

CLIPPER BLADE CARE BASICS
BY JEFF ANDREWS

Ask around and you will likely get a few opinions on this subject and all will probably work ok. The basic thing about blade care is how much time you want to dedicate to it. If you want to leave the shop as soon as you are done grooming without even cleaning the hair off the blades, you'll never stick to a blade care program that will save you money in buying new blades and sharpening costs.

I have received blades that were so impacted with hair that I could not figure how the groomer got it on the clipper. These same groomers then complain about these blades dragging again after a week or two, and the sharpener doesn't know if the problem is the blade or the clipper. There are several things that the groomer has control over that can save the metal itself and keep off buildup that will bind the blade up and damage the clipper. If you don't take care of the blades it could damage the clippers.

The basics are these: clean the blades of hair and the red buildup, and maintain a level of lubrication with which you are comfortable with daily.

Cleaning

You can't use that many blades during the day - 5 or 6, maybe 8 or 10 depending if you are finishing or shaving down. At the end of the day I would gather all the blades that have been used and use the high velocity dryer to blow all the hair from them. Take a pipe cleaner and slide it under the cutter (side to side) and get the hair from under it as well. Hair sucks up oils and will prevent the blade oil from being useful. After that, I check the blade for reddish or brown buildup where the teeth slide back and forth together.

Spray Coolants

Spray coolants are made by about every clipper manufacturer out there, and are misused by about every groomer who uses them. They all contain about the same thing in them: 1,1,1 Trichloroethane (brake cleaner), glycol, CO2 and water, and very little lubrication (not oil). These products do exactly what they were manufactured to do and that is cool the blade. If you read the back of the can (nobody does) it says to use the product occasionally in a well ventilated area. Some also say to use clipper oil along with the spray coolant. There is not enough lube in spray coolants to use them as a base for blade care. Your not even suppose to spray the teeth of the blade with them, it says so on most of the cans. The solvent will displace the water and prevent rust (so it says) but using these products continually will cause damage to your lungs and your blades eventually. Here is the correct way to use them.

1. Turn your clipper OFF
2. Point the clipper down toward the floor
3. Spray the BACK of the blade only with one short burst.
4. Immediately turn the clipper over and oil the cutter teeth with clipper oil. DO NOT SPRAY THE FRONT OF THE BLADE. The solvent will take away your lubrication causing more heat and making you spray it more often. Spraying the cutter teeth might cause this

- product to get inside your clipper where it will melt your carbon brushes and short out your switch and possibly the armature. It will also weaken the plastic of the blade drives.
5. Turn the clipper back on and continue grooming.

Spraying the teeth of the cutter causes the reddish buildup on the blades. When the buildup gets thick enough it will cause the blade to drag. Sometimes it will seize the blade parts together and cause damage to your clipper when you start it up with that blade on there. We'll talk about this a lot throughout this paper.

Buildup

Buildup comes from a lot of places, mostly the melting of pet dander, oozy stuff from under mats, and sometimes moisture from the coat you can't get totally dry. If this buildup is ignored it will cause the cutter to lift up from the comb part of the blade and the blade will start to drag. Buildup will also cause the cutter part to slide very hard back and forth. When that happens many groomers spray it with spray coolants that are mostly solvent and water. The solvent breaks down the buildup for a few minutes and gives you that happy feeling of it actually cleaning and lubing the blade. Groomers also make the mistake of spraying the teeth of the blade with spray coolants. The directions say to spray the BACK of the blade and oil the teeth. But, in 3 minutes you are spraying it again, and if your blade is this far gone you're in trouble. Remember this, how did the blades look when you got them back from the sharpener? They didn't have a red or brown, or worse yet, a black buildup on them did they? No, you put it there, you need to control it.

Buildup damages clippers

Years ago, if you can remember back that far, clippers were made of good stuff, they were made to last a lifetime. Today, they are made to break down and the manufacturer will sell you a part to fix it. One way of controlling the breakdowns is to control the one thing that causes clipper failure most of the time...dirty blades. When the blades are tight from buildup they cause parts of the clipper to fail. On the Andis, the drive, the front motor mount and the hinge go first. When they do the drive system becomes loose and this can cause "corn rowing" with a #10-15-30, or a #9 blade, and the blades will drag 75% of the time. When loose, the cutter hesitates on the side before coming back to the other, this causes dragging. If the parts were made better they could take more abuse but they aren't. Osters are the same way, the hinge and the fiber gear (which used to be metal) will fail. This will cause the same effects with the blades, corn rowing and dragging. When the fiber gear finally fails for good, there will be a groove cut right in the middle of it where the worm gear butts up against it. Every other part in the Oster head costs about \$2.00, this fiber gear costs \$10.00. See the connection on the spare parts racket they have going? I could be wrong though.

How to clean off the buildup

Forget spray coolants, they don't clean and they don't lube. They are a quick fix to keep you going and I use them myself, BUT, each night I clean off the buildup they sometimes create on the blades. Not cleaning daily will give the buildup a chance to go from a semi hard substance that can be removed, to a concrete-like film that may not be able to be cleaned off. If this is the case, the blade will have to be sharpened.

H-42 is one of the best cleaners around, it was made just to clean this film off clipper blades. It can be used as a dip (stick a running blade in it). Some have used an ultrasonic cleaner and put a whole batch of blades in the unit, covered them with H42, and turned it on for awhile. H-42 not only cleans this buildup off, but will lube the blade as well. It will not cool. I always put a drop of oil on after H-42 anyways to make sure its lubed real good. If the buildup is too tough and H-42 cant get it off try the following products first, THEN clean in H42 to get these solvents off. Try "Goof Off", WD-40, brake cleaner (use outside), and believe it or not, charcoal starter. You can use kerosene, but that smell will make you sick after a while.

What about Oster blade wash? If you want to spend 6 bucks for a half pint of Blade Wash, go ahead, or spend \$1.99 for a quart of charcoal starter, same difference to me. Get the H-42, you'll never regret it.

<http://www.h42products.com>

This is my opinion and it works, I've had groomers go 13 months without blade sharpening. They take the time to clean the blades. If you don't clean your blades, your sharpener will be glad to for you!

Lubrication

Lubrication is essential to the blades, they can never be allowed to go dry. Every time hair builds up in the blade it scoops up badly needed oil and removes it when you clean them out with your HV. How much oil should one use? With today's new clippers having higher speeds this produces more heat. Heat can be controlled by changing blades while keeping the oil on them and never letting them get dry. If the blade gets dry it will cause more friction and more heat. So, the more you keep a good comfortable amount of oil on your blades, the less chance of heat causing red buildup and the cutting surfaces going dull quickly.

Rusty Blades

What about rusty blades? They are ok and you can get sanding sponges that will let you rub the rust off. If a blade is discolored it usually means it is oxidized pretty deeply, and this deep oxidation isn't going to hurt the cutting surfaces. If the cutting surfaces are rusted and pitted the blade is junk.

What causes the rust? Rust comes bare metal (loss of plating) and no protection. The protection is oil or H-42. The plating loss comes from using the blade, dog hair is very rough and will take the plating off between the teeth of the comb, that's where rust starts. Sometimes you can scrape the rust off but using the blade will get rid of the rust between the teeth. Spray coolants have a high grade solvent in them and can cause rust to start from little pits in the metal, usually on the backs of the blades that look like spots. Clean these areas off with a sanding sponge and keep the blade lubed.

That's all from me. There will be recommendations from others that will also work. These are my key points. No matter what maintenance program you use YOU have to follow through with it to make it work.

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Please visit the grooming and sharpening website for more info

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