

## *Grooming the English Springer Spaniel - Trimming for the Show Ring* *by Steve Dainard*

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The articles were written by renowned breeder, owner, handler, judge Steve Dainard. Steve has been involved in the dog world since he was a young boy showing his mother's English Springer Spaniels. He expertly guided A/C Ch. Serenade's Family Tradition to Top Dog All Breeds in Canada in 1994. Since then he has attained multiple Best in Shows and Best in Specialty shows with many different English Springer Spaniels in both the United States and Canada. He and his wife, Kelly, breed English Springer Spaniels under the kennel prefix Kas.

Steve is known and respected for his excellent grooming techniques and his superb ring presentation. Steve has always been willing to share his expertise, both grooming and handling, with others. The springer world is richer for his presence. As he is now a judge, he only handles dogs he owns or co-owns.

### *Trimming for the Show Ring*

The most important concept to remember when grooming is to try and make it look natural and not barbered. Re-read your standard to get a mental picture of the effect you will be trying to create. The two areas I will discuss this issue are clipper work and hand stripping.

#### *Clipping*

Use a #10 blade for your clipper work approximately 4 to 5 days before your first show. If you have a dog with a little wider head you can use a #15 blade to get a closer look. I like to start with the top of the ear leather. Use the flap on the front part of the leather as a guide for your bottom clipper parameter. Go against the grain cleaning all of the hair on the outer and inner portion of the ear. Remember to not let your clipper line go below the bottom portion of the ear flap.





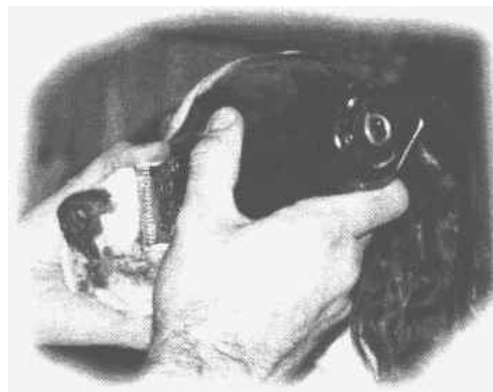
Continue against the grain to where the ear meets the skull. At this point you will want to go with the grain of the hair from the outer portion of the skull down the ear leather blending the variance in hair length. Do the same for the sides of the skull. Blend the hair by going with the grain in a downward motion into the cheek area.

Continue cleaning out the area under the neck by going against the grain in a 'U' shape. The top of each point of your 'U' will be located behind each ear where the ear meets the side of the head. The bottom of your 'U' will be approximately 2 to 3 fingers above the breastbone. Everything inside the 'U' will be clipped against the grain. Continue against the grain right up to the underside of the muzzle.



Wrap the ear around the other side of the head and hold it with your non-clipper holding hand. Blend the side of the neck into the cheek area. Clean out the cheek area by going in a downward motion on a line starting at the corner of the eye. You won't be going against the grain in this area. You will be taking the hair off at a 90 degree angle. This gives the cheek area a little softer look than cutting it against the grain. But if you have a dog with thick cheeks then go against the grain to give a tighter look. Use the same technique for the chisel area. It grows in better and looks more natural by show day.

Go against the grain on the sides and top of the muzzle making sure to get all the whiskers. Pay special attention to blending in this area. With the hair being shorter, inconsistencies in your clipper pressure and angle will result in a choppy uneven look. Go lightly with the grain to blend the stop area. Don't gouge this area. You can even use your thinning shears to give a softer look.



Clean out the hair along the break of the mouth. Lift up the sides of the flew and remove all hair around the sides of the mouth. This can be a really nasty area if you don't keep the hair short and tidy. With a lack of air circulation, food and water builds up and creates some awful odors.

Now for the most problematic area. The top of the skull. I choose to blend the sides of the top skull with the clippers going with the grain. As for the center of this area, use your stripping knife and thinning shears to give a more natural softer look. By going against the grain with the clippers you create a much harsher appearance.



### Stripping

Now on to the greatest challenge in your grooming careers. Stripping! This is the single most commonly misunderstood concept you will ever have to understand. It seems that everyone is deathly afraid of using a stripping knife. This isn't the same type of stripping that Terrier people do. You're not going to rip the hair down to the skin and have it grow back in the same manner. Instead, you are going to use your stripping knife to drag for undercoat. Your ultimate goal will be to leave as much of the glossy, lustrous, luxurious topcoat as possible and minimize the amount of undercoat. You don't want to get rid of all of the undercoat because our standard calls for both types of coat to be evident. By minimizing the amount of undercoat, you will leave a flatter jacket. The undercoat is the duller, fluffier coat which adds more fullness to the jacket. The bottom line is you should be dragging the jacket of your dog for undercoat.



I must own four or five different sets of knives that range from fine to coarse. The knife I use most frequently is the coarse knife. Some great knives to purchase when you are just learning are the Mars brand knives. They are slightly more expensive than the other knives like the Classic but it is my observation that the Classic knife tends to cut the topcoat more, especially if you are inexperienced or apprehensive about using a stripping knife.

If you are working on a dog that hasn't been stripped in some time, you will want to start off by using your coarse knife like a comb to remove as much undercoat as possible. The key is to make sure the stripping knife is flat or parallel to the body. The greater the angle increase of the knife to skin, the more topcoat you will cut. This is an effective technique in shortening the length of the top coat in areas where a shorter hair length is desirable. For now we will concentrate on removing the undercoat.



Here are a few rules to follow regardless of where you are stripping on the body:

- Make sure to keep your wrist stabilized. Don't rotate your wrist as you pull with the knife. This will create a carving motion and cut the coat.
- Make sure to always pull in the direction you want the coat to grow.
- Pull in long motions, not short choppy movements.
- Go over one area and then move to the area beside it. Go over a panel of hair and then return to your starting point to repeat the same process.



- Never concentrate on one area for too long because you will create a hole.
- Use your thumb as a tensor or buffer between your knife and the hair. This will remove the hair easier.
- Use your other hand to pull on the skin above the stripping area so you will create tension on the strip area.

Follow the natural contours of the body. You can train the hair to grow in the direction you are pulling. When using your knife to strip into long hair areas, always use a coarse knife so you will leave more desirable hair and the transition between long and short hair will look natural.



For areas where the body hair progresses into longer furnishings, use your coarse stripping knife to blend the transition in hair length. If you have furnishings that are bulky and cumbersome, use your stripping knife like a comb and get to the root or base of the hair and comb out some furnishing. A couple of pulls will leave the hair lying flatter to the body and will be far more attractive.

### *The Pattern*

This illustration shows the various directions in which you should be stripping/clipping your English Springer Spaniel's body coat. If you strip your dog once a week, your work will be extremely minimal when it comes to show time.

