

The breed is on the upswing," says Sid Page Jr., a professional bird-dog trainer from Ewing, Ill. The breed Page is talking about is little known to the public, but it is gaining favor with field-trialers who seek a challenge and with hunters who are looking for meat for the pot. It is known to its enthusiasts as the red setter, although the Field Dog Stud Book officially registers it as the Irish setter. By whatever name, the dog is essentially an Irish setter with a dash of English setter blood.

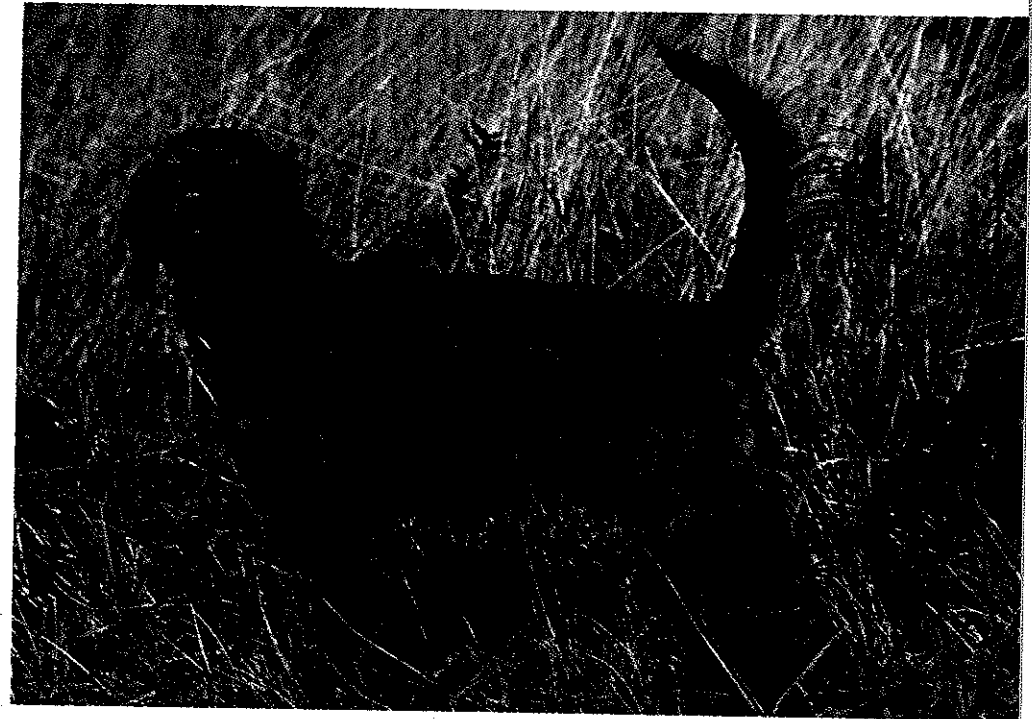
Page was one of a hundred or so field-trialers from all over the U.S. who attended the recent National Red Setter Shooting Dog Championship at Rend Lake in the Little Egypt prairie country of southern Illinois. The trial grounds covered 3,000 acres, and the dogs, which ran in braces for an hour, were followed on horseback by handlers, judges and gallery. "You want a dog that gets out there and hunts," says Page. "You want a dog with range, a dog that's looking for fencerows and tree lines, a dog with style. We're looking for dogs that can run with anyone."

Like field-trial English setters, the red setter is smaller than its American Kennel Club counterpart. The breed also lacks the deep mahogany coat of the show Irish, and the red setter is sometimes splashed with white on the head, chest or feet. "To be very blunt about it, their weakness is their appearance," says Alex Soutar of Gardiner, N.Y., who has trained all breeds of pointing dogs. "But in the field they have a beautiful fluidity of movement. They don't pound the ground, boom, boom, boom. They just flow."

"As far as trainability is concerned, I would rate the pointer first, the English setter second and the red setter third," says Page. "This is on average. Some red setters are very quick to learn. When you are breaking dogs to be steady to wing and shot, some red setters may falter a bit, lose their style and enthusiasm, especially if you put a lot of pressure on them too fast. I guess you could say they are a softer dog than a pointer, but the breed has been improving in the last five years. When I get a red setter in to train, I'll set him down with one of my big running pointers to see if he can compete. I like to have a month to evaluate him. If he's not making it, I'll send him home. I'm not going to embarrass the owner,

embarrass myself or embarrass the dog by running him in a trial when he can't compete. When I put a dog in a trial—a red setter, a pointer or an English setter—I want people to acknowledge that dog and say, 'That's a nice dog, Sid.' That means something to me, maybe a little bit more if it's a red setter."

