

Grooming Lagotto Romagnolo

by Louise Ferguson

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF MY INTEREST AND EXPERIENCE WITH LAGOTTO!

After enjoying several years of grooming my own Lagotto, I decided to take a 6 week full time grooming course followed by a 10 week City & Guilds course. I was trained to groom all breeds. I set up my grooming business in 2013 and have groomed many Lagotto and other breeds since then. Managing the Lagotto coat causes much concern for many people because there is so little information about it and varying views and methods used. Many people resort to taking their dogs to the local groomer, who probably has little or no experience of the breed, and they come out looking like Labradoodles! My training with all breeds has helped me to understand the Lagotto coat for myself so I hope the methods I'm about to share with you will help you and give you the confidence to have a go at grooming your own dogs.

Above all DO NOT WORRY, if you make a mistake the coat will grow again! It is a case of trial and error and practice makes perfect! Feel free to call me if you have any concerns or question.

GOOD LUCK!!

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EQUIPMENT

BASIC EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- A **Grooming Table** with an **H bar**. It is almost impossible to groom a dog efficiently without the use of a grooming table. The comfort of the groomer is important because it can take time to do a complete groom so it is important for the dog to be at a comfortable working height. The security of both dog and groomer must be considered, using sharp equipment around a boisterous, resistant dog is a risky business for both parties. A grooming table will enable you to secure the dog to the H bar using a neck strap and a belly strap.

NEVER LEAVE YOUR DOG UNATTENDED WHILST ON THE GROOMING TABLE

- **Nooses and Belly Strap**. Neck straps or "Nooses" comes in various materials but my preference is for webbing. Make sure you have it tight enough that the dog cannot slip it over its head but fitting comfortable around the neck. The best belly straps come with rings attached to the strap which enable you to loosen or tighten it when needed. For Lagotto go for the medium size for each.

Once your dog is secure you'll be able to groom much more efficiently with two free hands and you won't need a second person to pin the dog down! Just a word of warning on that front, if you try to forcibly hold a dog down to groom it, it will panic and resist. Also DO NOT treat your dog when it starts to play up - you will be rewarding it for its behaviour, not distracting it. If you produce food the dogs will become excitable and reactive. Fine to give treats after the groom, NEVER during it! Lagotto have to get used to being groomed, it is a lifelong sentence for them. Ignore bad behaviour but KEEP GOING REGARDLESS! If they learn that by playing up you stop then that is how they will control the situation, be kind but firm.

- **Nail Clippers, Metal Comb, and a Pin Brush**
- **Ear Plucking Powder**
- **Large straight professional standard Scissors**. There are many makes to choose from, it is best to try them all to see what suits your hand size and budget.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED FOR A CLIP OFF, IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE:

- **Electric Clippers**
- **Clipper Blades**: choose a selection of the following for example 10, 7F and a 4#:

10# (1.8 mm) For sanitary areas and can be used with extension combs although these are not really suited to the dense Lagotto coat unless it is free of matting. The 10 blade can be used instead of the 9# if the coat is felted to the skin

9# (2mm) This blade is effective when removing the heavily matted coat. It is a coarse blade so use with caution in areas where the skin is delicate ie under arms, groin, and neck

7F# (3.2mm)

5# (6mm)

4# This is my preferred length of blade for clipping a coat that is in good condition, it leaves 9.5 mm of coat. When preparing for a show, a clip using this blade 10- 12 weeks before the show should give you just enough coat to work with leading up to the show day

Clipper blades tend to get very hot in a short space of time, particularly the finer blades, so I tend to have two of each size to hand so that I can swap to a cool blade.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT:

- **Rechargeable Cordless Clippers** e.g. Wahl Arco Trimmer. These are much quieter than electric clippers so excellent for nervous dogs or puppies. They have adjustable blade lengths and clip on extension combs are available for the longer clip. They are not as durable as the electric clippers so don't drop them but are useful none the less for doing legs, feet, between pads, groin, under arms, inside ear leather
- **Double sided Thinning Scissors, Single sided Blenders and/or Chunkers**
- **Small Bull Nose Scissors** for trimming between pads

SUPPLIERS OF GROOMING EQUIPMENT:

Grooming supplies are available online or at some Shows from grooming suppliers such as:

www.groomers-online.com

www.christiesdirect.com

Some items can be bought from Amazon and other non-specialist companies.

