

Working With Wet Coats

VOLUME I, ISSUE I

NEWSLETTER DATE
FEB 2004

A CUT ABOVE/PARTICENTRAL KENNELS

Were we ALL taught incorrectly???

Special points of interest:

- *Why to work with wet coat*
- *HOW to work with wet coat*
- *Safety issues while working around wet coat*
- *Blade care*
- *All about dirt and coats*

Inside this issue:

What dirt does to hair

What dirt does to equipment

Water and electricity

SAFETY!!!!

Dematting

Clipping wet coats

Using Silicones

We will discuss the whys and how's of wet shaving, dematting and scissoring in this seminar and this newsletter.

HOPEFULLY you will be able to save yourself some time and money using these techniques.

Until very recently, I had never met a groomer that was taught in school or apprenticeship to bathe dogs before brushing, dematting, or shaving down a once a year dog.

The rules have ALWAYS been to get the hair off BEFORE the bath. I think that in the days prior to silicones, high velocity dryers and recirculating bathers it WAS the smart thing to do. But we have come a LONG way and it no longer DOES!

I don't work on dirty dogs. I refuse to . My health and the ease of working on clean coats have convinced me not to.

Every dog, regardless of amount of coat or mats goes in to the tub here FIRST, then we deal with mats that will be removed in one way or another. I do not want to deal with dander, dirt or parasites in my shop and in my lungs and on my skin. SO we wash everything first.

Once a year dogs are TOO nasty for my clipper blades and my hands to touch, and wet clipping saves time and blades.

Dematting wet hair (or at least CLEAN hair) is actually less damaging and easier than dematting dry, dirty hair. Easier on



Debi Hilley, NDGAA certified Groomer, owner of A Cut Above Pet Salon in Albany Georgia.

both the groomer and the pet.

But, what if you have 6 inches of unmatted coat they want short? Throw that pup in the tub, wash it, HV it briefly, then wet shave, dry and finish. Saves lots of time and wear and tear on the equipment. This is a terrific technique for mobile groomers as well as shop groomers and vet groomers because it saves TIME. And we all know, time is money.

What dulls blades?

That is simple! Dirt and heat.

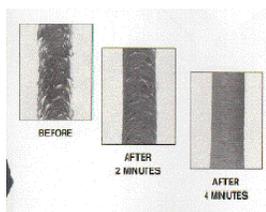
Those are the two main reasons blades get dull. Dirt actually cuts into the sharpening surface of the blades. Think about sandpaper. Would you ever run a piece of sandpaper across your blades? OF COURSE NOT! Yet you do every time you cut a dogs hair that is dirty. Dirt is sand and guess what

they use in sandpaper?

Another cause of blade dulling is heat. Heat is caused by friction.

AGAIN sand and oils contribute to heating because they contribute to friction. Most cooling sprays do nothing to cool anything but the top layer of metal in the blade . I swap blades when they get hot.....but that

happens very rarely in my shop anymore. Wet clipping solves BOTH of these issues. The water acts as a lubricant and a coolant for the blade. Usually , even on a cocker or a large breed, you will not need to change the blade out due to heat while wet clipping and since the dog is clean you do not have the dirt problem.



Hair cuticle before, during and after conditioning treatments.

Hair Cuticles and Dirt.....

Hair cuticles (shafts) are actually made up of layers, like snake skin or fish scales and are not perfectly smooth. Before damage is done to them by styling products and tools as well as dirt.

Dirt is the number one damaging factor in a dogs coat. The dirt acts like sandpaper actually causing huge gaps in the cuticles and can actually go all the way through the shaft breaking the coat off. These gaps are what cause tangles and make hair dif-

ficult to comb through.

If you are combing through dirty coats you are in essence taking sandpaper to the coat and causing a lot of damage that can be easily avoided by washing and conditioning coats before brushing and combing them.

The washing of these coats removes the damaging dirt particles and conditioning (either with sprays of conditioners) coats the rough cuticle allowing for a smoother surface and mak-

ing the comb out MUCH easier.

We were all told that washing mats made them tighter, and it DOES! But only if they are dried into the coat and not removed.

Removing matted hair is easier when the hair is wet, clean and properly conditioned. REGARDLESS of whether you demat it or clipper it off. Start with clean dogs and the results will be better!

If you are combing through dirty coats you are in essence taking sandpaper to the coat

Why is dirt bad for coats ?

