

Scottie Column 2-17

“Dual coat or not”

By the time you read this, another great Montgomery has come and gone. Nowhere else can one get the immersion into Terriers as you do on this special weekend? From conformation to performance to dinners and seminars. It is a unique celebration of all things Terrier. I find that I always gone home with some great conversations heard around the rings and at club events.

A reoccurring theme among most of the breeds this year was our smaller numbers. Terrier people are especially aware and concerned about out diminishing registrations. Many recalled the days when entries were so large that some of the breed clubs moved their sweepstakes to other days on the weekend. This year saw a few Sweeps return to MCKC because of the trend towards smaller entries.

Discussions on this topic included various issues that many feel have contributed to the decline. It ranged from the aging of the show/breeder population, expense of breeding and showing, health issues in specific breeds, too many shows, and even some believe the work required of grooming.

I thought I might take this time and offer some points on the grooming discussion that I believe merits consideration. The fact is that we do have greater involvement in coats and conditioning our Scotties for the show ring when compared to many breeds. Some question how much this should be a factor in judging. Putting up a dog to winners can become a contentious debate among some exhibitors if they felt the only merit was a fancy trim. At one point, I heard from more than one person that maybe we should consider allowing people to show their dogs in clipped coats; after all that is how most people keep them as pets. Does it matter anymore? The concern voiced was that there are those who groom too well and that puts all others at a disadvantage. It seems there is a strong belief by some that the judges are fooled by better grooming not better dogs.

I first must state that I have strong feelings about the hallmark characteristics of our breed and one of those is coat. From our standard: *“The Scottish Terrier should have a broken coat. It is a hard, wiry outer coat with a soft, dense undercoat.”* Let’s discuss for a moment the merits of clipping. What happens to that Scottie out in the field? One of the first things we are taught about understanding a breed is “form and function.” Without this wiry dense coat the Scottie loses a key factor in its ability to function. It loses protection from the elements, the briars and the brambles as well as an errant bite from their prey. They will get bogged down by the damp mist or rain when there is no dual coat providing a harsh outer layer to repel the wet and the insulating undercoat against the cold. That coat can be what stands between the body, claws, and teeth of an angry cornered badger.

How is clipping the coat going to help novices or unskilled groomers. It won’t. Someone will always do it better. Then where do we go? Show them bald? Instead, we need people to be patient and willing to learn and people willing to teach. Those who started decades ago put in the time. Back then they were told, “don’t expect to have a top dog until you have been in the sport at least 10 years.” Some might say part of the problem today is that we live in a society that expects instant gratification and it is commonplace for new people in any endeavor to believe they should compete on a level playing field at the start, but that just is not realistic. I am not suggesting that you wait 10 years, but I am suggesting a little patience goes a long way.

Complaining about better groomed dogs is not a new thing. You can go back and find it brought up over the years. It is an easy thing to blame rather than admit a dog may not be that good as we think. We must not bog down the judging process in worries of how sculpted the grooming is. Instead what is most important is the quality of the coat and texture. Grooming will always be a manmade issue, but quality is not. Grooming should never be a key factor in putting up a dog but it also should not be used against one because it is well groomed.

The next time you sit with your Scottie, feel the coat. What do you like about the coat? Is it the feel of that wonderful harsh coat or a silky finish? I'm always a bit sad when my Scotties get to an age when I no longer feel I can strip out the coat. I know in about 4 or 5 clippings I will lose that wonderful thick, dense harshly layered coat. Our judges should experience that as well. So, take the clippers away from the bodies. Let's keep our finger callouses' for just a little longer.

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