PRE-GROOM

- **Nails:** Lagotto have long nails which help them scramble through undergrowth and enable them to dig efficiently. The "quick" or the soft tissue inside the toe nail grows further down the nail than in most other breeds. The frequency of trimming depends on the amount you exercise your dog and on what sort of terrain. Lift the foot and hold it as you would a horse's hoof, you'll see a groove in each nail, do not cut any further back than this. Cut the nail at the same angle as the flat of the foot so that, when you place it back down, the end nail is parallel to the ground.



- **Ears:** Lagotto grow profuse quantities of hair in their ears to prevent water entering the ear canal when they are swimming. A build-up of this hair can cause problems with canker and eventually infection so it is important to pluck this hair out regularly. When your Lagotto arrives as a small puppy it is a good idea to get him familiar with you putting your fingers in his ears even if you just give a little tug on the hair and pull out tiny quantities at first. The ear plucking powder helps you to get a good grip on the hair.

- **Sanitary and surrounding areas:** Using either the Arco trimmer on the shortest setting or the electric clippers with 10#, take hold of the hind leg AND the tail in one hand and lift it so that you can get to the groin area. Using a scooping action with the clipper into the groin and then take the fine hairs from the inside of the thigh. Make no more than 3 strokes in one area otherwise the skin can become sore. With great care clip around the delicate areas between the legs taking care not to point to clippers into the genitals. Repeat on the other side. Clip the hair under each forearm but, again, be careful not to catch the skin. Clip the hair on the inside of each ear leather so that the ear rests nicely against the side of the head. Carefully remove any dirty clumps away from the anal area without pointing the clipper blades into the anus.

TYPES OF COAT

Before I go into grooming methods I just want to talk a bit about the diversity in coats you will come across in this breed. The coat should be a double coat with a thick under coat designed to protect the skin of the Lagotto in water and a coarse, almost wiry, guard hair. I have included a description of the ideal coat found in the KC and the FCI breed standards in the scissoring for showing section. The texture of the coat varies according to colour, the brown coat forms a looser more open curl whereas the paler coats are much woollier in texture with tighter curls. Within these variations you will find a difference in quality, some dogs lack the desirable dense undercoat and for that they are likely to be penalised in the show ring.

CLIPPING THE COAT OFF

The Lagotto coat benefits from being clipped off periodically. Traditionally the recommendation is to leave the coat completely then clip back to the skin twice a year. For working dogs this works well but many people like to leave some coat on but this requires time and effort or regular every 8-10 week trips to the groomer!

It is easier to clip a clean dog and less wear and tear on your equipment. Follow the instructions above for bathing and clipping the sanitary areas. The length of blade you are going to use will be based on the condition of the coat. You may be able to use a 4# if the dog isn't matted to the skin but, at the end of the day, your clipper blades will decide for you because the length is determined by the space between the skin and any felting in the coat.

I begin by clipping the back of the neck, running the clipper in the direction of the growth of the coat. As with the scissoring method, allow the longer hair on the head to taper out a couple of inches below the occiput. Where ever possible pull the skin taught with your other hand to prevent the blade catching the skin. Do not go over the same area repeatedly because you will cause clipper burn and abrasion to the delicate skin. Be particularly aware of this in the neck and throat area. Lift the head up when doing the neck and chest so the skin will be stretched tight. When doing the rib cage put your other hand on the top of the back and roll the skin away from you. Run the clipper down around the rib cage towards the belly. You can run the clipper in reverse along the underside to form a nice crisp finish.

Clip as much of the outside of the hind leg as you can get to then lift the leg by placing the hand in the inside curve of the hock. Run the clipper UP the back of the pastern in reverse. Clip the inside of the leg in reverse as well whilst the leg is lifted. If it is easier you can also reach over and clip the inside of the other hind leg whilst you have this leg raised. Clip down the front and outside of the leg and off the end of the foot.

For the tail hold the tip as you would to scissor but this time clip towards you, going with the growth of the coat.

Again, the front legs will be the most difficult part to clip because the dog is likely to resist. I often resort to using the quiet Arco cordless trimmer for this. Do what you can whilst the foot is on the ground then lift the foot off the ground, stretch it forward and run up the inside of the leg in reverse, taking care not to catch the soft skin under the arms. Hold the foot flat in your hand and run the clipper down the outer sides of the leg and off the end of the foot.

It is easier to finish the feet with the bull nosed scissors. Trim between the pads, around the foot and between the toes. Take great care when doing this because the lagotto, being a water dog, has webbed feet! The best way to do it is to separate the toes and pull the hair up with finger and thumb then point the scissors towards the toes and trim off the excess hair. It is worth taking the time to do this because not only will the feet look so much neater it will prevent the accumulation of dirt and grit between the toes and pads. The head should be scissored following the same guide lines as outlined in the show scissor section but I generally take it shorter than the show head.

