

## Briefs

Registration is open for the **All American Grooming Show**, to be held at the Westin North Shore in Wheeling, Ill. The Aug. 11-14 event will feature GroomTeam-sanctioned competitions, vendor exhibits, seminars and stylist lectures. For information, visit [www.aagrmgshow.com](http://www.aagrmgshow.com).

**Chateau Marmutt** (Los Angeles), which offers dog day care and grooming and also retails boutique items, moved to a 4,500-square-foot building at 8162 Beverly Blvd. in June. It purchased the building last November.

**Fetch! Pet Care** (Berkeley, Calif.) partnered with **LittleGifts Inc./IDTAG.com** (Secaucus, N.J.) to offer customer discounts.

**Pet Camp** (San Francisco) added 13,000 square feet of outdoor play space to its facility, said to be the largest leash-free area in the city.

**Wag'n Tails Mobile Conversions** (Granger, Ind.) now offers the Catty Shack Vac option for its Pet Stylist Elite and Endurance Sprinter grooming vans. ■



Mattie is groomed to exhibit six key features of the current bichon frise look, from the rounded head to the teddy bear feet.

## Essentials of Bichon Grooming

You can capture the essence of this distinctive breed by paying attention to a few key elements. By Barbara Bird

A pet groomer's goal is to create a style that reflects the characteristic features of a breed *and* that is practical for a family pet. If you don't strike the right balance, the essence of the breed can be dimmed or even lost—and pet owners will moan that their bichon doesn't look "bichonly" enough.

Here are the features and styling elements of the current bichon look:

- A fluffy coat.
- A rounded head style with a distinct ledge over the expressive eyes.
- An arched neck.

- Rounded "teddy bear" feet.
- Saucy rump line or "bichon buns."
- A plumed tail.

Let's walk through some techniques that will highlight the breed's six distinct features.

### Fluffy Coat

The American Kennel Club breed standard describes the bichon frise as a "white powder puff of a dog ... ." Unfortunately, that powder puff coat is a combination of soft, dense undercoat and coarse, curly hair. Combination

coats often are a serious maintenance adventure. The bichon frise is an especially challenging breed for the average pet groomer because its coat is challenging for the average pet owner.

The high-maintenance nature of bichon coats can be a source of tension between pet owners and groomers. Shorter hair may be easier to maintain, but I personally don't think anything shorter than a No. 4F blade can be considered fluffy.

Then there's the question of a sculpted versus contoured trim. A sculpted trim incorporates variations in length at different points of the profile, especially the body and legs. A contoured trim is the same length all over, achieved with a clipper blade or comb attachment.

The scissored bichon presented in the show ring sports a sculpted trim. The body is surprisingly short, less than an inch and often as short as three-quarters of an inch. The legs are rather full, but not so much as to puff out over the shoulders or hips. The lines over the shoulders and down the sides of the legs as well as over the hips and down the rear legs form reverse U-shapes. The hair on the back of the front legs and the front of the rear legs is left slightly longer. The very shortest points are under the chin at the throat and at the backs of rear legs at the point of rear angulation.

For a full-looking pet trim, use a half-inch, five-eighths inch or three-quarters inch snap-on comb to trim the body and set in the lines. Then scissor the feet, legs, head and neck crest. For a shorter pet trim, use a half-inch or three-eighths snap-on attachment in a contoured style.

### Rounded Head and Expressive Eyes

The head style of the bichon frise is distinctly rounded, although the bottom of the circle is often rather flat. An



Expose the bichon's eyes by carefully scissoring or clipping over the eye rims (left). Thanks to dark eye rims and dark "halos" around the eyes, the dog should look like it is wearing eyeliner.



important feature is that the eyes are set on a line that dissects the circle at the midpoint. The result is that there is more hair above the eyes than below the nose. For pets, the chin hair can be quite short, as long as the eyes are placed at the widest point of the head piece.

The singular hallmark of the bichon frise's expression is that the rims of its eyes are exposed. Because it has dark eye rims and dark "halos" around the eyes, the dog should look like it is wearing eyeliner. To achieve this effect, carefully scissor or clip over the eye rim. If scissoring along the eyelid makes you nervous, use an adjustable-blade trimmer on the No. 10 setting. Lightly clip from the outside corner of the eye to the inside corner, removing hair about a quarter-inch above the eye. The lower eye rim also can be carefully clipped.

