

ACBA: Breeds and Varieties

## **TEXELS: BASIC SELECTION, CARE AND SHOW PREPARATION**

by Teri Leach

The decision of which Texel to purchase, show coat or breed is not an exact science, but there are basic qualities to look for from birth through adolescence. Care of a show coated Texel is often considered as time intensive as that of other longhaired breeds that require unwrapping, combing, and re-wrapping of the sweeps. The basics of care and show preparation are accomplished in minimal time once committed to routine. These tasks can actually become ones of great pleasure for you and your Texels. A bond of trust and play flourishes.

### **SELECTION**

For Texel breeders, the first thing checked with each new litter should be the belly. Even as newborns, they'd better have curl on the belly. If they don't at birth, they won't get it later. Since lack of belly curl is a disqualification from competition in the US standard, these babies won't be worth the effort to show coat and it's a judgement call whether to keep them for a breeding program.

At birth, the coat should exhibit kinkiness and curliness, much like that of a newborn Teddy. The more the better. Once dry, the coat should stand somewhat away from the body. If the coat looks "wavy" but lays close to the body, chances are this Texel won't develop the overall curls of those that show more curliness from the start.

At weaning age (approximately 3 weeks), the coat should exhibit a natural loft and still retain kinkiness. Watch the hair around the upper neck area and shoulders. Though it occurs less frequently, some Texels do not develop either curl or length in this area and it can start to show at this age. It can appear as though this area of hair is not keeping up with overall coat growth.

The face and the forehead, in particular, should have the shorter hair reminiscent of a Teddy, yet, a full "face" of curly hair below the ears and lower jawline is evidence that the Texel will have good growth of sylvesters. Remember from whence the Texel came (Sheltie x Rex). Though the Standard does not make any reference, curly sylvesters give a terrific finished look on a really good Texel.

The coat on the body, the neck and face regions should present a picture of fullness and roundness

punctuated with kinkiness and curliness. While the coat accounts for 50% of the points in the Standard of Perfection, there are other things to consider. This breed should have a wide round nose, curving smoothly toward the crown. Heads are generally easy to "fix" onto any breed within a breeding program, so those without roundness should not be culled in lieu of an outstanding coat. Big round, bold eyes are desirable. With all that coat, it can be easy to overlook shoulders. Don't, as the Standard calls for well developed shoulders and judges do check them.

Through adolescence and into maturity, the Texel develops real curls and ringlets with growth in length of coat. Curls develop from the base of the coat and work outward to the ends. This generally happens first in the undercoat at the base of the rump and sides. A number of things can "go wrong" at this stage. The natural curling process can stop, leaving 1/2 to 1 inch of straight coat at the ends. The undercoat can develop phenomenal curl and leave the topcoat on the back and sides straight as string. The best Texels will show overall curl and ringlet development with the topcoat just a tad behind the undercoat.

Curls and ringlets (accounting for 35 of 50 coat points) are paramount in competition, however, Texels have lost Best in Breed because they did not have good density (a full 10 points). There are ways to determine density. One is "pantaloons" or "bloomers", again remembering the Texel's heritage. Lack of development of a lot of curly hair on the hind legs is not a good sign. Assuming a Texel has very good to excellent density, the maturing coat can take on a straighter or wavy appearance as thick shocks of hair are weighted down, curtailing the development of curls and ringlets. Don't be dismayed. Here, simple grooming will help the natural curling process and show the Texel's real qualities.

### **CARE AND GROOMING**

Bedding. Pine or Aspen shavings are okay for juniors before their coats begin to grow out. And for breeders who have their coats clipped short. For coated Texels, shavings spell doom. One little piece can work its way into the coat and what begins as a small tangle can turn itself into a massive rat's nest covering the entire rump or undercoat of your Texel.

To minimize tangles and mats, use one of the following that suits your budget and your time: paper bedding, horse hay pellets, towels ( not good for Texels with white coats because of staining), or a corncob product. Change the bedding at the first note of excess moisture or soiling.

Daily Coat Maintenance. Very Important! If your Texel is being show coated for exhibition in the United States, never- ever use a comb or brush on the coat. Actual curl will disappear and the coat takes on a wavy appearance with high loft. Texels are shown this way in numerous countries, but in the US, judges are oriented to place emphasis on coat curl.

Every morning and evening, check for tangles. Catch them early and minimize (not eliminate) the problem of matting. Be diligent. Check around the hind legs where many little tangles start. Also check the belly and the genitals area. Use your fingertips to delicately untangle hairs. With care, hair loss from little tangles is minimal.