If, for whatever reason, you want or need to clip the head short then use the same blade as you have used on the body. Take great care particularly around the eyes, lips and ears because the dog is likely to resist. Follow the direction of the growth of the coat otherwise you'll have patches that are much shorter.

SCISSORING FOR SHOWING

Keeping a Lagotto in full, show length coat is quite a commitment. Regular grooming is the only way to keep it in a manageable condition. Timing the growth of the coat in the lead up to a show takes careful thought. In general, to grow sufficient coat for the show ring from a short clip off takes a good 3 months although some coats can grow more slowly. Once the coat gets to 2 cms it should be combed through at least every 2 - 3 weeks particularly in the areas most likely to felt such as the collar areas, under the ears and the legs. This is purely to break up any mats that may be forming, however care should be taken not to remove too much undercoat. Young dogs need combing more frequently because from 7 months onwards puppies will begin to develop their adult coat. Unless you regularly comb right down to the skin with a metal comb to remove the loose wool like puppy coat you will end up with a matted mess. If you are not planning to show your Lagotto then at this age it is a good idea to keep the coat relatively short otherwise the new coat combines with the loose puppy coat to form thick felted clumps against the skin. As I mentioned before, the areas that are most prone to felting are under the ears, chin, neck, arm pits, legs and groin. Ideally a puppy should be clipped back to the skin at 3 months to encourage a good strong coat. If you plan to show your puppy the coat should have grown back sufficiently to show at 6 months.

PREPARATION:

Depending on the condition of the coat I will approach the preparation in several ways:

- If the coat is **relatively clean, in reasonable condition and a comb passes through easily** you can scissor prior to bathing or you could bath the day before and leave to dry naturally.
- By bathing and fluff drying a **thick dense coat** this enables you to achieve a more even finish. **BUT** be sure to do this **AT LEAST** a week before a show because thick dense coats take longer to regain their curl. This method wouldn't work as well on a coat that lacks undercoat because it would be too thin and fluffy to work with.
- A **dirty, felted coat** can be saved by bathing before scissoring using the following Bathing method below.

BATHING:

Bath your Lagotto at least a week before a show because otherwise their coat will be too soft and fluffy. It is a challenge to keep them clean all that time because, as we all know, they do love the muddiest puddles! If you need to wash them close to a show use a mild shampoo and rinse them in cold water because this encourages the curl.

For very matted, dirty dogs use a shampoo and conditioner. Whilst covered in conditioner you can make a start on combing the coat through. If the coat is very matted you can use a high velocity blaster, whilst the conditioner is in the coat, to push the mats away from the skin. Rinse the coat thoroughly and allow to dry completely. Roughly brush the coat with the pin brush or a large, coarse slicker brush to break it up before going through it with the metal comb. The Lagotto skin is surprisingly delicate under that thick, protective coat so, for the comfort of the dog, hold the coat at the base with finger and thumb when teasing any mats out. Lumps that you cannot break up then cut beneath them with the thinning scissors (no more than 3 times because you will remove the entire coat) before easing the mat apart with the metal comb.

SCISSORING THE COAT:



This illustration shows a newly combed and scissored dog, you'll notice the curl definition has been lost but once the coat has been dampened the curl will return.



This dog fits the breed standard in terms of presentation. There is no exaggeration to the outline, the curl is evident in the coat and it is clean yet rustic and natural looking.

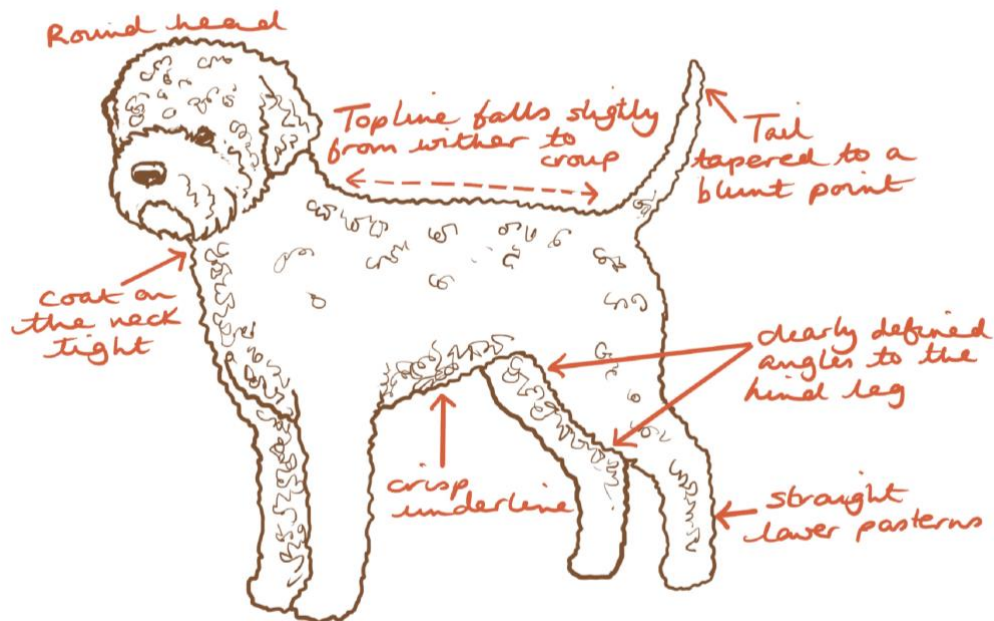
The KC breed standard for Lagotto Romagnolo describes the coat as follows:

