

The Red Setter

BY BILL TARRANT

Kansas handler Don Beauchamp's dogs are winners in more ways than one

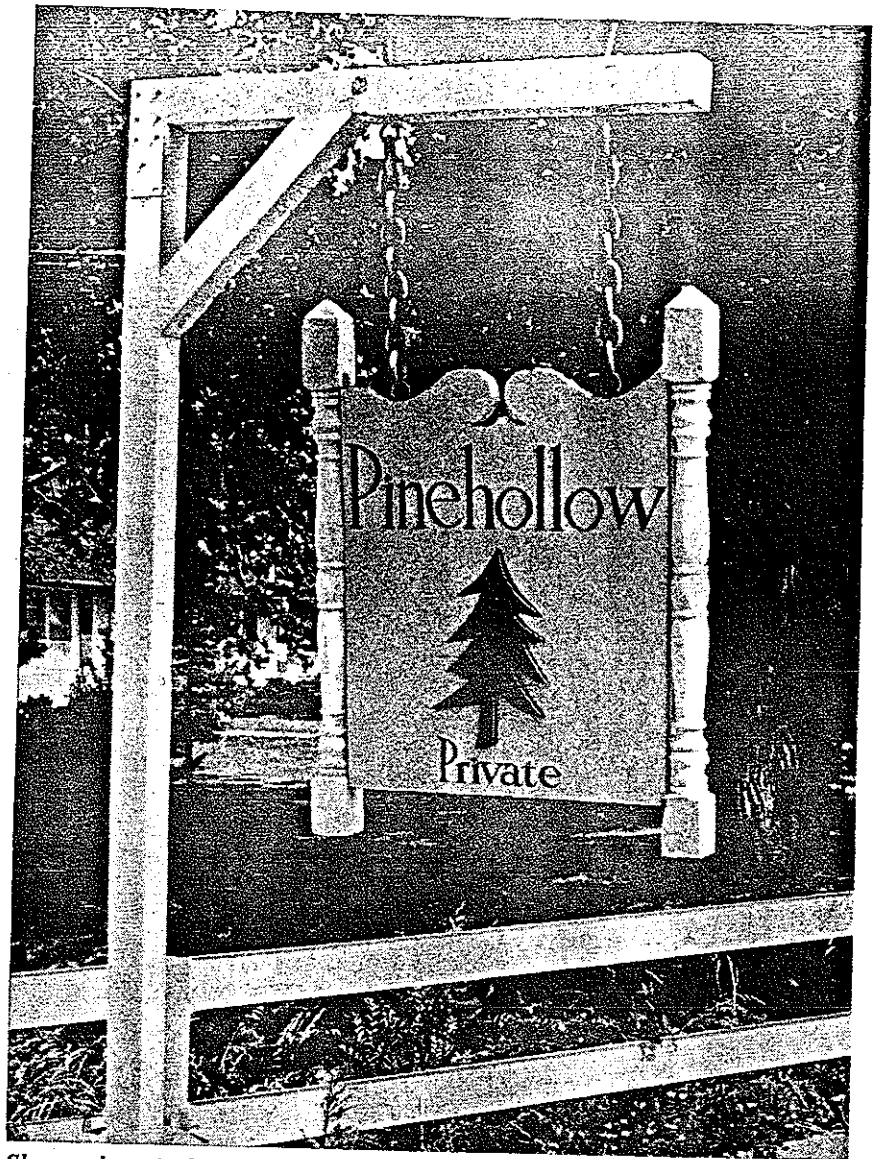
Now comes the red setter. Salvaged from the bench. Back to the field to run and quarter and stand to shot and wing. Not only as a foot hunter's gun dog—which would be enough—but as a class horseback shooting dog that can compete with the high-tailed, stilt-legged, gaunt-waisted English pointers and English setters.

The red setter is here.

Not the Irish setter. There is this difference. The Irish setter is the big-boned, all-mahogany, heavyweight bench and public-fancy product registered by the American Kennel Club of New York. It's the sixth most popular American dog in 1977.

