

# Grooming box

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## Richard Smith – the one to watch

EVERY now and then we feature a prominent or up-and-coming groomer in GB, or even somebody about to get started. This week we are honoured to include Richard Smith following his success at the British Dog Grooming Championships with two dogs, winning a special award for being 'the one to watch'.

Richard kindly agreed to share his experiences and passion for dogs with us. From the start, from as early an age as he can remember Richard says, "I loved dogs. My mum got me my first dog, a lovely crossbreed called Jenny, who lived to a ripe old age and we had many special times together. I was in my early 20s when she died. It was a difficult time."

Richard recalls his early years with the family dogs. "My dad used to show two English Setters and I used to go to all the dog shows with him and help groom them for the ring. I loved doing that. Then mum acquired a Pekingese and I showed it for her when I was a teenager. I knew by this point that I wanted a career in dogs, the presentation of them for the show ring had always interested me, and how each breed was trimmed to enhance their particular breed characteristics was fascinating from the beginning."

After leaving school Richard says he had a couple of jobs but nothing really engaged his brain as much as the dogs, so finally when he was 19 with some financial help from his stepfather he enrolled on a grooming course at Southend On Sea. He was thrilled to be able to do this and really enjoyed every minute of the learning curve. The first part of the course involved learning the skills of grooming, as regards to brushing and combing properly and thoroughly, (something that seems basic but it's probably the most important factor in getting a good finish), bathing, blow drying and prepping dogs, getting them ready for the more experienced groomers to finish.

Then once Richard had mastered these important skills he went on to learn the different trimming techniques, ie clipping, scissoring and hand stripping. This involved learning the different breed trims. There was also some theory work and health and safety aspect to take on board, but Richard says he was mainly gaining valuable experience 'hands on' which in his opinion is the best way to learn how to do the job correctly.

Richard says, "I really enjoyed it and after completing the course I came back to my hometown of Kettering and opened my very own salon. It was quite daunting being so young and dealing with the day-to-day running of a business by myself, plus, being new to grooming every day I was faced with new challenges with clients, dogs, new trims on breeds I hadn't groomed before, and situations that I hadn't covered in training.

"It was quite stressful at times, and I did consider packing it in



Richard grooming a Wire Fox Terrier.

at one point as I felt out of my depth. However I stuck at it and every day it got a bit easier. Each day was an achievement bringing with it more experience in grooming and working for myself. The salon took off quickly with many people commenting that it was great to have a groomer who groomed dogs to look like the breed they were and not just a

number of years and then one day decided he wanted to learn some new styles and keep abreast of what was happening in the industry, things were changing fast and new equipment needed to be sourced and considered, so he did some more training with various groomers and also took the City & Guilds qualifications. It was during these training sessions with top groomers that the idea of competing at grooming competitions began to grow. "At first this was a scary idea," he says. "The thought of the pressure to groom dogs with so many eyes on you from your peers is quite daunting to say the least. It took some time and effort to boost my confidence enough to take the plunge into competing."

Richard recalls, "After a lot of persuasion from some groomer friends I decided I would give it a go, so my first contest was in April this year! I was very nervous and let my nerves get the better of me and I didn't get placed, but it was a great learning curve for me. It didn't put me off. Since then I have competed in three more competitions gaining a second place at two competitions during the summer. Then I competed at the British Dog Grooming Championships with two dogs, a Bichon Frisé and Welsh Terrier, and I was thrilled to be placed first with both these dogs. I then went on to win the experienced group with my Bichon and my Welsh went into the reserve place. Because I won the group I then had to compete for the title and I was amazed to win runner-up Groomer of the Year. I also won a special award for being 'the one to watch' so it really was a day to remember and I felt like all my hard work was starting to pay off."

Richard feels attending grooming competitions are worthwhile and something he would recommend all groomers to contemplate even if it is just as a spectator. He says, "you will guarantee to see something new every time and learn a lot. It's very inspiring. I'm now addicted. I'm hoping that the future consists of me carrying on successfully competing, entering more competitions and gaining more qualifications and perhaps diversifying into other aspects of the grooming world. Running my salon I would like to expand my business into other avenues as well as the grooming. I think Asian fusion grooming is really interesting and very artistic. I think it is really taking off over here with many groomers learning more about the styling and trying it out. It would be good for this styling to be included in grooming events perhaps in a different aspect to the creative section of competitions."

Richard says he has lots of ambitions with the biggest being gaining the title of British Dog Groomer of the Year! He adds wistfully, "I would love that award. I would also like to one day try competing abroad and maybe even America!"

*"I think it's vital to listen to your customer and try to achieve their requests if you can."*

groomer that clips everything off regardless of coat, condition and the owner's ability to cope with brushing the coat."

Richard gained a considerable clientele and the business expanded so much so that in 2008

customer and try to achieve their requests if you can. I always try to do the very best trim I can on all the dogs we have in as they are the best advert for the business."

Richards says that he carried on grooming in his shop for a



Richard grooming a Welsh Terrier.