GROOMING THE PULI

By Anne Kennedy
THE PULI COAT

During the past several years, discussions about the Puli coat have centered around the question, "TO COMB OR TO CORD". Numerous articles have appeared debating the question, but very little has been written explaining how one cares for the coat after the owner has made his decision.

All too often, however, care of the Puli's coat is made more difficult by the fact that the Puli owner based his decision on the wrong criterion — on his own likes and dislikes rather than on the nature of his Puli's coat. I do not believe a breeder, or anyone for that matter, should try to influence a new Puli owner, but a breeder should help the novice by providing him with, (1) an honest appraisal of his Puli's coat characteristics, and (2) information to care for the coat regardless of how the owner decides he likes it best.

Pulis seem to have three kinds of coats. First, some have what I call the "Ideal Coat", ideal to me because the coat may be corded or combed depending upon the owner's preference. However, some Puli coats will not cord regardless of how hard one tries because they do not have sufficient undercoat, a necessity for the cording process. An "open coat" (a term frequently mis-used) is not an uncorded coat as many people think; it is an un-Puli coat resulting from heredity factors. The term "open coat" means lack of undercoat, not because it has been combed out or pulled out, but because there never was any undercoat and there never will be any. This coat type is rare. I have only seen three or four such coats, and, in each instance, the coat was extremely fine and silky. Such a coat is easily recognized and is considered a fault according to the Puli Standard. To try to cord such a coat is folly.

On the other hand, some coats must be corded if the Puli is to have a coat at all. By trying to keep dense, curly coats combed, one not only commits himself to a full-time job in keeping the coat free of mats, but also succeeds in keeping the Puli "free" of coat. Trying to brush the curly, thick coat is as much folly as trying to cord a fine, silky coat. Thus, the characteristics of a Puli's coat determine the kind of grooming he should have as well as the kind of care his coat should receive.

The following bathing and grooming methods result from my experiences with both corded and combed coats. These are the techniques that work best for me, and I hope that they may be of some help to you, adapted, of course, to your Puli and your circumstances.

Anne Kennedy
PULI GROOMING:

The Combed Coat

The most necessary tools for grooming a combed Puli are a pin brush and a bristle brush. The adult dog may be brushed completely with the pin brush, but any tangles or mats should be removed by hand. The bristle brush is good for the puppy and also for the adult Puli for quick brushups between groomings.

A house pet that doesn't exercise strenuously shouldn't need a complete grooming more than every ten to fourteen days. However, between groomings, I find it wise to check for mats which seem to form first around the ears and the rear.

I teach my Puli as a small puppy to stand quietly as he is being groomed, even though he doesn't need a great deal of brushing. A grooming table with a hitching post is excellent, but any sturdy table of comfortable height will do. I start grooming the feet and work upwards, using my left hand to push the hair up, brushing down with my right so that the brush touches more than the surface hair. Next I do the tail, saving the head for last. When grooming the head, I brush all the hair straight back. Then, starting at the muzzle, I brush all the hair down, a layer at a time, being very careful around the eyes. It is unnecessary to part the dog's hair, for he automatically concludes his grooming session with a brisk shake, and his hair falls into a natural part.

When I discover mats, I separate them with my fingers, carefully pulling them apart from the end, working toward the skin. A tight snarl can be removed more easily if it is first rubbed with ST. AUBREY'S ROYAL COATALIN or any coat product containing lanolin. Unless the snarl is large and extremely tight, it will easily break apart. Mats that have been neglected too long may have to be cut out. I use an OLIVER MAT SPLITTER, this time beginning at the skin, pulling the splitter carefully towards me. If I must resort to a scissors, I guide the scissors parallel to the hair because cutting across the hair will naturally leave a hole in the coat. If a particular section of the coat is troublesome and my charge gets restless, I give him a break by working on another area for awhile. I never stop grooming because he is restless. You know the Puli...before long he will pull any trick if he knows he can get his groomer to stop. By continuing to groom on another area, he sees that I'm not going to give in to him. But when I'm finished, we are both paid off....he with a goodie and I with a drink.

PULI GROOMING:

The Corded Coat

The striking breed characteristic of the Puli is his unusual, but typical, coat of shaggy hair, the result of hundreds of years of natural development. The shaggy, corded coat is not artificial; it is nature's way of protecting the Puli from the extreme conditions of outdoor living. The shaggy coat consists of a coarse outercoat, (which should never be silky), and a very fine, dense, wooly undercoat. The two combine to form cords. The kinds of cords which will result — wide plates, round cords, or strands of different length — depend upon heredity factors.

