

The Pumi Coat and Its Grooming

By Chris Levy

One of the things that drew me to the Pumi (besides the wonderful ears and their temperament) was the ease of taking care of the coat. As caretakers of the breed in the US, we must both understand and uphold the standard for the breed, and one of those areas is the easy-to-care-for coat.

Let's look historically at the Pumi standard to get some understanding of the coat. In the book *Hungarian Dog Breeds* by Imre Ocsag, he paraphrases the FCI (Hungarian) standard from 1960:

The coat of the Pumi is quite unique. It consists of a rough top coat and a finer undercoat in a 50-50 ratio. Compared to the Puli the Pumi coat is generally rougher but has more variations. The whole body is covered by shaggy rough fur. The preferred coat is the harsh type since that contains the least quantity of woolly undercoat. Longer plaited coats contain a higher percentage of fluffy hair but even those never felt or mat, not even on the hindquarters or thighs. The hair is shortest on the paws and on the muzzle, so that the eyes and nose are always visible.



Figure 1: Anghihazi Borbolya

I would like to draw your attention to a few phrases:

1. rough top coat and a finer undercoat in a 50-50 ratio
2. preferred coat is the harsh type
3. never felt or mat

This standard was revised in 1966: *“Its whole body is covered with medium long, curled hair. Its fur is formed by covering hair and bottom hair. Its hair does not get felty anywhere. The hair is the shortest on the facial-nasal part and on the limbs.”*

This was described more fully in the 2000 standard:

The wavy, curly coat forms tufts and is never smooth or corded. The coat has an average length of 4 to 7 cm, growing to smaller or larger tufts; it is elastic, shaggy and dense. It consists of a strong, but not coarse, topcoat and a soft undercoat.

This is the first time that the word “tufts” is used. In English this is defined as “a bunch or cluster of small, usually soft and flexible parts, as feathers or hairs”.

In 2010, when writing the AKC standard for the breed, the HPCA used these descriptions and incorporated much of the wording:

*The coat is a combination of wavy and curly hair, forming corkscrews or curls all over the body, and is never smooth or corded. The coat consists of an even mixture of harsh hair and softer undercoat. The coat stands out from the body approximately 1½" to 3" and is prepared using a combination of stripping and trimming. The eyes and the foreface are free of long hair. The hair on the underside of the tail ranges from ½" at its shortest to 3" to 5" and has little undercoat. In order to achieve the characteristic corkscrews and curls in the coat, the hair is allowed to dry naturally. **The coat must never appear fluffed and blown dry, obscuring the characteristic curls.***

So how does this apply to the Pumi? There are three critical points of the Pumi's coat:

1. The proper Pumi coat is wavy and curly.

These waves and curls vary all over the body as shown in the following photos:



Figure 2: Curls on the body



Figure 3: Curls on the legs

2. The proper Pumi coat is an even mixture (50-50) of soft and harsh hairs.

You can see in the photos below that mixture. This should be true no matter what color the coat.



Figure 4: An even distribution of harsh and soft hair on the body



Figure 5: An even distribution of harsh and soft hair on the leg

As stated in the 1966 standard, too much of the soft undercoat will make the coat tend to mat. Puppy coats usually have much more soft coat than harsh and can be more difficult to keep up, so need to be combed more often. The adult coat may not appear until approximately 3 years of age.

3. The proper Pumi coat forms tufts all over the body

A proper Pumi coat forms these tufts of hair when allowed to dry naturally. The following is a photo of some of these tufts from the same dog on different parts of his body:



Figure 6: Tufts vary in type all over the body

These tufts are apparent clear down to the skin, not just at the tips of the hairs. The only way these tufts will form properly is if the coat is entirely wet down to the skin and allowed to dry naturally. You can see the skin at the base of the tufts on the photo below.



Figure 7: The tufts form clear down to the skin

The Pumi's coat must be combed out every few weeks to make sure that mats do not form, and to get out any twigs and other material they may have picked up. When the coat is combed out, the tufts are temporarily lost and the hair is fluffy. At this stage it has more of a tendency to mat.

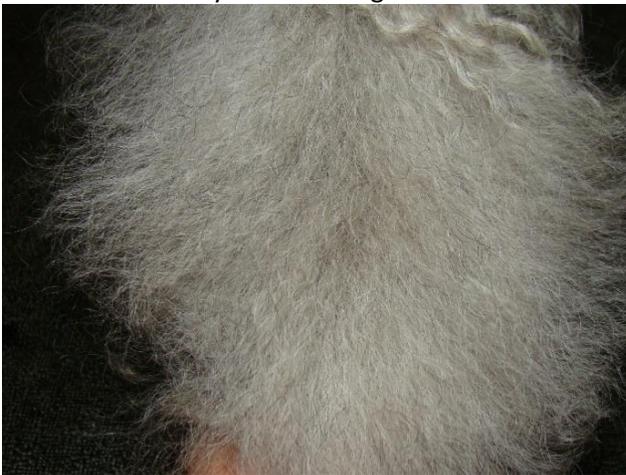


Figure 8: Combed-out coat - leg hair



Figure 9: Combed-out coat - body hair

The only way to restore the characteristic Pumi hair tufts is by wetting down the hair, either through bathing or by spraying the hair using a spray bottle, wetting it down to the skin. My first mentor in Hungary told me many years ago that the best Pumi coat is obtained by letting the dog go swimming (in clean water!) over several days, and this was confirmed by a Pumi owner who trained her Pumi in dock diving and her Pumi was getting soaked down many times a day.



Figure 10: The appearance of the coat after combing out and then spraying down

The Poodle coat can also be prepared like a Pumi – it's called a "packed coat", which was done in the past more than it is now. But that doesn't mean that a Pumi coat can be prepared like a Poodle! Fluffing and blowing dry the Pumi's hair removes one of its most important breed characteristics – the wavy, curly, tufted Pumi coat, without which it is not a Pumi.

(Note: all photos were taken of the same dog going through the combing process.)