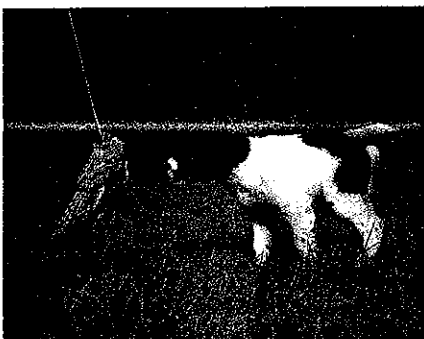


GUN DOG

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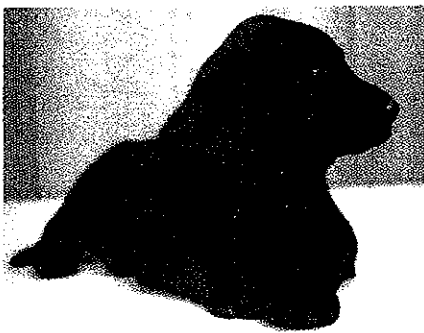
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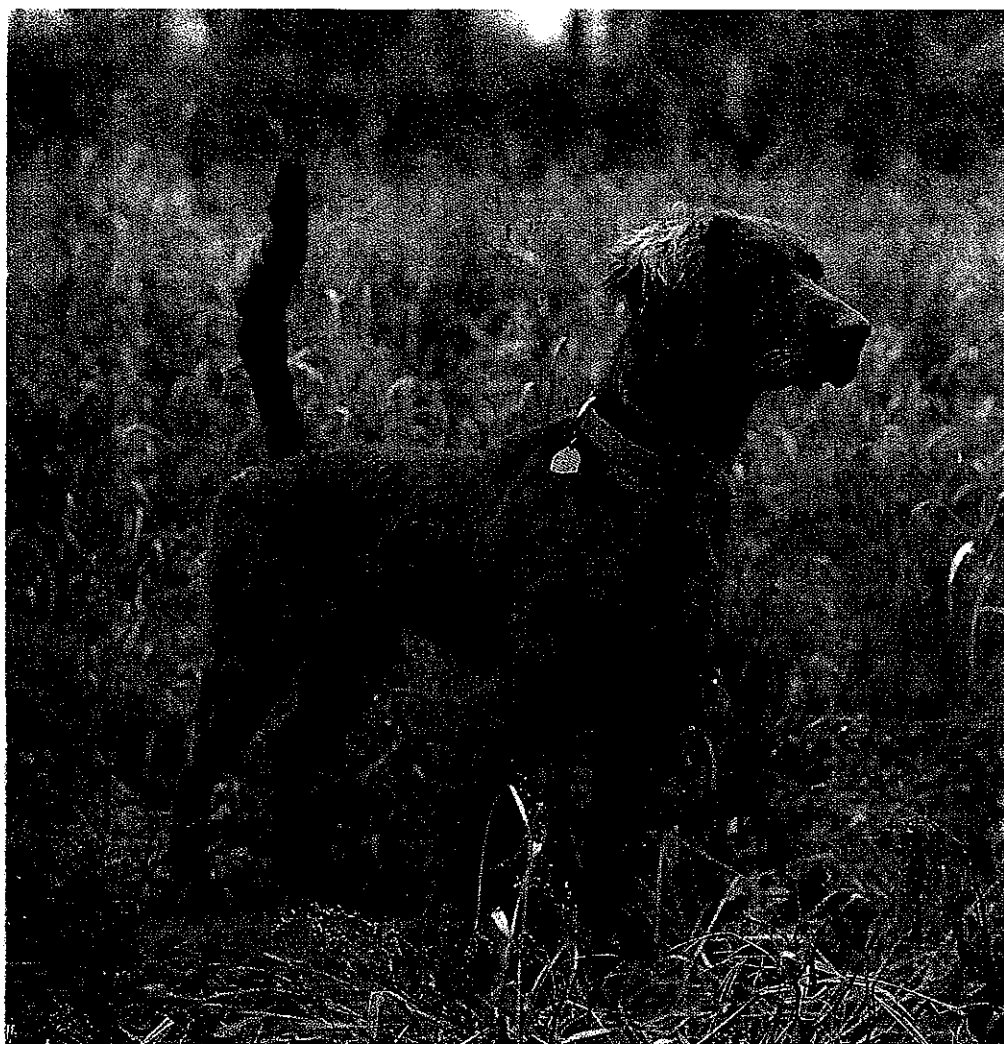
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Cover Photo

