COATS FOR OUR DOGS

We often get asked "Do dogs need a coat for Mantrailing in the cold?"

Let's look at that natural coat our dogs have already before we consider man made over coats

A dog's coat can be a *double coat*, made up of a soft undercoat and a tougher topcoat, or a *single coat*, which lacks an undercoat. For double coats the top coat is made of stiff hairs to help repel water and shield from dirt, and the undercoat serves as insulation. With single coated dogs one big advantage, much appreciated by allergy sufferers, is that the absence of an undercoat means less shedding. Single-coated dogs mostly originate from areas with warm climates, where undercoats were not a great advantage. As a result, Chihuahuas, Afghan hounds and Salukis will struggle to keep warm in a colder climate.

The terms fur and hair are often used interchangeably when describing a dog's coat, however a double coat, *e.g.*, like that of the Labrador, Collie and Spaniel, is referred to as a *fur coat*, while a single coat, like that of the Poodle, Yorkshire Terrier, Greyhound or Portuguese Waterdog is referred to as a *hair coat*.

So, do any dogs need a coat?

The British Small Animal Veterinary Association advises that there are very few occasions when an animal needs a coat, even in really cold weather. Occasions they say could be for elderly or ill animals, very small dogs with short hair, thin breeds like greyhounds, or those bred for much warmer climates, like the Saluki. Just as humans will be chilled wearing a light jacket in wintry weather, single-coated dogs may need added protection against loss of body heat when temperatures plummet.

In general, a dog's own coat will protect them from the elements. It is self 'adjustable' as they raise or lower the fur to control their temperature. Dressing them in a coat diminishes the animal's ability to regulate her own body temperature and could even be detrimental if the animal gets too hot. Too high a temperature is more of a risk to the dog's health than too low a temperature. Clothing could also rub and cause sores and if the animal is wearing it for a long time, it could cause skin conditions.

Unfortunately for fashionistas, couture coats are pointless for dogs - not that that has stopped designers, including Vivienne Westwood and Ben de Lisi, who have created dog accessories and clothing, while Harrods holds an annual fashion show for canine clothing, called Pet-a-Porter.

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In what situations would a Mantrailing dog require a coat?



Whilst it may be true that few dogs need to wear a coat whilst out and about, it is a different situation at the end of an exercise session. We have all returned to the car with a wet, muddy smelly dog. At these times a drying coat is brilliant for (as Destiny is modelling in the picture). Not only does it speed up drying the dog on the way home (using body heat) but it protects the inside of the car from dropped-off muck. By keeping the dog warmer whilst drying it may help reduce the potential for future muscle and joint problems. Incidentally some breeds can suffer with a condition called 'dead tail' where the tail goes suddenly limp and there is evidence that being left wet and cold after exercise can trigger the condition.



The second picture shows Destiny (Andy`s first Mantrailing dog) using the same fleece coat whilst on a training course in a French forest. They had made a camp in the forest on a cold and drizzly May day. Just as Andy was wearing his best weatherproofs, having their fleece coats on kept both Destiny and Ella warm and dry whilst waiting their turn to work. They are also useful when the dogs are waiting in the car on cold days to keep them warm before and after mantrailing.

Destiny's coat was made by Equafleece and has 'quick clip' fixing and Velcro across the chest and under the tummy to keep it snug. There are other styles and many manufacturers. Design wise there are some where the dog puts its head through a polo neck or whole body suits with legs but I prefer this style as there is less tussling with a dog to put a wraparound coat with clip fastenings rather than polo necks!

We recommend a functional dog coat or wrap for your dog's welfare - not as a fashion statement.

As with harnesses, look for a coat that is easy to take on and off and is comfortable for your dog to wear for prolonged periods and even sleep in! If you feel the need for bespoke tailoring fear not! Many manufacturers provide detailed sizing guides on their websites which mean your dog can still get that 'made to measure' look with practicality - which an old towel won't equal! Finally before buying, check it is easy to wash and a real advantage of fleece is that it is quick to dry and doesn't stain easily.

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