

# GROOMING THE IRISH WATER SPANIEL



By *Michell Evans*  
and *Melissa McMunn*



COMPLETED GROOM

The breed standard states that Irish Water Spaniels are “a smart, upstanding, strongly built, moderate gundog bred for all types of shooting, especially for water-fowling. Great intelligence is combined with rugged endurance and a bold, dashing eagerness of temperament. Distinguishing characteristics are a topknot of long, loose curls and a body covered with a dense, crisply curled, liver-colored coat contrasted by a smooth face and a smooth ‘rat’ tail.”

Grooming this breed starts with a clean straight coat. To achieve this, bathe the dog, blow out most of the water with a forced air dryer and then heat straighten it with a brush and a relatively hot, but not forced, air dryer. The pads and sanitary areas should be clipped and the nails trimmed.

Use a #10 or #7 blade to clip the cheeks and throat in the same pattern as a Poodle except for one very important characteristic, the beard, which is sometimes called a goatee. The hair on the throat and muzzle forms a natural pattern making it easy for you to follow. The

natural pattern forms more of a U shape than a V shape. The chin and muzzle hair will already be short, but should be neatened (*Picture #1*).



With the dog standing in a stacked position and with the muzzle parallel to the table, run your #7 blade up the larynx until it comes to rest just above the Adam's apple. It is important that when the dog is in a stacked position, the goatee is hanging from the jaw line and not protruding forward from the throat. Make sure that the goatee does not come forward from the corner of the mouth and it should not be longer than the ears. Leaving the goatee more forward under the jaw line will

shorten and broaden the muzzle and taking it farther back will create a longer leaner muzzle.

Use your #10 blade to clip the entire tail with the grain of the hair, but leave two to three inches of coat on the top of the tail at its base. This coat will become part of your top line (*Picture #2*).

In order to make this groom simple, I propose blocking in your body coat with attachment blades the first time you groom the dog. After that, I hope you will have the confidence to make your own judgments as to what lengths, in what areas, will best make your Irish Water Spaniel fit the AKC standard.



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Clip the area from about two inches behind the occiput to about the middle of the top line, leaving hair approximately two inches in length. The neck should appear long, arching, strong and muscular. The shoulder should appear moderately laid back. Clip the rest of the top line, including the croup, leaving the hair approximately one inch in length. Leave the area just in front of the tail and the coat at the base of the tail to be rounded with scissors.

The back should appear to be broad with a rounded croup. Even though it is acceptable for the Irish Water Spaniel to be slightly higher in the rear, it is more appealing to the eye to make the top line level. Clip the shoulder and area outside of the shoulder points to about an inch in length, leaving an apron and showing the return of the upper arm. The shoulder should appear moderately laid back and powerful, but not heavy. The forechest should appear to be moderate.

Clip the ribs leaving the hair about two inches in length. Leave a slight skirt by falling away from the body with your clippers when the ribs turn under. The ribs should ap-



PICTURE #3

pear to have a barrel shape. Clip the thighs about two to three inches in length, leaving enough coat to create parallel lines when viewed from the rear. The hips are to appear wide with muscular, well developed thighs. Clip the area from the point of rump to the deepest part of the rear angulation leaving that area of hair two inches in length. The dog should appear to have moderate rear angulation with good width through the thigh (Picture #3).

Now that you have this basic blocking accomplished, scissor all of these parts together. Trim the brisket coat to appear to extend to the elbow. Continue your underline, keeping it almost level. The loin should appear short, wide and muscular without a tucked up appearance. Round the ribs and shape the apron.

The forechest should appear to be moderate and the ribs should appear well sprung. Trim the feet to appear large and round and create cylinders with the front legs. Trim the rear legs to balance with the front. Hocks should appear to be set low.

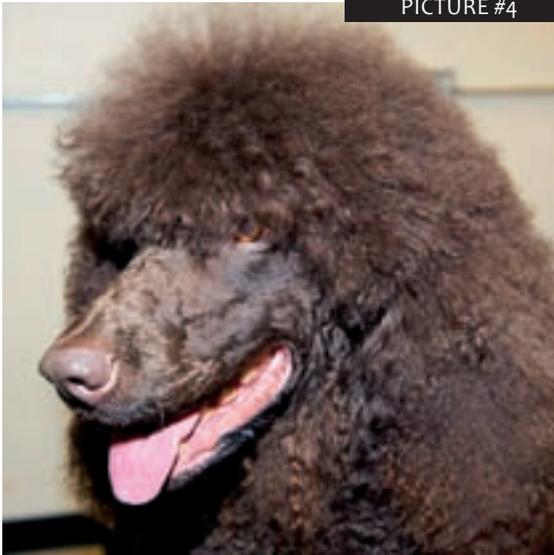
As well as the rat tail, the topknot of the Irish Water Spaniel is an essential characteristic of the breed (Picture #4). The topknot should not be trimmed in an exaggerated or excessive manner and should obstruct the eyes. Comb the topknot forward and trim the bangs so that they lightly graze the muzzle. You can use thinning shears to thin the coat over the eyes so the dog can see a little better (Picture #5).

From the portrait view, the topknot is trimmed to blend with the ear. There is no separation between the topknot and ear as with a Poodle. The area of the topknot over the occiput and on the top skull is used to blend into your long arching neck and should give a domed appearance. The area above the cheek in front of the ear is trimmed to blend with the ear, so that it gives the impression of a softly drawn curtain. The ears are to frame the face and

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PICTURE #4



PICTURE #6



are layered. The ears are never to be longer than the breast bone and never all one length.

The final step in creating the style of the Irish Water Spaniel is to wet the coat to bring back the curl. Spray the body coat with a bottle of water and pat it with your hand. Do not wet the legs. They should be left fluffy. Wet the topknot and ears just enough to style them, but not enough to flatten them. Blot the coat with a towel to remove excess water and allow to dry naturally (Picture #6).

Irish Water Spaniels are not a common breed to turn up in grooming shops. Tuck

this article away and when you get the call you will be ready. Happy Grooming.

*Author: Michell Evans ICMG, NCMG, Owner of The Grooming Tutor LLC, Michell is a multiple Best in Show and Best All Around winner. She has received the Liz Paul Best Scissored Poodle award. She was ranked 3rd in 2010. She will be traveling to Belgium in 2011 to compete for the United States. She has groomed and/or handled 24 different breeds for AKC including Irish Water Spaniels. She works very hard to bring the most sensible and current information to you through her tutoring business. For more information please visit [www.groomingtutor.com](http://www.groomingtutor.com).*



PICTURE #5

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