by Larry Sawyer

The cute 3-month-old English setter on our front cover is E.S. Dober. Dober is the personal gun dog of Larry Sawyer of Blaine, Minnesota. Sawyer has high hopes for this pup, and we hope he has many, many years of good hunting.



The Red Setter: A Dog of a (Slightly) Different Color

by Rick Van Etten

Saturday Night Eddie J, owned by Gun Dog subscriber Chuck Ahmann, shows the style and intensity of today's red setter. Eddie has twice won the Ed Schnettler trophy for the National Red Setter Field Trial Club's Walking Shooting Dog stake.

One of the most dynamic performers on the American field trail circuit — and in hunting covers across the nation — is a dog that is still unknown to some and misunderstood by many. The red setter, the field-bred Irish setter developed under the auspices of the National Red Setter Field Trial Club, is a breed which has long been surrounded by controversy. But any confusion or misinformation about the breed deserves to be quickly laid to rest, for the red setter is a dog whose day has arrived.

"To use a popular marketing expression, our dogs are 'new and improved,'" says Aaron Bixler, current president of the red setter club. "Our members realize that we must utilize several bloodlines to breed the best dogs possible, and as a result the number of good red dogs is steadily increasing. We've moved upward from the plateau we hit in our breeding programs a few years ago — anyone who formed his opin-

ion of red setters in the 1970's needs to take another look!"

So what exactly is the red setter? Probably the easiest way to begin answering that question is by describing what the red setter is not. The dog isn't to be confused with those Irish setters bred for American Kennel Club (AKC) bench show conformation — big-boned, full-feathered, mahogany-coated beauties that sometimes run 30 inches tall (or more) and may weigh close to 90 pounds. These are the dogs envisioned by the general public when picturing an Irish setter. But as almost every sportsman knows, these same dogs lack the necessary instincts and physical conformation to put in a productive day afield, a direct result of overemphasis on breeding practices aimed at improving appearance only.

The red setter, by contrast, is a smaller, quicker, lighter-colored version of the Irish setter, possessed of those hunting and pointing instincts that have been lost in the

bench-bred dogs. Ironically, according to club officials at least, the red setter is also much closer in type to the early Irish setters of more than a century ago, dogs which were prized by sportsmen and market hunters for their superior stamina, intelligence, and bird-finding abilities. Today's red setter is, simply stated, the result of a few dedicated individuals' determined efforts to restore the Irish setter as a capable field dog.

Achieving this challenging objective was no small task, as a look at the breed's history will indicate. As already mentioned, overemphasis on breeding for certain physical characteristics (greater size, solid dark-mahogany coat, higher shoulders and streamlined build) had resulted in Irish setters that were of little use as gun dogs. The old-type Irish setter, known in this country since the mid-1800's as a dog able to hold its own against any other hunting breed, had gradually given way to the glamorous star of the bench shows. By 1950, only a few dogs remained that

were useful field performers . . . enough to remind sportsmen of the glorious Irish gun dogs of the past, but an insufficient number to be used as breeding stock to restore the breed's lost hunting abilities.

