Grooming 101
written by Members of the Briard Education Committee

One of the most popular and well-attended seminars at BCA Nationals is the grooming seminar that has been Presented multiple times by BEC member Terry Miller. New Briarders get valuable grooming advise. Experienced groomers often learn a new piece of information that will assist them in having their Briard look its best, be it a companion or show dog. The seminar can often "overflow" its designated time slot, and the conversations about grooming can go on infinitum.

Heeding to this interest, the BEC felt it would be beneficial to many to continue the dialogue in the DC. All current BEC members have been asked to give a little background about themselves, and answer some of the most asked grooming questions.

Meg Weitz: Meg Weitz has been involved with Briards since 1976. She and her husband Michael Greenberg have sucessfully exhibited their dogs on breed and group levels primarily as owner/handlers, maintenance and conditioning multiple dogs since the beginning of their involvement. She came to Briards as a former junior handler--having Miniature Schnauzers taught the need for preparation for the ring, as hand stripping in stages was a requirement for a dog to be in its best "jacket". Meg also worked as a professional groomer for many years.

1) How often would you normally groom a Briard? Bathing frequency?

I believe it is always best to anticipate a weekly grooming on adult dogs, with puppies and teenagers in transitional coat needing more attention such that undercoat doesn't become matted. It is also important to have them up on a grooming table regularly---they thrive on the attention, and grooming is one of the best bonding and training tools ever. That being said, the better the quality of the hair, the easier grooming is in all aspects. I have learned to maintain much softer coats than ideal, and strive for the coats that require reasonable maintenaince. I try to maintain coats with less bathing than I used to do, using water as my spray as I brush. Occasionally I mix in a small amount of Pinaud Eau de Quinine or Jeris hair tonics(both usually available at Sally's Beauty Supply) -- they are products I was taught about over 35 years ago by the manager of a famous poodle kennel. I am careful of the ends of the hair so they are not "snapped" or shredded on dogs that I will be showing. For dematting I went back to an old favorite a few years ago...Mr.Groom Show Groom. It has a new scent which is almost powdery, which I much prefer to the old one, and the product works well for me.

Bathing frequency depends on the individual dog, although in earlier years I bathed each dog weekly or bi-weekly. I often will bathe only the legs and face, and underbelly/loin on males as opposed to the entire dog. This may be true for show weeks, again depending on the dog. Softer coats attract more dirt, and those are usually the dogs I would bath more often.

On another note, I have never found "putting a dog in oil" to something I either found useful or enjoyed on my dogs, although there are those with long-coated breeds that swear by the process.

2) What grooming tools do you prefer to use?

I have a few tools that I use regularly, and have only changed the pin brush I use in the last few years when I could no longer get the ones I liked from France. Favorites are Pure Paws pin brush, Number 1 All Systems Slicker, greyhound Comb(medium/fine combination), and Resco Coarse and 80 M(edium) wide combs. These last two are products I have used since 1976, and the Coarse comb I use at home is at least 30 years old! I do not hesitate to use a slicker as necessary on a show dog (on legs, to remove undercoat), but it should be used properly. For dogs I am not showing but keep in reasonable coat at home, I will use a Universal Slicker or the Imitation Le Pooch slickers (especially the teal one) to help separate the coat and remove excess undercoat. As for "weapons of mass destruction", i.e Mars Coat Kings, Rakes, etc....not on a show coat, but sometimes on a dog that I am having trouble combing through.

3) What shampoo and creme rinse products do you use?
For the show coats I use the various lines of Pure Paws products. When I do legs/maintenance I might use Suave Daily Shampooing or a product from Sally's that is a Honey Almond Shampoo. To remove heavy dirt and greasiness, I use diluted Palmolive. Thanks to Marsha Clamp, I learned about Cure Care Creme rinse(for dogs and me!), over 20 years ago, and it is still my go to creme rinse...you can use it diluted or straight, depending on the need.

4) Under what circumstance might you trim back or clip down a Briard coat?

I generally keep our dogs in coat, but will adjust how much coat a retired dog has depending on its texture, its age and health, and circumstances. Sometimes I will shaving areas that are not visible, pull out a lot of undercoat, and use a clip-on blade to comb through the coat(and trip the legs as well) yet the dog still looks like it is coat. I have absolutely no objection to clipping a dog down for all the various reasons one might--a clipped dog is much happier than an uncomfortably matted specimen. When I do shave a dog, I usually try to leave the head and the tail, as the extremities tend to fill in slowly. Then, if you wish to put the dog back in coat, it's more efficient. The same is true for the coat that is "lightened" but not clipped off..

5) What advice would you give a new owner in regards to the grooming process?

It is imperative that you spend even 5 minutes a day brushing your puppy, even though they have little need for it. Always do both sides, and you determine the length of time the process lasts. It has been my experience that dogs who get matted early on, or don't like the grooming process are the ones that the new owners haven't regularly brushed from the time they received the puppy from the breeder. It is very important that you buy the tools before getting the puppy, and follow recommendations made by the breeder. Be pragmatic, and make sure you groom down to the skin. This is so important when that pretty puppy coat start transitioning into adult coat...one day the dog may be all groomed out, but in a few days you may be paying a high price of time and effort if you don't groom before the mats start, especially in places of friction like loins and elbows.