Grooming procedures begin during the early puppy stage. The natural divisions of the coat should be respected as much as possible. If I intend to exhibit during the cording process, I continue to brush the coat, at least on the surface, while it is cording, unless the coat is the dense, curly type that I mentioned earlier. I NEVER brush this kind of coat while cording; I simply wet it down EVERY day. When coats are brushed, they do cord more slowly, but I prefer my Pulis to look as well groomed as possible in their public appearances. Until the puppy coat has reached the length and density where splitting becomes necessary to avoid matting, I brush the coat with a soft pin brush.

From eight months to one year, depending on the type of coat, climate, environment and activity, the cording begins. The most important tools for this process are fingers. I never use a comb, coarse or fine, because it not only pulls out too much coat, but it tends to split the coat ends. I carefully separate the strands by tearing each down to the skin. This frees the excess hair (dead undercoat) which will then fall out. It is important not to separate the coat into overly small strands, for such separations are not natural, and I always try to follow the natural formations as closely as possible. As the coat grows, these strands or cords will become more pronounced and dense.

The easiest way I have found to tear the cords on a full coated Puli is to wet him down thoroughly in a tub, beginning the tearing procedure while he is damp. This way I can more easily see the natural formations as well as eliminate excessive undercoat which would ordinarily have to be brushed out after each separation. A warm spray of water when finished will remove all the excessive hair. When the
Pulls is almost dry, I check to make certain that I did not miss any needed separations. If it is not practical for me to wet down my Puli, I sometimes use a spray bottle of warm water, spraying a section of the coat at a time, then tearing the coat to the skin. A good reference for corded a dog is HOW TO RAISE AND TRAIN A KOMONDOR, by Oscar Beregi and Leslie Benis, T.F.H. Publications, Inc., 1966. This book contains pictures and detailed descriptions of the procedure.

Once the coat has been evenly separated, it is easy to keep and requires care only in accordance with its own speed of growth. With a young Puli, I repeat the separation approximately every two weeks. The coat requires the greatest amount of care in the beginning stage. As the Puli nears maturity less care is needed. The fully grown Puli needs only an occasional separation of new growth. The corded coat is much easier to keep clean and neat because dirt will not penetrate the cord, and the dirt which settles on the surface is very easy to remove. However, the coat must be kept clean while it is corded.

It is extremely important that the ends of the cords be kept open. Even the smallest curl on the end will double back into the cord as the cord continues to grow. If allowed to remain, the ends will look matted, and the Puli will lose his neat appearance. The ends are very easy to check. I simply pick up a handful of cords and examine the ends. I keep the cords very short on the stomach area of male Pulis because of urine stains. If the stains are allowed to remain in the cords for any length of time, they are difficult to remove. Cutting the stomach cords is also a helpful hint for the male who is being used for stud.

For the show ring, I groom a completely corded coat by following the same procedure I use for the combed coat. Starting at the feet and holding up the coat, I brush down briskly with a pin brush or even a slicker brush to give the coat a fuller and neater appearance. Just because the Puli is corded doesn't mean he isn't groomed.

BATHING THE PULI

Though many people feel that frequent bathing dries out the Puli's coat, I find that with good care and proper bathing such is not the case. I bathe the dogs that I exhibit before every show and the dogs that I do not exhibit when I feel they need it. This depends entirely on the individual Puli, for like children some are neat and clean even after eating while others will make a mess of everything in sight just taking a drink of water. Therefore, I don't feel one can say exactly how often to bathe any Puli except one's own.

Before bathing any Puli, I take special care of the ears, eyes and feet. The inner ear should be kept free of hair so that air may circulate freely. I find that I can easily remove the hair with my fingers without causing any discomfort to the dog though he may shake his head for a short time afterward. To clean the ear, I dampen a piece of cotton with alcohol, wiping the inside of the ear thoroughly. Alcohol should NEVER be put into the ear. If I need to soften the wax in the ear canal, I put a drop or two of mineral oil into the ear, allowing it to set for a few minutes while massaging the base of the ear. Then I swab it out. Long-haired dogs seem to be especially susceptible to ear infections if their ears are neglected. If any odor from the ear is noted, a vet should be called because the odor is usually an indication of infection.