Faced with this dilemma, a handful of breeders embarked on a revolutionary (some would say drastic) course of action. Backed by the Field Dog Stud Book, long regarded as the authoritative register for all pointing dogs, the breeders began a program of outcrossing aimed solely at revitalizing the Irish setter as a hunting dog. By selecting those Irish setters which still retained hunting and pointing instincts and then outcrossing them to top-notch English setters, the breeders hoped to eventually restore the Irish setter to his rightful position as a field dog.

One of these dedicated individuals was W. E. "Ned" LeGrande, regarded by most fanciers as the father of the modern red setter breed. LeGrande had championed the cause of the hunting Irish setter for many years and conducted extensive searches for dogs which retained the proper instincts. It was LeGrande who acquired Askew's Carolina Lady, one of the most important dogs to figure in the restoration of the field Irish setter, from a North Carolina farmer. A measure of the significance of Lady's role as a foundation bitch can be found in the fact that it is her likeness which is depicted in the club's official logo. Lady also holds the distinction of being the only Irish setter ever included into the Field Trial Hall of Fame through all-breed election.

One of LeGrande's most notable characteristics was his habit of giving away puppies to club members and other interested sportsmen, in an effort to promote the breed. He felt the best way to further the cause of the red setter was to keep good quality dogs in circulation, and an interesting anecdote arose from his generous attitude.

LeGrande once received a postcard from a 15-year-old boy in Min-



The official logo of the National Red Setter Field Trial Club features the likeness of Askew's Carolina Lady, one of the most important dogs to figure in the restoration of the red setter breed. Lady is also the only Irish setter ever included into the Field Trial Hall of Fame through all-breed election.

nesota; the boy stated that when he grew up, he was going to be a veterinarian and have a whole kennel full of red setters. LeGrande wrote back to the youngster, saying, "If you build a crate and send it to me, I'll put a dog in it and send it back." The young man did as he was instructed, and LeGrande made good on his promise.

The upshot of the story is this: the youngster did indeed go on to become a veterinarian, as well as an active force in the red setter movement. Dr. Roger Boser is currently a vice president of the club and the breeder and owner of several top gun dogs and field trail competitors. One of these, a female named Scarlet Fever, won two of the club's highest

honors, the LeGrande and Duke trophies, in 1985, setting a new point record for each in doing so.

A well-known dog authority and writer, Horace Lytle (himself an Irish setter fancier and owner of the famous Smada Byrd) was one of the first advocates of the English setter outcross. In an article which appeared in *Sports Afield* in 1950 (Lytle was the magazine's gun dog editor at the time), he openly suggested that due to the scarcity of good hunting Irish setters, outcrossing to English setters should be employed to replenish the lost instincts. His article stirred up a wide range of reactions, running the gamut from those who felt he had "hit the nail on the head" to those who vehemently opposed the very thought of outcrossing.

Ned LeGrande and his associates were undaunted, however. Horace Lytle's article provided, in print, the justification for the outcrossing deemed necessary to rejuvenate the Irish setter. With this backing and the support of the Field Dog Stud Book, they crossed Illsey Chip, a son of the National Champion English setter Mississippi Zev, to Willow Winds Smada, an Irish setter owned by LeGrande. Chip was owned by Lytle and was red and white in color, an important consideration as English setters with black markings produce black puppies when crossed with Irish setters.

The resulting pups were light red in color with white markings on toes, chest, and face. They were registered with the Field Dog Stud Book as crossbred setters, and were then bred back to offspring of Askew's



Dedicated breeders have restored the red setter's style, intensity, and bird-finding abilities — characteristics once lost through overemphasis on bench show breeding.

Carolina Lady. By continuing to breed back to purebred Irish setters, the red setter fanciers were able to reduce the amount of white and re-establish the dark red coat, as well as retain the increased hunting and pointing instincts afforded by the infusion of English setter blood.

The red setter breeders were also allowed to register their pups as purebred Irish setters after three generations of pure Irish ancestry had been established. This was possible because the English setter outcross did not appear in a four-generation pedigree, and the Field Dog Stud Book ruled that this was satisfactory to re-establish the pure Irish bloodlines.