Dirt acts like glue in coats. It is bad for blades because it dulls them and bad for hair because it damages it. If you think about it, hair that is dirty is STIFF. Clean hair is soft. The dirt is rough and actually sticks to the hair shafts making them rough. And lets face it, rough on rough is not going to come apart easily! Imagine sandpaper sheets placed

face down and rubbing them together. That is the same thing as dirty hair shafts rubbing together.

Dirt breaks coat and sticks the shafts together making it harder to comb through and damaging the coats even further.

By working with clean, wet hair we have a more elastic hair shaft

that is smooth. It combs apart MUCH easier with less damage to the individual hair shafts resulting in a coat that is in better condition and faster to demat or clipper off as well.



Aren't you glad your hair doesn't get that dirty?

What else can make hair dirty?

This is EASY! Think of your own hair. Dirt alone is not the reason our hair breaks, nor is it the only thing that causes hair to tangle or become damaged. Styling products are the number one cause of human hair becoming damaged. Hairsprays and gels trap dirt and as we have discussed dirt damages hair cuticles. Now, since dogs are closer

to the ground with their coats than we are with our heads of hair, they encounter MORE dirt than we do. Dogs also come into contact with food, urine, grass, water, dew, and too many other things to mention. And if we are working on dogs with all of these things in their coats, WE are coming into contact with them as well.

ALL of that makes the hair shaft more susceptible to damage. ESPECIALLY if the particles are dragged across the shafts by combs or brushes!

I would rather not have the smell, dirt and contaminants that could possibly be in the dogs hair come into contact with MY skin. That is the number one reason to work on clean dogs.

Safety Measures for Wet Clipping

This is **CRITICALLY** important for your safety and the safety of the dogs!

There is always a risk involved whenever you use water and electric appliances together.

As a result there are steps you **MUST** take to ensure both your safety and the safety of the pet you are grooming.

FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAN CAUSE SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH!

If possible use a battery operated clipper such as the Luabe lightening cordless clipper or a Speed Feed. There is no safer method for clipping wet hair than using battery operated clippers.

If you do not own a pair of cordless clippers, then a GFCI **MUST** be used to plug the clippers into. This device will trip and prevent electricity from continuing to flow through the clipper in the event of a malfunction or ground interruption.

Also, it is important to remember to check your cords for damage and if you find **ANY** do not use the clipper until you get it replaced.

OK, so you have your GFCI or Cordless clipper ready and have a dog ready to work on.

Let the fun begin!

First of all you bathe the dog. I recommend using a bathing

system like the Bathing Beauty by Hanvey or the Hydro surge Bath Pro, concentrating on the **SKIN** and the coat directly at the skin. The rest is coming off anyway so there is no reason to get it clean. Then rinse using as much pressure as you can get from your nozzle, forcing the water under any matting, again concentrating on the skin.

Use your High Velocity dryer to dry the dog so that it is not a dripping dog that you are trying to clipper. You want to remove some of the water at the skin and force the mats away from the skin. Again, concentrate on the skin, not the coat that is coming off.

Then **MOVE** the dog to a table. There is always a chance that your bathtub will be grounded through the plumbing or that standing water could remain in the tub and you **COULD** drop the clipper into it causing electrocution hazards.

IF YOU DROP YOUR CLIPPER IN TO STANDING WATER DO NOT REACH IN TO REMOVE IT! Unplug the clipper first. Or better yet, just don't use the clippers near the tub!

After you get the dog on the table, a longer blade than you expect can be used to remove hair. Usually a 4,5 or 7 can be used without clogging up. A ten will clog sometimes unless it the dog is **VERY WET**. Adding

a little bit of silicone spray can assist in getting blades to go through coats easier as well.

You may have to rebathe especially dirty dogs, but I have found that is not always the case. Usually they are clean enough if you direct your washing and rinsing at the skin level.

If the dog is extremely dirty or flea infested, or even **VERY** tightly matted, you can leave the shampoo or conditioner on the animal while you clipper it. This will allow you to have more lubrication and the coat will come off easier with less chance of injuring the dog.

After removing the coat, I dry the dogs then go back over them to finish if needed.

How did that save me time?

EASY! It would have taken me **HOURS** to dry that coat if I had dried it all the way before clipping! It would have taken me **MUCH** longer to remove nasty matted hair than clean wet hair. And since I used my blades on clean hair I did not damage them with dirt.

Now to prevent your blades from rusting, simply HV them and oil them. Dry, oiled blades equal no rust.



See how smooth and clean the dog is?

FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAN CAUSE SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH!