Nothing in the written breed standard describes the bichon "ledge," or the wedge-shaped piece that extends over the eyes. However, a lack of hair over the eyes can leave the dog with a startled

expression that is not attractive. If the ledge is too sharp or triangular, it can create a terrierlike expression. Some owners think this makes the dog seem angry, and prefer a softer look. Rounding and shortening the ledge is preferable to removing it altogether. The ledge helps the eyes look deep and inquisitive. To keep the ledge from falling over the eyes, scissor it in about three layers. Cut in about a quarter-inch behind the outside corner of the eye. Comb down a fine layer, create the shape you want, then comb down two more layers and scissor to that same shape.

### Arched Neck

The bichon's arched neck is the styling point that bothers groomers the most.

The hair on the back of the neck from the occiput to the withers is longer and is distinctly bowed or arched. It serves to balance the large, round head, and gives the dog its characteristic attitude. The neck crest also helps create a more square profile, which is preferable to a

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## 7 Steps to a Great Bichon Head

**A BICHON'S HEAD** is the crown jewel of its look, so getting it right is important. Here are some steps to make it look great:

**1. Start at the bottom and work up.** Begin by scissoring under the chin all the way to the throat. Curved shears work best.

**2. Scissor the jaw line and back behind the ear.** Scissor off any excess length on the ear.

Some pet owners are attached to longer, fuller ears. In such cases, you can create an "ears out" head style by scissoring the face inside the line of the ears. This also works for dogs that have a poor ear set, or ears that are too perky or fold inward.

To make the "ears out" style look more bichon-like, round the bottoms upward rather than cutting straight across or leaving them uneven. By maintaining a circle image and defining the eyes, you can get that bichon expression even with longer ears.

**3. Create a circle.** Scissor the sides of the head up through the ear hair to the crown. Take careful note of where the bottom of the ear leather is located. I usually do the left side first (my right). Comb out sides of the face to the side, and trim off anything that sticks out beyond the line you have created as your circle.

**4. Reverse your shears.** Then shape the other side of the head.

**5. Save the top of the head for last.** Then complete the circle.

**6. Scissor the neck crest.** Move from the highest point of the crown of the head to the withers. Always fit the neck to the head after completing the head. It should be the last thing you do.

**7. Finish with a trim.** To trim the hair in front of the mouth, comb it forward and remove what extends beyond the tip of the nose. Better yet, lay your finger alongside the nose and cut off hair that is in front of your finger. Careful not to cut your fingers!

—Barbara Bird

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



rectangular profile. The longer the dog is in its back, the more it needs that neck piece. However, the neck piece can be shortened and modified.

The neck should start in line with the back of the front legs. If the dog is long of body, however, the neck should start farther back. Do not shorten it in such a way as to start in front of the withers. Doing so will create a "helmet head."

### Rounded 'Teddy Bear' Feet

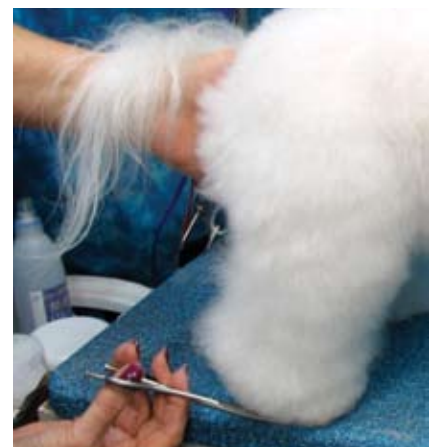
Rounded and beveled "teddy bear" feet are a signature of the bichon frise. Ideally, the toenails don't show, which can be a challenge with a very short cut.

I started achieving my best-looking feet when I began using small, 5.5-inch curved scissors. Scissor the outside edge of the foot straight up and down to create a beveled effect.

To make the dog look on its toes in the rear, curve the hair on the very back of the rear foot slightly upward. This is easily achieved with small, curved scissors. One way to do this is to place the dog's foot right at the edge of the table.