The Puli's eyes need special attention also, for like the eyes of all longhaired breeds, they have a tendency to matter. A drop of mineral oil rubbed under the eye will prevent matter from forming. The eyes can be cleaned with a piece of cotton dampened in warm water. I never use Boric Acid for anything on a dog, especially the eyes.

The Puli's feet also need attention. The fur between the pads needs trimming to help keep the pads tight and to keep the dog well up on his feet. I take a round ended baby scissors and trim the hair between the pads. I also trim around the feet to give the feet a neater look, trimming to the edge of the nails, but not allowing the nails to show. Untrimmed feet can make a Puli look as if he is toeing in or out. By the same token, the tendency to toe in or out may be camouflaged by careful trimming.

Before bathing I put cotton in the ears and a drop of mineral oil in the eyes. I also check the anal glands. These are scent glands located on each side of the anus. With a piece of cotton, I apply gentle pressure with the thumb on one side and the forefinger on the opposite side. The normal secretion is brown; if pus or blood is secreted, the glands require treatment by a vet. An abscess may result if neglected.
There are many shampoos on the market. I prefer a medicated one which makes the coat very manageable as well as giving it the "alive" look.

The easiest place for me to bathe my Pulis is in the bathtub in spite of clogged drains. I attach a hose and spray to the shower head to facilitate soaking and rinsing.

On a corded dog, I begin by wetting the coat thoroughly, then putting a little shampoo down the part of his back. Next, I spray a little warm water on him, proceeding to gently massage the shampoo into the skin.

In much the same manner as one washes a wool sweater, I squeeze the shampoo through the cords, beginning at one end and working systematically so that the dog is thoroughly massaged and completely saturated. I work slowly so that the medication in the shampoo has time to work on the skin.

After the corded Puli has been thoroughly rinsed, he should be allowed to drip so that the excess water drains from his cords. Then I use a large beach towel to blot the ends of the cords and even wring them as I would a wet cloth. I complete the drying process with a dryer.

On a combed dog, I begin by completely grooming the coat, making sure it is free from mats because mats tend to tighten if wet. I NEVER SCRUB BRISKLY, for this could easily cause mats. One does not bathe a Puli because the skin is dirty but because the coat is dirty. Thus, it is not necessary to rub the skin. I also dry the combed Puli with a dryer. To speed the drying process, I often fluff the coat with a towel at the same time the dog is under the dryer. However, I never brush the coat until it is thoroughly dry.

If dandruff appears on my Puli, I rub a little Menen's Baby Magic into the area. This quickly clears up the problem. However, I have never had trouble with dandruff since I have been using MBF shampoo.

If urine stains remain in the cords too long and the odor cannot be removed by bathing, I eliminate it by using a couple drops of NILODOR diluted in a pail of warm water. (NILODOR should be used sparingly.) The ends of the cords in the rear area can be easily washed, after which the odor disappears. One can also add three drops of NILODOR to a tub of water before starting the bath. I let the dog stand in the tub for a few minutes with the guilty cords immersed in the solution. Then I drain the tub and start the regular bath procedure. NILODOR now makes an aerosol spray which is effective and can be sprayed directly onto the coat.

If my little show stopper is going on a circuit of more than three shows and I know there will be no baths on the circuit, I use a PROTEIN AND CHOLESTEROL HAIR CONDITIONER to prevent what I call a "kennel odor". (Any good conditioner for bleached or treated hair will do.) The conditioner gives the dog a "fresh from the bath" scent, a very clean but not a cover up scent. After the bath while the coat is still damp, I put a small amount of conditioner in the palm of my hand and use my fingertips to massage it into the skin. The conditioner MUST be used sparingly, for too much will defeat the purpose. If allowed to remain on the coat without being thoroughly rubbed into the skin, it merely collects dirt and dust, making the coat dull. If the dog has already been bathed, I simply use a spray bottle and spray the coat lightly with warm water, and then rub the conditioner thoroughly into the skin and coat.

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I hope the reader finds these ideas helpful. As I said in the beginning of this pamphlet, these are the methods and techniques that I have found most successful. Thus, the pamphlet was written in the hope that my limited experience might help guide the novice to a clean, healthy and happy Puli.

ANNE KENNEDY