The red setter is a fox-bright, fox-light, usually white-blazed, clay-colored beget of an Irish setter/English setter outcross-and-breedback registered by the *Field Dog Stud Book of Chicago*.

To nugget what's best about the red setter, I've brought you over the camp-coffee-black streams, past endless wheatfields, and under heavy crowned cottonwoods to the damp outback of south-central Kansas. Here's where we'll talk to Don Beauchamp, Beauchamp being a



Shown above is the entrance to Pine Hollow, home of Beauchamp's red setters

French name funneled through England, so it's now pronounced Beecham.

Beauchamp's the present-day standard bearer of the red setter breed; he's the owner and handler of Buddwing, the winningest red setter ever; and Molly, 1978's runner-up in the National Red Setter Field-Trial Club's Annual Classic.

On the night of April 8, 1978, Beauchamp sat at a banquet table in Berea, Kentucky, and received in rapid-fire order: the presidency of the National Red Setter Club, the Duke Award for Buddwing's most wins of the year for any red setter, the W. E. (Ned) LeGrande Award for the most all-breed placements in

a year by a red setter, and the runner-up trophy for Beauchamp's Osage Molly O'Shawn.

This was two weeks after picking up four trophies in Colorado, where Molly took first in the Western Red Setter Quail Classic and first in the Amateur Shooting Dog Stake. Meanwhile, Buddwing garnered second in the Amateur Shooting Dog Stake, and third in the Classic.

Returning home, Buddwing was awarded the Kansas Shooting Dog of the Year laurels, and when I walk into Beauchamp's home and ask about the grand trophy on the fireplace mantle, I'm told it's recent hardware picked up by Buddwing—and for none of those awards that

were mentioned above.

All this was accomplished by a handler who ten years ago didn't even own a dog, had never seen a field trial, and was thinking he'd like to get a pup to take him hunting.

And accomplished by a working geologist who explores for oil and gas, saying, "Luck favors a prepared mind," then substitutes words for his avocation so the dictum goes, "Field-trial wins favor a prepared dog."

But before that . . . let's turn the clock back thirty years. Back to Horace Lytle, popular gun dog writer of that day, who wrote that in order to save the Irish setter it is mandatory that there be a mating with English setter blood. All hell broke loose with this suggestion when into the fray stepped field-trial-hall-of-famer Henry Bettern, who backed Lytle's play with an article that called the salvaging of the Irishman "The Purest Challenge."

Such words stirred bubbles in the blood of sportsmen who always back the underdog. Into the field-dog stud-book offices they came, seeking permission for an outcross-and-breedback. Would the "book" regis-

ter the dogs? "Yes," said Bill Brown, keeper of the book and arbitrator of such matters. Whereupon Horace Lytle's English setter Illsley Chip, son of national champion Mississippi Zev, was bred to Ned LeGrande's Irish bitch, Willow Winds Smada. The beget was bred back to Irish setters for three generations, then the "book" enrolled them as red setters and the purest challenge was begun.

Thirty years later the challenge stands far from met. Still no Irishman has qualified for the national championship held at Ames Plantation at Grand Junction, Tennessee, the Super Bowl of upland dogdom. But the contenders are afield who may qualify to run within the next few years. Already they can beat the good, but not the great. That will be the fulfillment of the challenge.

Enter Don Beauchamp, a man who says he'll stay in the game long enough to take a shot at Ames. Yet his real interest is in breeding, not campaigning. But the challenge-hawk has his claws in Beauchamp's psyche and may fly him all the way.

I say to Don, "Tell us your version of the red setter story," trig-

gering a three-hour monologue which I highlight here:

"Well, Ned LeGrande was the founder of it all. Others might get the credit, but Ned carried the shovel and did all the digging.