### Saucy Rump Line

Whether you call it "the rear assembly" or "bichon buns" (my term), the rump of the bichon has a characteristically saucy line with moderate rear angulation. To determine the point at which to dip into the back of the rear leg, lift the foot straight up and find the natural bend. The deepest point of the dip is trimmed very close. The front of the rear leg is slightly



Place the dog's rear foot at the edge of the table so you can scissor the back of it on a slightly upward curve. This makes the dog appear to be on its toes in the rear.

curved to balance the curve of the angulation at the back of the leg.

A key to creating an attractive rump line is to set in the tail by scissoring around the base about a half inch. Basically, you want to create a distinct separation between the base of the tail and the back and rump. Then you can create a nice, clean line from the back to the point of the rump. Some groomers like to create a jaunty rump line, slightly angled from the point of the hip to the point of the rump, similar to a poodle trim. I prefer a rounded, softer line.

How much hair do you leave to create the rump line? Not too much. It depends on the proportions of the dog. If the pet is long in the body, you do not want to emphasize that by extending the rump line farther. In that case, you may even want to minimize the rump by taking the hair very close. If the dog is more nearly square in proportion, you can build nice buns. Bichon owners love it when their dogs have cute butts!

### Plumed Tail

The bichon's tail should not be trimmed. It is a plume, not a bottle brush. It should have a flowing appearance, with a long tip. If it's dreadfully uneven, even it up.

It's important to know that the hair on the tail does not grow as fast as the hair on the body or legs. It does not seem to be genetically programmed to replace itself. The bichon tail is meant to last.

Unfortunately, these tails mat easily. This is an area where dematting skills are



The bichon frise's tail mats easily, but shouldn't be trimmed. Instead, try a silicone gel, thick cream conditioner or hair serum with a long-pin slicker brush or dematting tool to smooth it out.

## Tools and Products for Bichons

**TO MASTER THE** bichon frise style, you must use the right products to prepare the coat. Choose shampoos, conditioners and finishing sprays that offer some detangling assistance without softening the coat too much: An overly conditioned, soft coat will not hold form or scissor well.

Bichons tend to have sensitive skin, and may react poorly to strong whitener shampoos or highly fragranced products.

However, almost all bichons do well with silicone ingredients. Lightly apply conditioners or sprays with silicones to

improve combing, fluff finishing and add sparkle and shine.

Styling products such as mousses and styling sprays can be very helpful in achieving a nice, full head style.

Coat damage is an ever-present hazard with the bichon's combination of soft, fine and coarser hair. The heads and tails suffer the most if constantly groomed with rough-tipped tools, such as cheap slicker brushes. Hair that has been damaged by tools or lack of conditioning protection mats more easily. Using well-made tools with finished pins is important.

—Barbara Bird

called into play. Even badly matted tails can be saved using a silicone gel, thick cream conditioner or hair serum and a long-pin slicker brush or dematting tool. To achieve the ultimate in plumage, apply a foaming coat dressing as a final touch.

### Price It Right

Can a bichon frise look like a bichon without all of these styling elements? Yes. However, these elements create the look currently associated with the breed. When you sacrifice two or more of these styling points, you sacrifice much of the breed's characteristic appearance.

Certainly you can shorten or even

remove the neck crest. However, if you take down the neck, shape a tight cap on top of the head, cut over the tops of the ears and scissor the face straight, you may create more of a teddy bear poodle style and lose the bichon look.

The most important styling elements of the bichon frise are the eyes, the expression and the plumed tail.

If you are willing to work on capturing the essence of this breed's look, full or short style, you need to get the word out. Owners who want this work usually are very willing to pay more.

Be sure to set a price that makes you happy to do the work. The price of a full bichon trim should approach the price of a standard poodle cut. Don't cut yourself short. Set your "happy price"! ■

*Barbara Bird, who has written about pet care for more than 10 years, is a popular contributor to several Internet groups for groomers and is the founder of GroomClassroom.com, where she teaches an online course on pet shampoos and conditioners. Bird stays grounded with large daily doses of pet grooming at her business, Transformation Pet Center, in Tucson, Ariz.*

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