

Labrador Coat

By Faith Hyndman, [Buckstone Labradors](#) (as seen in the Fall 2001 LQ letters to the editor)

Looking back on all the Labrador standards over the years, there isn't one comment involving coat directing us to mousse, tease, back comb or blow-dry our Labrador Retrievers' coats in preparation for the Breed ring. The more shows I go to, the more I've noticed dogs being presented with evidence of excessive grooming. Dogs prepared in this manner are not carrying examples of correct coat. Correctly prepared coats are simply clean Labrador Retrievers ... period.

Their wash-and-wear reputation was one of the first things that attracted me to the breed years ago and it puzzles me when I walk by owners' or handlers' trucks and see a grooming table occupied by a Labrador Retriever with scissors, shedding blade, hair dryer, chalk and all the other show dog paraphernalia. A Labrador's coat is one of the best things about them. They don't need anything done to them other than good care, good nutrition, good breeding and good timing. They don't need their pants or bellies trimmed nor their whiskers cut off. Neither do they need chalk or powder. When our dogs are in coat, they don't even need the twist removed from the end of their tail. If they are out of coat, there is nothing that can be done to make it look better that a practiced eye won't detect. No one's fooling anyone. Leave them home and use that time to do obedience, agility or run some hunt tests.

It doesn't matter which standard you read, which camp you belong to or whether you think all have some merit, all the standards describe coat in basically the same way: "It should be short, straight, and very dense, giving a fairly hard feeling to the hand." Or "short, dense without wave or feathering, giving fairly hard feel to the touch."

Standards should be read with a sense of history and an understanding of the vocabulary of that time period. When our early standard stated that our dogs were not to have wave in their coats, remember that in the early stages of breed development, outcrosses were made and some coated breeds were used to enhance the Labrador Retriever. So there became an earnest attempt a bit later to avoid throwbacks to that particular coat's appearance. It does not mean that a Labrador's coat should not have any wave. It means it should only look like a Labrador Retriever and not any other breed. It should not resemble a Flat-Coat's coat, a Golden's coat or a Setter's coat. Unfortunately, so many years have passed that people have forgotten about that time in our breed's history.

The LRC standard states that wave is permissible. Most of the breed books here and abroad mention that wave is not only acceptable but indicative of a good coat, and some of the best coats I've ever seen are slightly waved. It has always indicated to me that before even touching it, I know it will probably have the correct hard feel. I don't profess to be an historian of the breed and there are many reading this who have been in the breed far longer than I have, but these facts are out there for all to read- I'm just relaying some thoughts from the past and my interpretation of them. Combine this with some hands on experience and you'll begin to understand what a correct Labrador coat is. Before long, you'll only need to look to be able to tell if the coat is correct.

We are responsible for showing dogs in good coat, correctly presented with the minimum of preparation. Don't try to fix it. Take them for a swim to clean them up a bit, but don't shampoo or brush them unless you have finished showing for the season. Shampoos will soften the coat and brushing will rob them of their undercoat, none of which you want before a show.

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