

The Chinese Crested – Nature's "CHINESE PUZZLE"

by Nancy Larson

There is a fascinating member of the Toy Group known as the Chinese Crested, a "toy" dog that has two varieties. A hairless variety that includes hair on the head, tail and feet, and a puff, a fully coated counterpart with a long double coat. However, within each of these two varieties, we have some rather dramatic variations.



Chinese Crested from the AKC Website

THE HAIRLESS: The AKC standard for the breed says, *"The Hairless variety has hair on certain portions of the body: the head (called a crest), the tail (called a plume) and the feet, from the toes to the front pasterns and rear hock joints (called socks). The texture of all hair is soft and silky, flowing to any length. Placement of hair is not as important as overall type. Areas that have hair usually taper off slightly. Wherever the body is hairless, the skin is soft and smooth."*

This "ideal" is what breeders aspire to achieve within their breeding programs, although it is not as easy as it might first appear. The gene that causes the hairlessness is dominant, however, it's an INCOMPLETE dominant. This means that you can get some interesting and even extreme variations in the amount of hair an individual dog can have. Hairless cresteds can be seen with everything from absolutely no hair anywhere, to ones that are basically fully coated with a single coat, and everything in between.

There is no "magic formula" for breeders to use to produce dogs with the hair only "where it should be". You can breed two hairless cresteds together, that have absolutely no hair and get puppies that not only have hair where you want it, but 'extra' hair where you would prefer not to have it. Conversely, you can breed two hairless cresteds with lots of "extra" hair and end up with puppies that have little or no hair anywhere and, most certainly, none that is "extra".

From my experience, and discussing this phenomena with many other breeders, most of us get a range of hairlessness in the majority of our litters. Everything from what some call "true" hairless (those with hair confined to the areas described in the standard), to those with varying amounts of hair on other portions of their bodies. One way to explain this variance in amount of hair is to compare the hairless Chinese Crested to another "hairless breed".....humans. In humans, we get a wide variation in the amount of body hair on individuals from minimal hair on legs, armpits, head, etc. to those who have massive amounts of hair on their legs, backs, and other parts of their anatomy. The same basic



True Hairless –
what you see is what you get



H – Pattern Hairless
strip down back and legs



Hairy Hairless
Can be thin or somewhat thick in areas

principle, regarding amount of hair and placement applies to "both species". As in human families, a wide variation in amount of hair and placement on the Chinese crested can be found in an individual litter.

THE POWDERPUFF: The AKC standard for the breed says, *"The Powderpuff variety is completely covered with a double soft and silky coat. Close examination reveals long, thin guard hairs over the shorter, silky undercoat. The coat is straight, of moderate length and density. Excessively heavy, kinky or curly coat is to be penalized. Grooming is minimal—consisting of presenting a clean and neat appearance."*

The powderpuff also comes in a wide selection of coat "types". These range from what is referred to as a "terrier" coat, which is short and somewhat harsh, tending to have almost no guard hairs on the legs, to a very long and dramatic coat, that almost sweeps the ground. Once again, virtually all variations in between are possible. We also see a wide selection of coat textures, such as "cottony" coats, that are heavy and hard to keep, being prone to matting; coats with undercoats that are long rather than short; coats where the guard hairs are extremely fine and soft and others that are less fine and very "slick" to the touch. We also get coats that "pattern" at certain ages and take until the animal is three years old or, sometimes, older to develop into a coat that looks as described in the standard. Any, or in some cases, many of the variations can be found in one litter.

Now we take all these "variations on a theme" and add in the rest of the standard to the mix. Ideally, dogs are to be between 11 and 13 inches at the shoulder, have almond shaped eyes, a hare (rather extreme) foot and more. Also, in addition to the above mentioned traits, breeders must take into account health issues that include PRA, deafness, LCP, glaucoma, lens luxation and other issues. And, we cannot leave temperament out of this equation. This makes for a very diverse set of traits that must be taken into consideration each time one breeds, or goes to purchase a Chinese Crested. Concentration on one aspect of the breed may well "improve" that particular aspect. However, what effect would it have on the overall dog? Does one sacrifice health to get "true" hairlessness? Does one sacrifice a good puff coat to get temperament? For the overall "health" of the breed and the gene pool (which is



Terrier Coated Powderpuff



Cottony Coated Powderpuff



Patterned Coat on a Powderpuff



Long Coat on a Powderpuff



Body hair on a hairless



Young Veil Coated Powderpuff



Mature Veil Coated Powderpuff

not large), this sort of "single mindedness" will only do harm by further reducing the size of the gene pool by decreasing the genetic diversity of an already limited population. If there was some sort of "magic recipe" available to the breeders that would allow us to only produce "true" hairless (with hair only where described in the standard) specimens it would make the lives of breeders so much easier, but, there is no such recipe available. Even those breeders who place an extremely high priority on this particular trait do not get only "true" hairless puppies.

So how does one select for one's breeding program? This question has as many answers as there are breeders, but there are common factors that go into most breeders' selections. Things such as structure, type, health, temperament, and, yes, how much hair do the hairless have and what type of coats do the puffs have. Each will make their choices based on their own priorities. There is a place in this breed for all the variations on the theme. Without soundness (good structure) type is worthless, yet without type it is not a Chinese Crested. So one must define "type" with the help of the standard .. and prioritize them? Is it more important that the animals have no excess body hair than it is that they have the correct gait, as described in the standard. Is it more important that the animals have an almond shaped eye or correct tail set than that they have a correct puff coat? Is the "hairy" hairless, that has a correctly structured front to be tossed out because it has extra hair? Or the true hairless because it has less lush furnishings? The answer to these for most part is "no". Each have their place in the grand scheme of things for the Chinese Crested. There are positives and negatives to be seen from using both. The hairy hairless with the lovely front will probably mean you have more grooming to do on



Full Face & Full Ears on a Powderpuff

at least some of your hairless puppies. On the plus side, you can get better dentition in the hairless puppies, more lush furnishings, and assorted other benefits. The true hairless will supply some benefits as well, including the satiny skin, ideal placement of hair, and, over time a reduction in the amount of body hair some of the very hairy ones can have.

In the end, regardless of a breeder's approach and choices, the goal should be a sound, typey, healthy dog with good temperament. This leaves us room for all the wonderful, unique and fascinating variations found within the Chinese Crested. Genetic diversity is an essential element to the overall viability of any breed of animal, without it any group will slowly, or in some cases, not so slowly devolve into extinction.



Patterning of a Chinese Crested Puppy – the older she got the shorter her coat got. It finally grew in after she was 2 years old

Photos courtesy of Nancy Larson, Susan Miller, Jennifer Young & Joanne Cayer

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