Woolly and waterproof, rather rough on the surface forming very thick, ring shaped curls, with visible, waterproof undercoat. Curls evenly distributed all over the body except on the head where the curls are less tight, forming well-furnished eyebrows, whiskers and beard. Cheeks covered with hair. On the ears, curls tend to be open but very wavy. The inner ear flap is covered with hair. Tail covered with woolly, bristly hair. The coat should evenly follow the line of the dog. It may be longer on the head but not obscure the eyes.

The FCI add the following to their breed standard:

The area around the genitals and anus should be clipped short. The coat must not be formed and brushed up in the fashion of the Poodles and Bichon Frise breeds or clipped short preventing it from curling or assessment of texture. The correct clip is unpretentious and contributes to accentuating the natural, rustic look typical of the breed.

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO ACHIEVING THE DESIRED FINISH



As with a pet groom, I begin by tidying the sanitary areas (see the PRE-GROOM section). The ideal length of coat for the show ring is 3-4 cm so you'll need to consider the amount you remove according to the date of the next show. I like to comb through the coat and scissor a dog at least a week before the show to allow the coat plenty of time to settle and form curls again. Either the day before or on the day of the show I do a final trim but I do NOT touch the coat with a comb or a brush because you do not want to break up the curl.

It is a good idea to start at the tail end to allow the dog to settle before doing the trickier areas like the head and the front legs. Lift the coat with the metal comb as you go and scissor the coat to follow the contours of the body. I begin by shaping the croup area to create a nice neat setting for the tail. The tail hair needs to be fairly short and tapered from the base to a nice neat, blunt tip. Hold the tip of the tail in your fingers and comb the hair away from you towards the base then shape it with your scissors. If you don't feel confident with scissoring the tail you can clip it using a #4. You'll need to tidy the tip of the tail with your scissors though.

Using your straight scissors create a nice straight topline that slopes down slightly from wither to croup as is demonstrated in the illustration. Provided there is enough coat, to a certain extent one can improve the dog's natural topline, however beware not to exaggerate the angle too much, have a look at the presentation of the foreign dogs; some of them have unnaturally sloping toplines!

Shape the coat around rib cage and then create a nice crisp underline before scissoring around the flank area and the thighs. Take care not to cut the flap of skin above the stifle, I tend to hold this in my finger and thumb and stretch it towards me so that the skin is taught, this enables you to follow the curve of the skin to give a neat finish. You could use your clippers under the belly on a long blade, this method will give a nice neat outline and can appear to remove pounds from your dog's waist line! I always use this method on a bitch that has had puppies so that I don't run the risk of snipping enlarged nipples with my scissors!

To enhance the angulation of the leg, define the angle of the stifle then follow the line of the lower thigh as it sweeps down to the inside of the hock. Scissor the hair on the rear pastern straight down to create the right angle to the ground. Stand behind the dog, lift the tail then tidy the inside the back legs by combing the coat up and remove any uneven ends. You can lift the leg closest to you then work on the inside of the opposite leg if you find it easier. To create a nice tidy lower leg and foot lift the leg then pull it forward so that the foot is held at the same angle as the lower leg then trim the coat back neatly. Form a circle with your fore finger and thumb around the foot and run it down towards the nails, pulling the hair with you as you go, any excess hair beneath the foot needs to come off. Place the foot down again and trim around it level with the ground.

Go back to the topline and work down over the shoulders and forward to the neck and chest. The length of hair on the head blends into the shorter hair on the back of the neck approximately a third of the way down the neck from the occiput. This line continues down around the neck to throat where the coat should be slightly shorter and tighter to the body. Depending on the quality of the forechest you can enhance it by leaving a little extra length but be warned Judges aren't easily fooled!

