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GRIFFONS VENDEÉENS



NATURAL BUT TIDY

*Preparing your Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen for
the show ring by Linda Skerritt (Monkhams)*

Twenty years ago the Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen was still in its infancy in this country, and when Terry Thorn judged the first ever BGV Club open show in April 1983, he did so against a proposed breed Standard.

Later that year the final version came into effect. Early drafts mirrored that of France, the country of origin, where, in 1966, the FCI issued a standard for the Small Griffon Vendéen Basset.

However, the final UK Standard contained subtle changes, patently designed to help judges, many of whom at that time were relatively unfamiliar with the breed and only saw them in NSC classes.

Puzzling addition

One such addition was in description of the coat. The FCI Standard in translation read: 'Harsh, not too long, never silky or woolly. Fewer fringes than in the Grand Basset'.

This evolved into 'Not as rough textured as the Grand Basset', and in the final version, approved by the Kennel Club, comparison with the GBGV had disappeared because, at that time, there were no Grands in this country! Instead it read, 'Hounds should be shown untrimmed'.

Little did the authors know that these five words would still cause consternation 20 years later, not only in the UK but in many countries abroad.

Trimming taboo

These words are only included in the British, Canadian, American, Australian and New Zealand Standards. They are in neither the standard of the home country, nor other FCI countries.

The American Standard even expands on this by adding 'Indications of scissoring for the purposes of shaping or sculpturing are to be severely penalised'. It seems that the taboo on trimming was something the Americans wrote into their first Standard, based on the UK and Canadian ones, and that this has carried over to the antipodes.

Thus, where 'shown untrimmed' forms no part of the Standard, exhibitors are free to go on trimming, shaving, scissoring, shaping, spraying or whatever to create the look they want!

Different coat

In France, where hunting is a passion, going to this extreme is unnecessary as any visitor to a club show will immediately spot the apparent lack of coat.

If we are honest, some French PBGVs actually have a shorter, denser coat than English-bred dogs and, of course, hunting dogs have it stripped out naturally when going through thorny undergrowth or stripped manually before the start of the hunting season.

As most of our PBGVs don't hunt, the hair just carries on growing. This is why we need to groom them.

Not trimming – just grooming

Making the most of your Petit is an art form where scissors need play no part. A dog that has the end of its tail, round its ears or in front of the eyes scissored should be apparent even to the novice judge.

To groom your dog for the show ring (or indeed to keep any PBGV looking its best), the only tools you need are your fingers and thumb, possibly a fingerstall for greater grip, a comb, a stripping knife and nail clippers.

Remember, every PBGV is different, some have coats needing much attention while others require little. You know your dog better than anyone else, especially the judge who only has a couple of minutes to assess its virtues and failings.

So don't leave it up to the judge to find your PBGV's good points, show them off! Read the Standard, understand what it says then look at your dog and see how you can achieve the best way of presenting him.

Ideally, take time to groom your dog a week before a show, giving the coat time to grow a touch to maintain that rough look. Bath him perhaps three days before the



Natural but tidy — Gimlet on look-out.

photo courtesy Nymann and Busk (www.chouan.dk)

show to give time for the harshness to return after shampooing.

Groomed to perfection

Probably the most important part of a PBGV, a good head is a bonus. A poorly groomed one can alter the appearance to make it look at best like a Dandie Dinmont, at worst like a Bichon!

Is there excessive hair on the side of the backskull, making it look wide? Pulling this out will reveal a skull that is 'not too wide, oval in shape when viewed from the front'.

Similarly, thinning out the hair above the ears will show that they are not set above the eye-line.

No scissors, please

Don't leave it to the judge to find out the length of your dog's ears in comparison with the length of muzzle. If you remove excess fringing, the judge will see clearly that they reach the end of the nose and not beyond.

Never scissor around the edge of the ear; remove the hair gently by hand or use a stripping knife, pulling the blade towards you. If you do the same underneath the ears, you will find that any heaviness at the end of the earflaps will gradually disappear to leave a 'supple, narrow and fine' appearance.

The leathers will also fall naturally along the side of the head 'folding inwards'. Remember to keep the ears clean and pluck out excess hair from the ear canals.

Dark eyes, white teeth

Is the hair covering your Petit's eyes to the extent that the judge is unable to see whether they are 'large, dark, showing no white'? Pull gently the individual hairs of the fringing of the eyebrows and, as it slowly becomes less, you achieve the Standard's 'surmounted by long eye-brows standing forward but not to obscure eyes'.

Finally, clean the teeth — there is nothing worse than a dog with yellow teeth.

Front cover

Next the front — has your PBGV a good one? If so take the coat a little shorter over the legs, leaving a clean but still rough look which shows 'straight, well boned forelegs' and tight elbows 'close to the body'.

Also take some coat from the forechest to

show this to advantage, accentuating the depth and 'prominent sternum'.

Attention to these areas will also accentuate a 'long, strong neck, with no throatiness' and show that the dog is not short on the leg.

If the front is a weak point, leave more coat, though remove some from above the front legs to show that the legs are well under the body.

Show off the hindquarters

As to the hind legs, gently removing excess hair can make the difference between your dog looking cow or sickle hocked and showing quarters which are 'strong, muscular, with good bend of stifle'. Less-coat will show width at the rear, 'short, well angulated hocks' and feet facing forwards.

By taking away some hair under the tail you will shorten up the body and show off the angulation.

Tidy feet

Use a stripping knife to pull out the hair round the edges of the feet to keep them tidy but natural looking.

Then — the only time you can use scissors — remove excess hair from between the pads under the foot.

Keep nails short; long ones spoil the look of the foot and may lead to splaying, as well as indicating to the judge either bad feet or poor conditioning if the dog also lacks muscle.

Strip excess hair from the end of the tail, showing clearly that it is of 'medium length'. Again, no scissoring — it shows!



Over zealous trimming makes this PBGV look completely atypical.

photo from Kitty Steidel's book on the breed published 1987

Stress qualities, hide faults

Working over the entire body, with practice you will become skilled at highlighting the features of your dog that clearly meet the Standard.

You will even learn how to play down your dog's not-so-strong points or where coat markings might give the appearance of a fault that is not there, for example out at elbow, short-necked, poor topline or low-set tail.

You spend a lot of money going to a show,

so give yourself a better chance by spending time on your dog's coat beforehand.

As long as we continue to see dogs in the ring looking so different, judges will remain confused about what is right and what is wrong.

Take away those with little attention paid to over-full coats, hair obscuring eyes, long ear fringing and untidy feet, others with patently scissored coats, and those so sleek that they resemble other breeds, and you have the happy medium — a well-presented PBGV.

This is one which has been groomed skil-



Left: Half and half — Grace demonstrates one groomed side and one completely natural. photo Gavin Robertson

Below left: One natural and one correctly groomed hindleg.

photo Gavin Robertson



fully to perfection, playing down its poor points and enhancing the good ones. It will look natural, at its best and fill the judge's eye the moment it steps into the ring. Above all, it will be displaying the 'rustic charm' that the breed is known for. ■