It took me ten minutes to do that small section before her bath and 25 minutes including her bath to strip the rest of her wet.

Wet Clipping on non-matted dogs

I know, I know, why would anyone in their right mind choose to bathe a dog before cutting hair off first?

The answer is really very simple. SAVING TIME but still not working on a dirty dog!

Lets say you have a poodle or Shih-Tzu that is wanting an all over shorter clip but they have 6 inches or more of hair, not matted, but mom or dad decides, "lets take it shorter". Then it turns out Fifi has peed all over herself or waded through a mud puddle and OBVIOUSLY you are not going to want to cut her down before the bath. I mean, I will not work on dirty dogs, so it's a no-brainer for me. Straight into the tub she goes and when she's clean we blow her out just a bit then to the grooming table. I will go one size longer than I want my finished work to be when using blades, or the same snap-on comb I will be using to cut the coat. If I am going to finish with a 4 then I use a 3/4 blade. If I am using an A comb I tend to stay with that comb. Each coat is different and depending on how much "spring" the coat has you will get a different result. Poodle coats tend to dry out longer when they are cut wet, and dropcoats tend to be pretty close to the same length.

You will save an immense amount of time doing this over drying the entire dog first and you will not be getting yourself or your equipment dirty by clipping down a dirty dog.

Drop coated dogs and wet clipping

This technique is amazing for drop coats because when wet the hair will layer itself and not fly everywhere. You will be clipping off excess coat the way you want the hair to lay, then because you will not be drying it as long, it will reduce static. After you clip the coat off, dry as usual then finish. You will find that after some practice this is a technique that is invaluable to you in the salon for most every type of coat.

Other ideas for grooming dogs wet are:

1. Eyebrows on schnauzers and other terriers that are wet slightly will hold their shape while you trim them giving them a really crisp, fast finish.
2. Layer clipping yorkies and the like. Your hairdresser works on wet hair to do this technique on your hair.
3. Visors on drop coats are fast and easy because the water holds the hair in place.
4. Ears and tails hold their shape better when slightly damp.
5. Poodle faces and feet on sensitive dogs because the water lubricates the skin and cools the blades.

Using Blades and Snap-on Combs on Matted Coats

For years we were told not to try to remove matted coats without using a ten or 7F blade. I have a serious disagreement with that type of thinking. MANY dogs that are only moderately matted and not felted (tight thick mats at the skin) can be easily and safely removed after bathing the dog using a longer blade or a snap on comb. The rule used to be NEVER BATHE a matted dog because the mats will just get tighter.

That is only true if you allow the dog to be bathed repeatedly without removing the matted coat, NOT if you are clipping the hair off or plan on brushing out the matting. The development of tools in this industry like the high velocity dryers we have now and the silicone sprays and gels that we can utilize have made a great deal of the things we were taught were LAW years ago seem silly today. However, that being said, owners who repeatedly wash their dogs at home and fail to remove matting or to dry their pets thoroughly will need to be educated in how to brush and dry to avoid the need for their pet being shaved when they bring them in for grooming.

When the need arises to remove matted coats, there are several things to consider. #1 is the pet going to come back in matted if I leave it longer this time? #2 does the pet live outside? #3 How tight to the skin is the matting? If the hair is packed onto the skin it is best to remove the pelt with a SHORT blade. I use a ten or a 7f in most of these cases and do it while the pet is wet. If the mats are further away from the skin, you can use a snap on comb or a longer blade.

Using skip-tooth blades can be dangerous because the areas in between the teeth of the blades can catch skin folds and since the matted hair pulls the skin up into the blade with it, your risk of injuring the pet increases. There is sometimes a need to go even LOWER than a ten blade. These type of strips in my opinion, need to be done under medical supervision in case of unexpected injuries being discovered or caused by the removal process and we refer those types of animals to the vet that they use for grooming. Dogs that are that severely pelted will probably have irritation from the clipping that will need to be addressed to prevent further problems from occurring due to the pet scratching or biting at the irritation. Vets are better equipped to handle that type of situation.

Even if the matting is quite severe there are tools and trick that will allow you to remove the hair safely. By knowing about wet clipping, snap on comb use and how to best decide when to say NO to a client, you can minimize the potential for injury.

This is a close up of a Wahl Snap on Comb. You can see the thin Stainless Steel teeth. The tips are rounded to prevent snagging and catching on skin and small mats. The SHORTER combs, like a 4 or 5 will oftentimes go underneath mats that a 7f would be required for in a regular blade. What are the advantages of the snap on comb on matted dogs? EASY! You CANNOT CUT a dog with a snap on comb. The cutting edge of the blade is not next to the skin which is what can cause cutting, tearing, scratching or irritation. If you are using a vac system, it may still be possible using the smallest of combs to pull the skin into the blade, but it is highly unlikely.



