

LEE'S GROOMING TIPS

by Lee Netzler

Here are some suggestions about clipping your Scottie. I suggest you read it all the way through first, because some of the comments are not exactly in the order that you will encounter them.

Equipment: Hi-powered (equals "expensive") clippers are always recommended by the experts. I've never owned one. I use an inexpensive model. Wahl brand is common and offers a good assortment of inexpensive packages ranging from about \$20 to \$50. I would probably buy in the \$30-\$40 range provided that they come with the proper plastic blade guards. Rather than have internal "motors," these use a cheaper less powerful "vibrator" mechanism, much like electric shavers, so they don't have sufficient power for heavy thick coats. For dogs with really thick coats, or if you are going to do a LOT of clipping, you might invest \$\$\$\$ in a good clipper, but I have not found it necessary. I've had two Scotties at one time and managed OK with the less capable but cheaper models. Even the cheap clippers last 10 years or more.

You can buy the cheap models in "kits" packages. Buy one that has the lever on the side so that you can move the lower blade in and out to change the amount of teeth that are matched up.

This allows you to control the depth of cut--especially in areas like the top of the head behind the eyebrows between the ears where you will be using the clipper without a blade guard. The shaver kit should come with detachable clip-on plastic blade guards. The guards are numbered #1, (smallest size), #2 a little larger, etc. Some are even produced in half numbers. In my experience, you should have sizes #1, #2, #3, and possibly #4. I never use a #5 (or larger) and rarely even use a #4.

Even the cheap kits come with a small amount of clipper oil (always clean clipper blades and oil them after every haircutting session).

Also, make sure that you can buy replacement blades for your clipper. They get dull (main reason for poor cutting and "pulling" hair) after several uses (like perhaps 4 to 6 haircuts) and need to be replaced. Some clippers have a permanent blade attached to the body of the clippers, and only the single movable lower blade can be replaced. That's OK, too, but isn't quite as effective as being able to replace both. If you buy one that has permanent blades, in a year or two it will be too dull and you'll have to toss it out.

You probably already have enough brushes and combs. You will need at least one decent scissors (a good pet shop can help you answer questions, too, about equipment). You'll also will need one thinning shears.

That's all the equipment I use.

It is nice to have blade wash--that will prolong the sharpness of your blades, but it isn't necessary. Other items (stop-bleed powder) are nice, but unnecessary.

Put the dog on a small flat elevated surface--one where he is not inclined to jump off, and one which restricts his movement while you are working on him. I don't own a "grooming arm" or "Grooming table." It is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY for the height of the table to be comfortable for you, though, or you will really tire and ache and it will be a miserable experience for you. I use two saw horses, a piece of plywood, and sit on a stool. "Fancy, eh?" as they say in Canada.

I start the haircut on the head and face. These are the most detailed areas and I find that doing them before I start tiring or losing patience, and especially before the dog is getting finicky, works best.

Introduce the equipment slowly to the dog before using it. Take your time to get him used to the sound and feel of it. Patience is the BEST ADVICE I can give. The second best advice is to cut small amounts and work up to the desired length of cut. Once you hack off an eyebrow, you can't replace it today!! If you take some off, you can always return and take a little more. If it doesn't look right, go on to another part of the dog and return later to the part you left unfinished. As the dog "takes shape," you will probably be able to visualize more clearly what you need to do in that unfinished area.

TALK a lot. Reassure your dog with much praise and gentle chatter. Let him know it is all OK and under control.

ALWAYS clip in the same direction that the hair lays (scissors-shaping the tail is an exception). If you go "against the grain," you can take out large chunks and also get huge "scallops" in the hair that can't be fixed. Once you have some skill in cutting with the lay of the hair, you can experiment a little in areas going the other direction. Remember, though, whenever cut against the grain you run the risk of the clipper sinking right down to the skin and leaving a bald area or severe "slash" appearance for which the only cure is growing new coat!!!! Good rule of thumb might be "If it can be successfully done by cutting in the same direction the hair grows, always do it that way."

I don't know if you will be able to finish the dog at one sitting. It takes me just over two hours to do Rusty, and for the most part, he is very cooperative during clipping. To shorten your grooming time, leave the nail clipping, anal compression, anal scissors touch up, even the feet trimming, etc., for another day.

I would suggest trying to at least finish the head in one sitting.

After the head, I usually do the chest and then top of the back next. Rusty likes to lay down while I clipper his back, and that's a pleasant time for both of us, since we are usually tense and stressed from the head work.

While he is still lying down, I put his butt toward me and scissors his tail. Keep the pointy end toward you. With thumb and forefingers of one hand, gently pull the hair outward from tail beginning at base. Scissors a small amount of the ends away according to how much you will be taking off. Continue to pull small tufts of hair away from tail, and continue the tuft scissoring

process. Be careful not to take too much. After you cut a few of these tufts, repeatedly smooth the tail and assess how it is going so that you insure you are cutting a uniform shape and size.

Keep going around the tail--top sides, bottom--and working from the base toward the tip. As you go, you will sculpt the "carrot" shape. Again, don't take too much--you are interested in shape and not cutting too close at this. When you get to the end of the tail, you can always begin again at the base and trim a little closer using the same process. Rusty is very relaxed for the tail work, too.

To do feet, I lay Rusty on one side, and do the two upper feet one at a time. Take each foot and scissors the underside, between toes, and around sides of the paws. Then I lay him on the other side and do the remaining two feet. He lays pretty quiet for that, but Scotties are nervous about having their feet handled and scissored) so you may get some struggles here. Now is the time to be dominant--just persist until he relents and lets you do whatever you are doing to his foot.

Stand the dog, use the large clipper guard and clip vertically downward from his shortened back area toward the floor to shorten and blend the "skirt" all around. Once you get it shaped, you can switch to a lower number clipper guard to trim it closer.

When finished with that, I STAND the dog and get down to eye level with his paws. Take the scissors and clip his furnishings and underhairs "flat" underneath. I usually leave 1 to 2 inches of space between the flat table top and the bottom of the furnishings. From this vantage point it is easier to see which furnishings need to be cut, and also helps to keep the under cutting flat and parallel with the table top as you proceed.

When you think you are done, let the dog outside and encourage him to run around for a few minutes. You will probably be surprised to see that you have some part of the haircut out of proportion--too much hair on one butt cheek, or too much on one shoulder, etc. After you determine the area to be remedied, return to the clipping platform and do the touch up. After that:

Kiss dog! Give a treat with profuse praise. It's Miller time!

Good luck. I'm sure you can learn how to do this. It is mostly a matter of common sense, patience, and cajoling your dog to cooperate by using lots of praise.

When you are done, you will both feel great.