichon eyes and the cuffs of small poodle legs. Large 10" curved shears are great for trimming rear skirts on Golden Retriever, collie mix, and other undercoated type dogs. Every groomer deserves curved shears.

What size is best? The fully equipped professional groomer should have a tool box with several sizes of shears. The reason for using longer shears is to scissor off more hair per cut. This increases efficiency and also can help achieve a smoother finish. I first started using 10" shears when grooming Bedlington Terriers, with coats that show every snip. If you are scissoring large areas, such as Standard Poodles, you might want to try 10" shears. They are also great for setting the topline on Bichons, and shaping the body on any medium to large sculpted groom.

There is something to be said for smaller shears, 5.5" to 6.5". They allow for good control, and they will work small areas with the least amount of stress to your hands. This can be an important consideration if you are starting to feel the effects of accumulated stress syndrome. Why use a larger, heavier tool when a smaller light weight one will do?

Most groomers choose to work with 7.5" to 8.5" shears. For hairdressers, these would be considered huge, but they are average for our work. Here is an important point: you want to use that size shear where you are going to use the whole blade. If you are not comfortable making big cuts, then don't buy big shears. If your technique is still at the snipping stage, and you are mostly cutting with the top 1/3 of your blades, I would advise you to get a smaller shear and practice using more of the blade.

Your scissoring style as well as what kind of work you are doing should factor in to your choice of shear. Are you doing lots of mixed breed clip downs with cute faces? A curved 7.5" stainless steel, serrated edge, could be a good investment.

What about thinning shears?

Let's clarify our terms here. "thinning shears" are actually shears with two notched blades. They are good for bulk thinning such as Cocker coats. The shears that have one straight edged blade and one notched blade are really "blenders" and, yes, you

should have

at least one pair. Blenders can also thin. Uses for blenders include finishing teddy bear faces on Lhasa or Shihtzu types so as to not look choppy; blending clipped areas on terrier heads to erase clipper lines; erasing unfortunate scissor marks; thinning and blending Cocker skirts; scissoring sporting breeds for a natural look (especially heads and necks); scissoring tops of feet on Newfoundlands, Samoyed, etc., where you want a natural looking “cat foot.” Basically, blenders are great for any work where you want a softer definition.

What’s the deal with “ergonomics”?

Glad you asked. In recent years scissor manufacturers have incorporated some ergonomic design elements so that the handle of the shears better suits the natural hand position and movement of the thumb. Most common is the offset thumb ring, where the thumb ring is slightly shorter and angled differently than the finger ring. Bent thumb rings are even more angled, and swivel thumb have free moving thumb rings to accommodate the movement of the hand.

On the finger side of the shears, the shank is sometimes curved for more comfort. A short shank is another element that can make a pair of scissors more comfortable for smaller hands, or in controlling longer blades. Your hands will tell you which of these features they like. Pay attention and “listen” to your hands. My hand told me it doesn’t like the swivel thumb. But it is a happy hand with a offset bent thumb and curved handle.

About our shears.

We sell Arius-Eickert shears exclusively. This is a company that I trust for their integrity. Arius-Eickert is a family owned business that originated in Soligen, Germany and is now located in the U.S., passing the craft down through generations. It is a company of master craftsmen with total commitment to their product. Most AE Shears are hand crafted and assembled with great attention to detail. Even the less expensive tools are given rigorous attention to balance, action, and edge.

Arius-Eickert also has commitment to your satisfaction. If you are not happy with any shears, for any reason, you may return them within two weeks for replacement or credit towards another. You will never get “stuck” with something you don’t like. I have personally tested this policy.

Think through your choice. Your next shears should move your work forward and add to your toolbox. Happy grooming!

Barbara Bird has been grooming for a gazillion years in Tucson, Arizona. She learned through excruciating and lengthy apprenticeship to a top groomer and local handler. She has owned her salon, Transformation Pet Center, for 27 years and is certified with the NDGAA.

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