

Dog Grooming Secrets

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Customers often ask about the beautiful pets featured in our catalogs and website. Most, in fact, are companions of our staff - the dedicated animal lovers helping you choose the right health essentials for your pet.

One Collie you may recognize from past covers is Ch. Southland's Bowen Island, a handsome sable who earned the prestigious title of "Best of Breed" at the 2002 National with the help of pro handler Matt Stelter. We invite you to a behind-the-scenes look at Matt's process for an award-winning grooming routine.

What's the secret behind a show quality grooming routine? It has taken pro handler Matt Stelter years to perfect his technique, patiently learning the home grooming skills he needs to guarantee his Collies catch the judge's eye in the show ring every time. Being a dog handler is more than walking around the ring with a gorgeous canine at the other end of the leash, and maintaining a spectacular show coat takes more than a quick brush-down 10 minutes before the spotlight hits. In fact, it can require a time commitment of 4 to 5 hours per dog.

Whether you're an aspiring show handler or a dog lover who wants to bring out the best in your undiscovered champion, a regular grooming schedule will make your best friend shine. Matt uses a specific grooming system, including using the right products, tools, and technique. Please see our grooming steps below.

And while you may not be readying your dog for the show ring, you do want your dog to look the best he can. A modification of Matt's technique may be just what you need. A good grooming system is imperative, and with the right tools and know how, helping your "Best of Breed's" coat shine can be rewarding for both you and your proud pet.

1. **The Brush Out** - Before bathing your dog, removing mats and tangles is essential. Mats and tangles that get wet tighten and become more difficult to remove. Matt uses a [Dematting Rake](#) for large mats, [medium/coarse comb](#) for tangles and small mats, and a [Large Wire Pin Brush](#) for the body and a [Slicker Brush](#) for the feet, head, ears, and lower legs. He works line by line to remove mats, tangles, or loose undercoat. At this point Matt also makes sure that the dog's [ears are clean](#) and that the [teeth are scaled clean](#) of any tartar buildup.

2. **Bathing** - "Whenever I wash my dogs I always have all equipment at the ready," Matt cautions, "this means shampoo, conditioner, rinsing hose, and towels."

Matt uses a [Scrub-A-Dub Tub](#), a walk-in tub with a convenient hose and showerhead, to wash and rinse his dogs. After the dog is shampooed and conditioned (if necessary), Matt rinses the residue out until the water runs clear. See Matt's tip on the best way to apply shampoo to your dog. Incidentally, Matt worked closely with Drs. Foster & Smith to help perfect the recent reformulation of our [Premier System® Shampoo and Conditioner](#). He tried various test formulations on his show dogs until the results were nothing but show quality. Now it's the only shampoo he uses for his fine show dogs. After bathing, he towels the dog off lightly before beginning the next step, which takes the dog from the tub to the grooming table.

Matt's Tip:

"When I wash my Collies, I fill a rinsed-out dishwashing liquid bottle with about two inches of shampoo, then fill it to the top with warm water and shake to mix. This allows me to get the shampoo down to my Collies' skin through their thick double coats, thus making a more effective cleaning process while saving me time."

3. **Blow-dry completely** - "If you don't blow dry every inch of the dog's skin and coat, skin irritation may result. The damp place itches, the dog scratches, and the next thing you know, you have a nasty hot spot." Matt uses the powerful [Metro Air Force Quick Draw Pet Dryer](#). He uses this dryer because it's strong enough to blow the water right out of the coat from the inside out, quickly enough to avoid any remaining damp spots.
4. **Pedicure** - Matt first [trims the nails](#) with a [Millers-Forge Dog Nail Trimmer](#). Nails soften after a dog is bathed and are easier to clip. "I can't get the correct groomed look for the feet until the nails are trimmed," he says. Also, a good pair of scissors is a must. Matt trims the feet and the lower legs first, since this is the first place to pick up dirt if the dog must be let down from the table for some reason. Cutting dirty hair will quickly dull a pair of scissors.

5. **Head Trim** - "This is an important skill that has taken me many years to learn," Matt says. "I trim the whiskers, the jawline, the underjaw, the back skull, and the ears." If a Rough Collie were not trimmed, his hair would be so long that it would appear unkempt and be prone to matting.
6. **Body Sculpt** - "I want to stress most of all: The goal for the head trim and body sculpt is to make the dog look as natural as possible, as if he were not even touched by a pair of scissors. Create a well-balanced body while keeping as close to the breed standard as possible." At this point, if he sees too much undercoat, Matt uses thinning shears and a [Matbreaker](#) because it will remove the undercoat without affecting the outer coat.
7. **Line brush and final body brush** - This is essentially the final touch before the dog goes into the show ring. "I keep a spray bottle with water and a small amount of [Premier System® Conditioner](#) by the grooming table. A little dampness in the coat at this point gives the illusion of fullness, which is what we want in a Collie's coat." Every hair on the body is brushed. Again, use the pin brush on the body and the slicker brush on the legs, ears, head, and feet.
8. **Final Touches** - At this point, Matt takes a final look at the dog to make sure he hasn't missed anything. Then comes the challenge of getting the dog's attitude ready for the ring!