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was, but you and your dog enjoy each other's company. However, your dog isn't quite the dog he was even a month or week ago. Lab work is unremarkable. What to do?

There are several canine quality-of-life scales that you can turn to as an aid to your thinking. Simply do an internet search, and the scales will come up. These allow the owner to give a numerical rating on several indicators of well-being. The total score is then compared to a point scale rating the dog's quality of life at that moment. This provides a somewhat objective evaluation of what is going on, and if nothing else it presents several factors to consider, as well as forcing you to take an objective look at the dog in front of you. The scale will force you to decide where on a continuum your dog is that day, and the assessment can be helpful as a comparative basis for later ratings.

My dog had a 57 (out of 80) on the scale I used. Several days later, it was a 35. Blood work revealed nothing out of the ordinary, but I had a nagging feeling that something was amiss but it just wasn't showing up. The rating was buoyed because he was eating a bit, drinking, and had full control of his bladder and bowels. Yet he was worse than the week before, pacing, walking in large circles, and getting stuck in various places. He had lost four pounds. On the last morning a seizure told me all I needed to know. I held and kissed him as he received his Angel Wings.

Our pets trust us to do what's best for them. A quality-of-life scale can help in that endeavor.

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Pulik

CORDS: THE PULI'S CROWN

Having just participated recently in a Meet the Breeds event at an AKC show, I was reminded that probably the most talked-about feature of the Puli is the breed's coat. People ask if it's real and if the Puli is born that way; beg to touch it; and are often surprised to hear that you don't roll or braid the hair, and that the cords do not unravel when you bathe the dog. More interesting, however, is that the coat is actually practical and functional for this breed.

The corded coat of the Puli was mentioned as early at the 18th century. The dense coat of the Puli developed over time to serve as insulation and protection from the environment and other rigors of nature (for example, hungry wolves) in the breed's country of origin (Hungary). The corded coat also allowed for unrestricted movement, necessary when the Puli was herding sheep on the *puszta.* The *puszta* is a vast area of plains and wetlands in eastern Hungary used for the grazing of sheep and cattle. Here, the Puli would be constantly exposed to the whims of climate (bone-chilling winters and hot summers) and terrain. Nomadic shepherds found the Puli coat easy to maintain, and unlike the modern show dog with his floor-length cords (which many people are shocked to learn take five years to get to that length), a working Puli in Hungary had his excess coat sheared in the spring just like the sheep. The Puli's coat then did not need further attention till the following spring.

The Puli is a double-coated breed, with a dense, soft, wooly undercoat and a longer, wiry, topcoat. The undercoat tangles with the topcoat to form felt-like cords. Without that balance, that coat will fail to mat and cord on its own. The soft undercoat hair acts as insulation, providing protection from the weather, and the harsher topcoat adds strength to the coat and repels moisture and dirt. The Puli coat is difficult to saturate with water, but once wet, takes a long time (hours) to dry. To learn more on what is involved with grooming this breed, the Puli Club of America provides useful resources.

Back in 1966, internationally renowned and respected Puli expert Dr. Imre Ocsag presented his study on the Puli's coat to the All-Union Cynological Council, where he described seven coat types for the breed, categorized by texture. These were: clustery; felt-like ribbon or corded; open hair type; short type; silky type; straight type; and wavy or shaggy type.

Cords come in a variety of shapes, including narrow cords; flat or "ribbon" cords; thin cords resembling shoelaces; heavy, very wide, matlike cords; and even, rounded cords. Structure of the hair determines the cord type. All are correct within the standard, since to initiate cords, a coat must have a proper balance between undercoat and topcoat. No two Puli coats are exactly alike—they are unique in that the texture will vary, as well as the size and shape of the cords.

The ideal cord was identified in the 1970s by Mr. Les Benis (an internationally recognized Puli expert) as the flat cord: proportionately uniform, ribbon-like tassels approximately one-half-inch wide. People often make the mistake of trying to achieve that size at the onset of cording, forgetting that with gravity and time, the cord lengthens and thins. Make the cord too thin at the onset, and it will weaken over time and break off. A good rule of thumb is that the good cords come from an area of skin the size of a quarter.

As cautioned already by Mr. Les Benis and Dr. Imre Bordacs in the 1970s, "over-empha-

COURTESY LYNDA MCKEE

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sis has been given lately to the length and profuseness of the coat, which, although impressive, often hides major faults and shortcomings." The breed's AKC standard allows for both the brushed and corded coat, and how the coat is presented in the show ring is a matter of the preference of the exhibitor, although overwhelmingly, the corded coat reigns supreme in the show ring. Crimping should be evident in the coat of a young Puli or one with a brushed coat, since that will tell you that the coat has the ability to cord. It should be noted that a judge's final decision on awards should not be based on a Puli's coat but his structure, since one needs to keep in mind the purpose of the breed, which is herding, and form follows function.

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Spanish Water Dogs

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SWD

As the Spanish Water Dog Club of America continues to do ongoing judges' education, significant elements of our judges' presentation seem to be logical "fodder" for this column.

As foundation information early in the presentation, we describe the Essential Characteristics of the breed; that is, traits that we would want to see present in any dog being considered for recognition in the ring and in a breeding program.

Distinctive rustic coat

The breed's coat has been addressed in previous columns, but it continues to require emphasis for many judges and others new to the breed. The term "rustic" *cannot* be overemphasized; aesthetic brushing, grooming/scissoring is always incorrect and should not be rewarded in the ring. While wide variation in coat length is very acceptable, the tips of the curls, no matter their length, should show a thin "fishhook-like" curl. Correct cords, not more than 6 or 7 inches in length, are never flat but are rather pencil-like in diameter, with the curl of the coat evident throughout the length of the cord and then tapering to the tip.

Medium-sized, moderate in all ways

The versatility of this breed, both now and historically in the country of origin, demands a hardy dog of medium size with considerable stamina. Due to variations between early dogs in the north and south of Spain, the standard does allow for quite a broad range in height. With correct proportions (see below) and the solid build of a good specimen, dogs who are much beyond the maximum height will become cumbersome and lack the nimble and surefooted ability required to manage goats on uneven terrain. (More than one judge has commented on the importance of not "growing" this breed.) Conversely, dogs lacking substance would not be able to fulfill all of their duties, particularly in the water and retrieving game. Moderation in build as well as in angulation and stride are necessary for maintaining the pace of a steady day of moving stock along roads to seasonal pasture.

Slightly longer than tall (9:8); 50 percent body, 50

The Spanish Water Dog's distinctive coat is never brushed or combed and is shown either in natural curls, usually with a fishhook-like turn at the end, or in rustic cords with tapered tips.

COURTESY MARNIE HARRISON