If you don't have a grooming table where you can lie the puppy down , you can use the floor . If you groom on the floor , keep a lead on your dog until they are reliable so they can not leave the scene! Try to learn to do nails properly, or take the dog to a groomer with some regularity.

6) When and how do you introduce grooming to a puppy?

I start doing nails when the babies are a few days old for the sake of the mother, but keep doing so at least once a week until they leave home. I run a tiny slicker over them from a few weeks old, holding them on my lap, but they are on the table at around 4 weeks to get used to it.

7) What if any trimming do you do on your dogs?

For showing, I do feet(and on all our dogs take the hair from the underside of the foot removed so their are no gummy or hard mats between the pads.I prefer to do feet at least a week before the show, and try not to do feet at shows. If you are going to ask someone to trim your dog's feet at a show, please make sure that there are absolutely no mats on the feet and between the toes. I clean up around the anus, and will neaten up the boys' groin area. Males can get some difficult mats around their testicles(uncomfortable and hard to get out) and females around their vulvas if these areas are not brush or cleaned up a bit. Otherwise, no trimming or sculpting as it is not appropriate for the breed. I do not cut hair between the eyes but will comb out hair with a very fine tooth comb if a dog has an excess of hair and really cannot see through the veiling. For dogs not being shown, I will take the feet much shorter, as I probably have lightened the amount of hair they are carrying already.

8) Do you have a standard ritual for getting your Briard ready for a show?

I will have the dog groomed out before a bath(unless it was recently groomed out and is free of excessive undercoat/matts and could go right into the tub...this can only occur if you have been diligent or have a dog with an excellent coat), and the range of the bath (whole dog or legs/face/underbelly) will be dictated by the individual dog's needs. I don't creme rinse a coat just before a show, and on some dogs creme rinse the body coat very rarely. How far in advance a bath is given is a similar judgement call...some dogs look their best bathed right before a show, but the majority of ours are done several days to a week before to allow the coat to resume its natural fall and quality. Having dealt with some soft coats over the years, I have worked hard to find the best way to present them as well as possible, and truly appreciate the good coats. I have some dogs whom I do not brush through on the day of the show, leaving their body coat to be settled lightly but not gone through as I would at home. I will just do their legs and beard(which may need blow drying depending on the weather), and settle the head coat. Depending on the weather, I adjust blow drying at home. In the winter, I will partially cage dry, and then finish on the table. When its warm, I will let the dog dry off partially outside, and finish on the table. I often will blow out the face and legs, and brush the body coat without having to blow it out.
Margaret Shappard: As many of you probably know, I am not a Briard breeder though I do judge them and a number of other herding breeds; however, I have raised, trained, and successfully exhibited the Briards that I have owned in obedience, rally, herding, and conformation since 1985.

I am not a fan of the glamorous show dog concept but rather am drawn to the natural beauty found in a correctly constructed and coated Briard. I believe the Briard should merely be healthy, clean, and brushed out before it is shown. Our sport seems to be full of frustrated hair dressers and that many, if not most of the coated breeds in the herding group are excessively groomed. I suppose I am a minimalist concerning grooming.

Response to questions:

1) **How often would you normally groom a Briard? Bathing frequency?**

   Depending on the coat quality and age of the dog, starting with daily to weekly to monthly; bathing as needed with the dog being brushed out first, then bathed, then air-dried, then brushed out again.

2) **What grooming tools do you prefer to use?**

   pin brush, comb, les Pooch slicker, and a Comfy Pet mat breaker.

3) **What shampoo and creme rinse products do you use?**

   I use a eucalyptus and citronella-based shampoo with no cream rinse or other products.

4) **Under what circumstance might you trim back or clip down a Briard coat?**

   If / when the grooming sessions become uncomfortable for the dog as he ages.

5) **What advice would you give a new owner in regards to the grooming process?**

   Since maintenance grooming is part of the general welfare of a coated breed, my advice to a new owner is to set up a schedule based on information from your breeder and stick to it!

6) **When and how do you introduce grooming to a puppy?**

   Your breeder has hopefully started the process and the puppy has been introduced to the grooming table. I had no problem brushing my puppies on my lap at first, then on the floor a few weeks later, then on to the grooming table (dictated by the growth of the puppy) as the length of coat and the strength of your back permits.

7) **What if any trimming do you do on your dogs?**

   Feet only

8) **Do you have a standard ritual for getting your Briard ready for a show?**

   Bathing the Briard up to two weeks before a show so that the coat regains its natural vigor. Bad weather or herding just prior to a show may necessitate rinsing out the legs and blow-drying to avoid going into the ring with a wet dog.

9. I do 95% of my grooming before leaving home. With a good quality coat a minimal brush-out is all that is needed at a show except for situations as described above.