

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF RED SETTERS

By W.E. "Ned" LeGrande (Reprinted from the Flushing Whip)

In my opinion there have been many improvements in our Red Setters during the last twenty-five years. During the late forties and early fifties when I used to spend a lot of time, especially nights hanging around Rusty Baynard's gasoline station, the Red Setter was then a pretty common bird dog. Herm David, too, used to join us when he was in town, and the three of us used to talk, and dream, by the hour about Red Setters with high tails that would point early, break as derbies, and be able to run with, and whip the pointers in field trials. The Red setter enthusiasts of today can't realize how impossible those goals seemed in 1949. Today those desired characteristics don't seem too far away, in fact, some don't seem to be away at all, as they have been achieved, and all are within reach of the dedicated breeder. With the "gene pool" we have developed today, by judicious crossing, it is possible for the dedicated Red Setter man or woman to breed a Red setter that could compete on even terms with pointers in any field trial in the United States. In 1949 this was not possible. The proper genes did not exist in the Irish setter breed. Years and years of selection towards an artificially created bench standard had created Irish setters that might look beautiful in a bench show, but were pump handled, dead heads, in the hunting field. Most of the bench bred Irish, which was just about all we had to work with in 1949, looked like they were bred to pull a milk wagon in harness, rather than to take into the fields to shoot a mess of quail over. Even to this day, in my opinion, the bench bred Irish still reminds me of low tailed Percheron horses, slow and cow gaited. The late Rusty Baynard, and the late Arch Church, Herm David and I tried dogs from countless bench strains of Irish and found all of them to be short on nose, deficient in point, and without exception equipped with pump handled tails. Even so, we ran them in trials, and accepted with good grace, the derogatory remarks by most of our field trial brethren, because of their cow like gaits in the hunting field and their bump and chase type of point.

When Rusty finally did get Jinks broke, at about seven or eight years of age, you could never be sure whether he was actually pointing, or had just stopped to answer nature's call. Even so he could really find wild quail at Petersburg, Delaware where all of the first National Trials were held. We used to kid Rusty that the only reason Jinks could find quail there was because Rusty hunter him there every day, and he knew where all the coveys lived. Askews' Carolina Lady changed all of this as she was small, petite, quick and actually pointed with a tail at 45 degree or better, and was extremely intense on her points. She had been broken by a professional trainer. Hunted some down around Enfield, North Carolina; She, of course, came from Minnesota originally, and was bred by a man named Earl Bond who had kept alive a strain of hunting Irish throughout his life time. Askew's Carolina Lady, and her son Ike Jack Kendrick were 100 percent straight Irish setters. Both of these dogs came along before Rusty and I started our many crosses with English setters. As good as Lady and Jack were, Rusty, Herm, Al

Party, Dave Hassinger and I knew they were not completely what we wanted. They were the best of the 100% Irish at that point in time, but we realized the genes were not there to beat the pointers in the bigger trials, so we decided to go outside to the Irish setters' cousins'. Both of the great English setter breeders Lewellen and Laverick had borrowed genes from the Irish in the early days, so why not let them pay their debt to the Irish, and replenish the point, intensity run, high tail, and most of all bird sense. With the advice of the best field trial brains in the land, at that time, and I refer to Horace Lytle, Henry P. Davis, Henry L. Betten, and Dr. Leon Whitney, we made the crosses with various nationally prominent English setter strains, and the English Setter paid its debt to the Irish Setter by replenishing the Irish setter gene pool, so that it was forever after possible to breed Red setters with early point, high tails, good shooting dog range, beautiful gait, and most of all, bird sense. All with intensity and desire.

I am not trying to take credit for making these crosses; in fact, I have been soundly condemned to hell fire by Lee Schoen, and other bench Irish breeders, and told that I was mongrelizing the Irish setter breed. Even after all these years Lee Schoen, of Kinvarro bench Irish fame, has finally gotten the AKC to not accept cross registrations with American Field Dog Stud Book registrations.

Twenty years ago, at various field trials in New England, Lee Schorn used to run some of his bench Irish in the trials of the Irish Setter Club of New England. His bench dogs were completely out-classed in those trials by the new Red setters owned by Bob & Jim Finn, Cooking Whiskey Cassidy, Arch Church and some that belonged to the writer.

I don't ever remember one of Lee's bench dogs placing in the trials, and he has never forgotten this. In a recent article in the AKC Gazette, which Ed Schnettler kindly sent to the writer, Lee Schoen wrote an open letter to the AKC governing body asking them to have one of their officers attend the recent AKC Irish trial held on the East Coast, asking the officer to throw out all of the Irish setter midgets that traced back to the crosses LeGrande made. Lee says in the AKC article that he pleaded with LeGrande, 20 years ago, not to crossbreed, and thus mongrelize the Irish setter breed. History tells us the early Irish setters in both Ireland and England had white spots on their chests, nose and an occasionally blaze on the head, and that they were a much smaller dog than the bench Irish in U.S.A. in 1949 or 1975. This was so in England as well as Ireland, as my Sulhamstead Norse D'Or would prove. I ran "Shane" for 7 or 8 years with great success, and he was about the size of our present day Red setters and he had a white blaze on his head. And Shane was imported from Mrs. Florence Nagel's Sulhamstead Kennels, with bloodlines that were the bluest of the blue. So, in my humble opinion our crossbreeding did not mongrelize the breed, but to the contrary it gave the Irish setter back his rightful place in the hunting field where he could compete on even terms with the other bird dog breeds. The Irish setter's heredity was not to be bench dogs, as big as draft horses, but to run, and hunt, in

the fields, and to aid man in his hunting and shooting sport, and to help put meat in the pan.

This has been so since Irish setters were first bred where they had to be small so the gamekeepers could throw the net over a covey of quail after the setter had found and set the covey. One of those bench Clydesdale's, the bench breeder's breed today would have never allowed a net to be thrown over the covey. This, of course, before the days of gunpowder. Anyway, I feel we made the right choice of name back in 1950 when we decided to call our great Club The National Red Setter Club, affiliating with The American Field, instead of the AKC. Horace Lytle advised us to do this, and his wisdom certainly makes sense today.

In closing, let me say that after 25 years with Red setters I feel that the Red Setter has come a long way. Most of the credit for this great improvement in the breed should go to the members of The National Red Setter Club. I only wish that Horace Lytle, Henry Davis, Dr. Whitney, McDowell Lyons, Henry Betten, Rusty Baynard, Carl Scholleriberger, John Van Allst and many more I can't remember were still alive to witness the great improvement in the Red Setter, and the explosion in the membership of The Red Setter Club. Also I wish they were here, to see and read, the present day Flushing Whip. In my opinion this extremely high class monthly breed publication that comes out month in and month out, stimulating our interest, holding us together, reporting the trials, selling our pups, and stud services, just might be the single most important factor in the fantastic rise in the field trial and hunting accomplishments of the Red Setter. For this we all have to give our editor and publisher, Bob Kerans, "the man of the decade" award. As to who is right on the subject of Irish setters bred to be like draft horses and to pull wagons, with low pump handle tails, or bred to be midgets (Lee Schoen's term) that cut a field to pieces, point with heaven kissing style, bird crazy, flowing gait, point when 6 weeks old, break easily, and a man can take pride in when he runs in all-breed trials, we will have to let history decide.

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