If you feed loose hay to your Texels, now is the time to remove the smallest pieces that have been picked up in the coat. Once hairs wrap around a piece of hay, other hairs are attracted to the situation like metal to magnet. Check by lifting curls over the entire body, paying particular attention to the lower cost, the belly, and under the chin in the throat area. Providing hay cubes is the best way to avoid this problem.

As the Texel coat begins to mature, curls turn into ringlets. Some ringlets develop into tight corkscrews. These have a tendency to become intertwined. Gently separate them, taking care to keep them whole and stretching them as little as possible.

If the cavy has scratched itself with a hind foot, laid on its side resting, or been energetic running around its cage, a massive tangle can occur in the undercoat of the rear sweep. Using fingers, gently pull hairs away from the tangle being careful to pull away from the Texel as little as possible so discomfort is kept minimal.

Once all unwelcome problem areas have been taken care of, use your fingertips to lift and 'fluff' the layers of curls. Begin at the head behind the ears, moving to one side or the other, around the rear of the cavy, up the other side, and ending again with the curls on the neck. A quick fluff of the sylvesters and you're done until the evening session when the routine is repeated.

Daily grooming accomplishes much more than show coat maintenance. These twice a day sessions acclimate your Texels to some of the handling they'll receive when being judged and can result in a calmer, less stressed cavy on the show table.

Weekly Coat Maintenance. Again, your primary tools will be your fingertips and a spray bottle for water that puts out a fine mist. You can also use a detangler product that contains no water or alcohol, penetrates the hair shaft and restores natural moisture. Most are quite concentrated, so don't overdo treatment or the coat will be weighed down. Take what amounts to 1 or 2 drops on your fingertips and rub them together. Apply lightly beginning again at the head behind the ears and work your way around the body. As the Texel matures and the coat is longer, repeat the 1 or 2 drops as necessary to treat the entire coat. This treatment can also reduce static electricity and, as Texels are not put in wraps, can help keep curls from tangling with each other as easily.

Note: Be sure to bathe a Texel prior to showing. Using a detangler is for coat maintenance, not as a showing aide. Texels should be shown in natural coat with no enhancing products used. A good Texel doesn't need anything added.

Take the spray bottle of water and go though the entire coat again, lifting and misting each layer of curls, continuously working the coat with your fingers. Again, don't forget the sylvesters. Never get the coat "soaked" during this process. The magic touch of your fingertips should dry the coat in minutes. It is exciting to watch the coat develop more and tighter curls with each treatment. The moisture does help the curling process along and does have lasting effect even when dry.

As it grows in length, the dense coat seems to stay in shocks of hair naturally. When grooming (using fingers only), spray each thicker shock of hair and carefully separate it into 2 or 3 sections. Heavily dampen each section. In a very short time, these sections begin to corkscrew as nature intended them to do.

Bathing. Use caution in choosing a shampoo. Avoid most conditioning shampoos which can relax the curl. Wet the Texel, including the undercoat. Take care to keep water out of the ears and off of the face. Lather the cavy, disturbing the coat as little as possible. 'Scrubbing' is unnecessary and could cause tangles. Rinse thoroughly as residue can affect the softness of the coat.

Use two towels for each Texel bathed. The first one soaks up the majority of water from the coat. The Texel will give itself a good shake. Wrap the Texel in the second towel, which absorbs more moisture. Just "blot" your Texel and put in a tub with a dry towel or a clean cage. At this point during this process, you swear you've ruined the coat by washing it. It looks just awful! But when completely dry, the coat will be fine.

Never use a blow dryer on a Texel coat. Some breeders will use a heat lamp to help dry the coat. Use caution that the cavy does not become overheated. Or, sit where there's a sunny window and no drafts. Then comes the fun part. Go back every half hour to "lift and fluff" until the Texel is completely dry. Again, use your fingers to lift the coat. This can take the better part of a day, particularly in cooler weather.

#### **OTHER TEXEL GROOMING TIPS**

- Keep your Texel toenails clipped, especially the on the hind feet. Long toenails catch coat and once wrapped around the feet either gets pulled out or starts a mat.
- When sweeps got to the length of dragging on the ground, you can use comb type hair clips to keep the sweeps up. It's a real trick to clip the coat tight enough to keep the sweeps up and yet not so tight as to cause discomfort to the cavy. Using hair clips presents some additional work. They must be taken out and the coat worked daily as routine. This helps keep a "kink" from developing in the sweep from the hair being 'folded' against its pattern of growth.

This isn't the only way to keep Texels in good show coat. Many breeders find other things that work, so be open to suggestions. The most important thing to remember is whatever grooming routine you decide on, follow through on it diligently and you will be rewarded with a most gorgeous Texel cavy.

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