Such a ruling generated a great deal of controversy, however, and much of that controversy continues today. Many of the Irish setter breeders affiliated with the American Kennel Club — primarily bench show-oriented individuals — were appalled by the English setter outcross. They felt the resulting pups were little better than mongrels, and did not deserve to be called Irish setters.

In passing judgment, however, the bench show fanciers neglected to take into account several significant factors. First, although crossbreeding is now regarded by most breeders as an almost criminal activity, it was by no means an uncommon practice well into the

A young red setter locks up on quail during a training session. Note the white markings on the face and chest.



1800's. R. Llewellyn, one of the most important figures in the development of the English setter during the late 19th century, frequently outcrossed his stock to Irish setters to bolster whatever characteristics he felt were lacking in his dogs. The history of all three setter breeds — Irish, English, and Gordon — is laced with instances of crossbreeding which were employed by sportsmen wishing to improve the quality of their gun dogs.

Second, the dog created — or re-created — by the red setter breeders was in fact much closer to the original type of Irish setter. It's pretty well known that early Irish setters frequently carried large amounts of white in their coats, and the solid, dark-mahogany coloring was a later development brought about by the bench fanciers. Also, the early Irish setters were tractable, robust gun dogs possessing the physical and mental requirements to put in a hard day afield — a far cry from the flighty, high-shouldered animal bred solely to pose and trot around a show ring.

Finally, the name red setter was also more in keeping with tradition, harking back to the days when all setters were considered to be of one breed. In Ireland, the dogs are most commonly known as red setters, and at Rusty Baynard's suggestion, the name was adopted to differentiate between the field and bench strains and to reduce the chance that the revived field strain would again be subverted by the bench show standard.

Lest these observations seem

overly critical of breeders associated with the American Kennel Club, it should be pointed out that there *are* AKC-affiliated breeders who are actively involved in breeding and campaigning Irish setters in AKC-sanctioned field trails. One such breeder is Ken Ruff of Sycamore, Illinois, whose dogs have established an enviable record in trial competition. Ruff says that many of the Irish setters now running in AKC trials are descended from much of the same foundation stock as today's red setter, and that the dogs themselves are similar in type: smaller, faster, more athletic specimens than those Irish setters bred strictly for the bench. Ruff believes the objectives of the red setter fanciers and those AKC breeders who campaign their Irish setters in trials are quite similar.

When the National Red Setter Field Trial Club was formed in 1952, the following purposes were outlined: to promote the red setter afield; to breed and develop red setters capable of holding their own as top-flight bird dogs in field trial competition with the pointer and English setter; and to hold regularly scheduled field trials for red setters and to offer championship stakes recognized by *The American Field* and the Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America. That these objectives have been met is evidenced by the performance of those dogs now competing in both all-breed and red setter-only stakes.

To dismiss the club as strictly field trial oriented, with a "win at any cost" philosophy, is a mistake. "People shouldn't be put off by the name of the club," says Bob Sprouse, editor of the club's newsletter, *The Flushing Whip*. "The results of our last survey showed that almost 80 percent of our members are bird hunters, not trialers. Our hunting members are represented on our board of directors, and there are a lot of breeders who are concentrating on developing walking gun dogs."

In conjunction with this trend, the club now sponsors a walking shooting dog stake at its spring and fall championships. Members are encouraged to enter, even if their dogs aren't polished performers. "We're very interested in promoting this type of stake for hunters," says Aaron Bixler. "We probably only sell one puppy out of 20 to field trialers,

with the rest going to bird hunters. We want to involve these people as much as possible."

Don Beauchamp, a top red setter breeder from Cheney, Kansas, agrees. "There's no doubt the walking stakes have created a lot more interest and activity for many members," he says. The winner of these stakes receives a handsome traveling trophy donated by Ed Schnettler, one of the earliest red setter fanciers and an honorary life member of the club.