"Then two dogs figured in it. Askew's Carolina Lady threw Ike Jack Kendrick, who was used in the third breeding that resulted in the red setter registration. Now, Ike Jack Kendrick had the all-time number of red setter wins until Buddwing broke his record this past year. And Askew's Carolina Lady . . . she's the only Irish setter ever inducted into the Field-Trial Hall of Fame. Got that for her progeny. It was as though she alone fielded all the Irishmen that made up the new red setter breed."

Beauchamp calls off and separates dog pedigrees with all the science he must surely use to mark strata and test core drillings. He sums it up, saying, "Winning with a red setter is the purest challenge in sportsdom . . . taking a minority breed, one destroyed by the bench, and turning it into an all-breed contender once again."

Then he pauses and notes, "The National (Continued on page 196)

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Red Setter Club had as its original goal the development of a class horseback shooting dog. We've done this. Now, some of us want to develop dogs capable of competing in all-age stakes on the major circuit.

"I know we have a ways to go. Yet, back East, where a dog doesn't need as much run, we're entering all-breed stakes and giving them a go for their money. Maybe we don't place, but that's not the point. We're edging up. It's a matter of time."

Beauchamp laughs and says, "Take my own case . . . the first red setter I bought was a little bitch: Shannon. She had that old rocking-chair gait so typical of the ruined breed—kind of a lope—and a low tail placement. Why, when she'd point, her tail wasn't even straight out behind her, it was down towards the ground. And she didn't have class. But she did have stamina . . . she'd hunt all day.

"That's what really helped me. Living in Kansas. Living where the big-league dogs run in big-league country. Not just seeing or competing with also-rans, but seeing the national contenders every weekend. Getting to know right from the start what it was going to take to win.

"Why, some of the dogs I ran against in fun trials . . . How about Clearwater Rex? Here he is runner-up in Oklahoma this year. And I've got a red setter out there running against him?"

"Well, it became obvious I had to

do something else. So I got involved, learned which red setters were doing the winning, what kennels in the country were doing good.

"Now I've always believed in pedigrees up to a point. Still, I like to go with the dogs that are winning today, not ten years ago. When I was getting started, nearly every national red setter trial was being won by the County Claire kennels of California, owned by E. J. Lewis with Stanley Head as trainer. So I called and talked to both these men. And I ended up buying a dog called County Claire's Heather.

I took her out to the fun trials and boy, did I get the compliments. She had a high popping tail, she was quick, all class, and she had range, she could run . . . and now there was all the difference in the world. People were walking up and asking, "Where did you get that dog?"

"But I got her late and she had to be broke for the All-Age, and she was my first dog and I put too much pressure on her. She got to the place she didn't want to point liberated birds. And I knew for certain, gun dog training must start early. So Shannon was retired to be a brood bitch and a hunting dog, and I began looking in earnest for a field-trial contender.

"Then I found a dark red male up in Minnesota and decided to breed him to Shannon. Out of that litter came Molly, who just took

runner-up in this year's National. That was an interesting mating. This Shawn of Kaymar, the stud, was a super bird dog, had a lot of style, a lot of wins, but he didn't have the range. What the heck? I had the run in my bitch. So the only thing I was looking for was biddability and good nose. I got it.

"But I didn't keep Molly. Sold her. Only to have to buy her back. The dog I kept . . . he just didn't pan out. That's the way with this game. You think you know! You don't know nothing. Maybe when you admit that . . . things start going better for you."

I hear Beauchamp continue, he's not to be turned out or tuned out, too much enthusiasm for that. But I'm thinking inside: *trial and error, research and search, read and breed. It's always the same. There is no other way.* And I'm thinking, too. *How many men I've known who became good shooters, good fly casters, good dog trainers and started and ended reading magazine articles and books. "I can only do by doing it," some say. Not others. Their success comes from the word. Paper knowledge. Having that ability to digest the best and repeat it afield on their own.*

It's during this time that Beauchamp and I leave the house. Out into a constant Kansas wind, so the wrap-around pond slaps the shore, the weeping willow branches have a whip to them like kite tails.