Plastic combs can be used in matted areas as well. Most companies make a shorter comb and these will work GREAT when dealing with tuck ups, under leg areas and sensitive stomachs. EVEN IF THE AREA IS MATTED, you can get a blade through it if you use a short enough blade to go underneath the mats. Stretching the skin can also help with this

task. If it is a REALLY bad mat, then use the combs on the dog before drying, but after force drying the hair away from the area. The water acts as a lubricant, making the removal of the hair even easier. A little bit of silicone spray or dematting gel will also assist in this area to help insure no injuries will occur because it allows the blade to glide through easier. Whichever brand snap on comb you use, follow the manufacturers recommendations for blade size under the comb. Failure to do so can result in blade damage.

Wet clipping with Snap on combs

Up until recently I would have said it wasn't possible or needed to use snap on combs while wet clipping. HOWEVER after having tried it on a couple of moderately matted poodles, I can now say I have changed my mind on that stance and will say **USE SNAP ONS WHEN POSSIBLE!** They will work on moderately matted hair equally as well as a blade if you are trying to save length, are working on a sensitive dog or if the pet has thin hair. They leave a little more length than a blade and not as smooth a finish, but you can then get a better finish after the original clip down and still save time drying all that extra coat.

The metal combs stay on better because they LOCK onto the blade, and as a result would be my first choice for wet clipping. There will be less pulling off of the guard, and that means less chance of an .OOPS. with the shorter blade used under the combs should the comb be pulled off the blade. Remember, not every situation is the same. Adjust your tools and techniques to the dog you are working on and you will have great results every time. Here.s to happy, SAFE grooming!

Snap on combs are PERFECT when used with a vac system, and YES you can use a vac system to wet shave a dog!

When using a vac system, use a long snap on comb or the blade of your choice, and clipper as usually. When you are through, run the vac on high for a minute or two to dry the hose inside and then EMPTY THE VAC! Failure to empty the vac can cause damage to the canister (if it is a pressed wood containment system) or your filter as well as mildewing if you forget to empty it.

AGAIN, remember that the clipper needs to be plugged into a GFCI or cordless. You can get vac heads for most systems for cordless clippers. The IVAC is safe to wet clip with as well, but REMEMBER it needs to be plugged into a GFCI.

Sprays and Gels

Using dematting sprays or gels can help with badly matted areas of hair that need to be removed with clippers. They provide protection from nicks, cuts, irritations and allow the blade to slide under the mats easier and faster. Apply often and frequently while clipping for a faster, easier shakedown.

Cleaning up after wet clipping

Wet hair is messy. By using a towel, a plastic bag or a puppy pad under the dog, on the table you are working on, it will minimize the mess. You will be able to simply pick up the hair and dump it into the trashcan. Your hands are easily wiped off with a dry towel, or you may choose to wear latex type gloves to prevent hair from sticking to your hands. The nice thing is that wet matted hair is in one piece and the hair does fall straight to the table when removed from the dogs. The wetter the hair is the easier it is to clean up after. Semi-damp hair is much messier in my experience.

Dematting wet coats

I have an entire book done on dematting dogs, but here are a few tricks that will help you out.

ALWAYS demat freshly bathed dogs, not dirty ones. Use sprays and gels when needed to assist in removal of mats. Using a wide tooth poodle comb to help split mats into smaller more manageable ones works great on wet coats.

I do most of my serious dematting after the dog is clean and dry (silicones work best when they are dried into the coats) but sometimes, on tails and ears especially I find it is easier to remove the matting while the dog is still wet. It allows for stretch that would not be there in dry coats, and it allows for the water to help lubricate the dematting tool of our choice as it goes through the mats.

We used to be told you NEVER bathed a matted dog because the hair would get tighter, and it will if you do not remove the mats, and if you use the correct products it is actually BETTER than dematting and brushing while they are dry and dirty!

For more information, see "Dealing with Matted Coats" available from Groomingsmarter@aol.com

Working with wet coats is a technique that requires a good clipper technique and practice to get right. If you don't have great results the first time out of the gate, DO NOT GIVE UP! Keep trying. You will have some results that will not be so great and you will learn from those and make adjustments that will make it work better.

This is a technique that needs to be in everyone's arsenal.