The evidence suggests, then, that the purposes for which the club was originally founded have been fulfilled, and the "purest challenge" has been met. Skeptics need only watch the dogs perform to see for themselves that red setters *are* capable hunters, demonstrating the desire, stamina, birdiness, and stylish pointing attitude of the best pointers and English setters.

Still, controversy — particularly in regard to the outcrossing policy — continues to surround the breed. In addition to an occasional English setter outcross, some breeders have periodically experimented with pointer outcrosses in an effort to create even bigger-running, harder-driving dogs. The practice has never been widespread, though, and has met with plenty of criticism. But it has helped to keep the outcrossing issue at the fore, so that many AKC-affiliated Irish setter fanciers (and even those of other breeds) still feel that a purebred red setter is non-existent.

According to red setter club members, however, the issue is greatly exaggerated. "The successful outcrossing was that which was done years ago by LeGrande and the other early members," says Roger Boser. "Since that time, most of the outcrosses that have been attempted just haven't worked out. And we now have a very good gene pool within the breed that can be used productively, so outcrossing isn't really necessary."

What kind of dogs are being produced by today's red setter breeders? Bob Sprouse says, "Today's red setter is probably as good a breed as any for the on-foot hunter — the dogs are adaptable, very comfortable to live with, and easy keepers. They're good gun dogs and companions, and they're easily trained — they break for hunting at an early age."



Aaron Bixler agrees. "We're personally breeding for early development in our program, trying to get away from the 'slow-starting setter' stereotype," he says. "We're looking for both natural ability and trainability — we want a dog that is tough enough to absorb training, yet at the same time tractable enough to make a good companion. Most people choose red setters because they are more affectionate and biddable than some of the other breeds."

Regarding the advances that have been made, Don Beauchamp comments, "We're trying to upgrade the breed by achieving some specific goals, and there's just no comparison to the dogs of 20 to 30 years ago. Today's red setters are a lot stronger as basic bird dogs. For one thing, the nose is so much better. But there's also been tremendous improvement in style, tail carriage, and running ability."

Beauchamp's remarks are based on plenty of personal experience. He purchased his first Irish setter for hunting in 1968, and began trialing in 1973. Since that time, he has collected numerous wins with his red setters in club and all-breed competition. In 1985, a dog named Rawhide, bred and handled by Beauchamp, tied with a pointer for the title of Kansas All-Age Dog of the Year — further evidence that the red setter is indeed capable of holding his own against top competitors of other breeds.

What should a sportsman look for if he's considering a red setter as a gunning companion? According to R. J. Schweiger, long-time red setter trainer from Earlville, Illinois, there

A red setter is readied for competition at the National Red Setter Field Trial club's fall championship.

Photos by Jo Ann Van Etten.

are several criteria to keep in mind. "You can tell a lot just by looking at the size, color, and markings of the dog," he says. "Any dog (or parent of a litter) which runs much more than 50 pounds is probably carrying Irish setter show blood, and you want to avoid that. Also, many of the red setters carry white markings and a lighter coat than the show dogs — another good indication of the type you're getting."

Other distinctions exist within the red setter breed itself, and Schweiger says, "As with some other breeds, there's a difference between red setters from the eastern and western parts of the country. The western dogs tend to be bigger-running, because you *need* a big-running dog to win trials in the wide open spaces out west. There are lots of opinions within the club about what constitutes a good dog, but that's a positive sign — it means the average hunter *can* find the specific type of dog he's looking for due to the different types to choose from."

The red setter, the field-bred Irish setter that can and does "hunt with the best of 'em," has made the comeback envisioned by far-sighted breeders of more than thirty years ago. For more information on the breed, contact club secretary Conrad Plevnic, Rt. 2, Box 748, Terrell, Texas 75160; or *Flushing Whip* editor Bob Sprouse, 16607 Moline-Martin Rd., Graytown, Ohio 43432. □