

Irish Wolfhound Coat Types

by Samuel Evans Ewing III

The Irish Wolfhound Standard reads: "he is a rough-coated, Greyhound-like breed" and further defines the hair as "rough and hard on body, legs and head; especially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw." Coat is one of the IW characteristics that varies greatly in the hounds currently being exhibited in show-rings and bred in different parts of the country. The criterion would seem to be explicitly set forth in the Standard, but there are many judges who place little or no reliance on a good harsh coat and, sad to say, a few breeders who are cultivating the long, woolly-coated hounds which they believe appeal to the general public and thus to their own pocketbooks.

The Irish Greyhound from which our modern IWs are descended appears to have been both smooth and rough coated, according to ancient writers and engravings. By the nineteenth century the rough coat was predominant in the wolfhound and the only genuine Irish specimens obtained by Captain Graham were said to have been of such variety. This, therefore, would be the reason that our modern hounds are required to have rough, hard coats, and there should be more uniformity in adherence to this part of the IW Standard. Occasionally there will occur a throwback to the old smooth coat or one of the long-coated outcrosses introduced by Captain Graham, but these specimens should be the very rare exception rather than the not infrequently seen wolfhound which is regarded as acceptable by more than one dog-show judge.

In addition to quality, the Irish Wolfhound coat varies in quantity. The most common type and amount of hair is that which is also possessed by the Scottish Deerhound - harsh, wiry, and about two to four inches long, with a soft undercoat. Because of his early use for hunting wolves, the IW almost always grows a ruff about his neck that is thicker than his hair elsewhere. A single coat is most often found with wolfhounds whose hair texture is more woolly or silky than desirable, and this coat is usually longer than the wiry one. Indeed, there often seems to be a direct correlation between the length of the coat and its harshness. Some very good specimens can be currently see with little or no head furnishings and a sparse, but very wiry, body coat. Needless to say, this type of broken coat is preferable to the luxuriant, but silky or woolly, coat found on other hounds.

The different varieties of hair appear to have separate growth patterns. The silky and woolly coats often attain full length by the time the hounds which unfortunately possess them are one year old. Hounds with the correct harsh and wiry coat may not come into full bloom until they are three or four years old. Many owners of adolescents of this type have bewailed their hounds' scanty adornment, but eventually the coat will appear and these hounds will then conform to the requirements of the Standard. Those wolfhounds, however, which have the short, broken coat seem never to grow more hair, although the texture remains entirely acceptable.

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