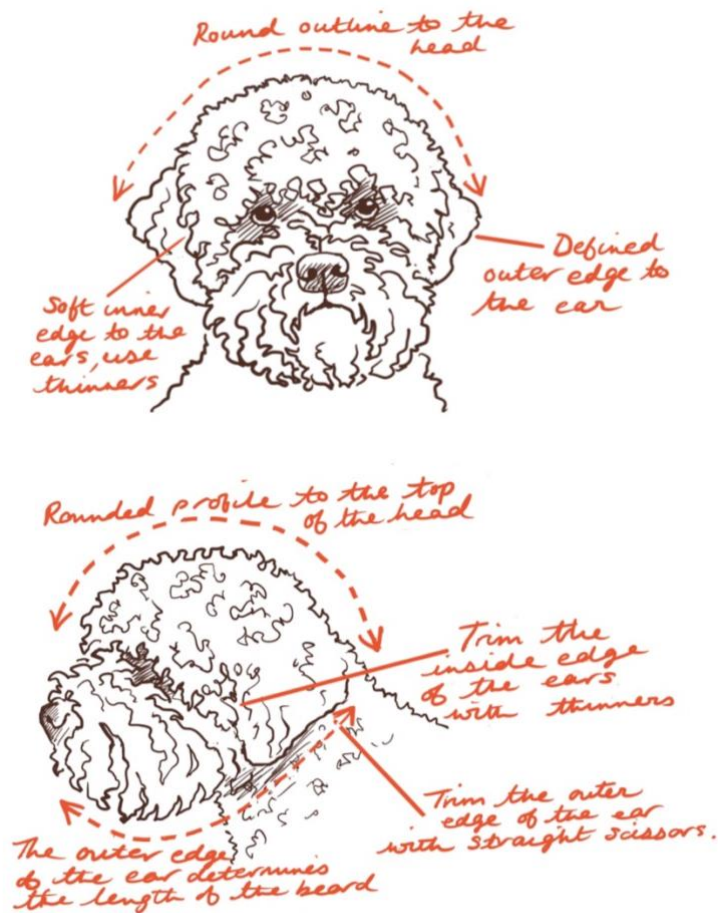
Very few dogs, of any breed, tolerate having their front legs done. Start by combing the coat back towards the body, lift the foot and pull the leg forward. Cut a nice straight outline down the back, trim the inside and the front of the leg and foot whilst the leg is pulled forward. Place the foot down again and trim the outside of the leg. In a similar way to the back leg shape the foot by lifting the leg and running finger and thumb down and removing excess coat.

THE HEAD:



The Lagotto head should appear round and have a soft, natural, appearance. The loose curls on the top of the skull gently blend into those on the ear. Begin by taking the outside edge of the ear leather between finger and thumb and cut the excess hair back to the edge of the ear. Ideally trim the edge closest to the side of the face with thinning scissors rather than straight so that the ear blends nicely into the side of the face. Take great care to always hold the edge of the ear leather in your fingers because even the tiniest cut causes profuse bleeding! Pull the hair on top of the head forward and start to shape the top of the head by working from the back of the head where the hair blends into the neck forward. The ideal shape is to have a rounded arc from one tip of the ear to the other and then an arc from the stop, over the head to where the longer coat meets the neck. Lift

the ear back and blend that shape around the side of the face, taking any bulk from under the ear so that the ear rest nicely against the side of face.



The hair between and around the eye should NOT be removed but you can use it to create a nice “stop” to the head (this is where the angle changes between the nose and the skull). Comb the coat forward, hold the straight scissors at a 45-degree angle to the stop and trim the hair a little. You don’t want a harsh fringe appearance just a soft indication of where the angle changes. With the scissors pointing away from the eye you can trim the hair above the eye a little but don’t expose the eye too much, the last thing you want is for your dog to have the classic Labradoodle look! You can use thinners to do this to give a softer finish. Once you are happy with the shape and length of coat on the top of the head, take the tip of each ear in your fingers and comb the hair away from you. You will see a difference in length between this and the hair on the top of the head so, preferably using blenders or chunkers, trim the ear hair so that it blends into that on top of the head.

Comb the hair on the muzzle forward and, using your hand, pull the coat forward over the end of the nose and trim the ends then trim the hair below the jaw to form a line from the chin to the throat. I find that by following the line that the outside of the newly trimmed ear creates is a good guide to how much length to take off under the chin. Blend the coat beneath the ears into neck.

ONCE YOUR DOG IS NICELY SCISSORED YOU NEED TO WET THE COAT SO THAT THE CURL RETURNS!