The top red setter in the country right now is a tiny (35 pounds at best) 4-year-old bitch named Dainty Celtic Sally. "I just didn't like the looks of a pointer as a pet or a dog to hunt with," says her owner, Peggy Boling of Dillsburg, Pa. "I wanted a dog that was cute and fun to be around. A red setter is an excellent house dog. It is not snippy at all and gets along with children. It trains well and is



Irish with a dash of Limey

The stylish red setter, which is fast gaining popularity in the field, is mostly Irish and a small part English

easily housebroken. It's a dog you can enjoy in the house, provided it gets sufficient exercise." Trained by Clair Gross of Wellsville, Pa., Sally beat out pointers and English setters to win the 1977-78 Open Shooting Dog of the Year award of the Pennsylvania Field Trial Association, and within her own breed she is currently ahead of her nearest competitor 927 points to 559 for the Ned LeGrande Trophy, given annually to the red setter with the most all-breed wins.

Last year Sally won the National Red Setter Shooting Dog championship on pheasant, and this year she won the National Red Setter spring championship on quail. Although she placed first at Rend Lake this fall, the championship was withheld, a not uncommon occurrence in trials, because she was lost for about 15 minutes; the sandy reddish coat of the breed is at times a disadvantage in fall trialing because it can blend in with the grass and brush. In contrast, a pointer or English setter that gets half a mile away "stands out like a cigarette," noted Frank Mudd, one of the judges.

The red setter is the brainchild of W. E. (Ned) LeGrande of Douglassville, Pa., now 66 years old, a vice-president of Gudebrod, Inc., the fishing-line (among other interests) people, and the man for whom the trophy is named. Back in 1949, LeGrande, who grew up in Vir-

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ginia with hunting Irish setters, decided the time had come to rejuvenate the breed whose once great field abilities had been bred out for the show bench. He and a friend, Rusty Baynard, ran an ad in *American Field* asking about the availability of good field Irish setters. Of maybe 40 dogs shipped to them on approval, LeGrande kept only two or three. After he heard a trainer rave about a bitch owned by a farmer in Enfield, N.C., he made a vacation trip south and found the farmer.

"He didn't want to let her go," LeGrande recalls, "but we sat down over a jug of cider and finally he said, 'Everything I raise is for sale.'" LeGrande bought Askew's Carolina Lady, the only Irish setter now in the Field Trial Hall of Fame, and he bred her and ran her for 10 years, "even when she was full of pups." LeGrande says, "Her progeny were great, but they didn't have quite enough range to compete with pointers or English setters, so we decided to crossbreed.

"We wrote to *American Field* and pointed out that since Laverack and Llewellyn [prominent 19th-century British breeders] had used Irish setters to develop the English setter, perhaps it was time for the English setter to pay back the debt. They said we could crossbreed to an English setter, and then after breeding back to Irish setters for three gen-

erations, the fourth generation could be registered as pure Irish. Dr. Leon Whitney at Yale, an authority on dog genetics, advised us to get the best English setter possible and to make sure that we got one with red or orange spots, or otherwise we'd wind up with black dogs."

An orange and white English setter, Illsley Chip, a son of National Champion Mississippi Zev, was bred to LeGrande's Willow Winds Smada. "We got kind of a straw-colored litter," LeGrande says, "and we bred them back to sons and daughters of Askew's Carolina Lady. We kept the Field Dog Stud Book informed of every breeding. Nothing was kept secret. We also started the National Red Setter Field Trial Club because the Irish Setter Club in the AKC wanted none of this. They want dogs the size of Percherons for the bench, but a field trial is a race to the birds, and unless you have small, fast dogs you're going to get beat. Besides, we want a dog with the tail straight up so you can see it in the field. The bench Irish have what we call pump-handle tails; they point straight down to the ground."

Before LeGrande suffered a heart attack in 1965 his red setters had won more than 500 placements in trials. His forced retirement from the field did not impede development of the breed, because he had given puppies away free

to members of the National Red Setter Field Trial Club all across the country.

Through the years, the AKC was willing to register red setters listed as Irish setters in the Field Dog Stud Book, but in 1975 the AKC announced it would no longer do so. The AKC did not explain why, but it was because AKC show-type setters were getting skunked in their own field trials by the reds. Owners who have both red and Irish setters know full well which is the better hunting dog.

Randy Kubacz of Central Islip, N.Y., who belongs to both the National Red Setter Field Trial Club and the Irish Setter Club of America and whose reds were registered with the AKC before the ban, says, "If you're going with any Irish setter in the field, you're better off with one of the reds. The show Irish setter that will win on the bench is too big. He lopes in the field because his conformations are wrong." To which his wife Anne Marie, who handled their Ramblin' Red Banshee to second place at Rend Lake, adds, "Show dogs are more prone to be easily excited. You have to be careful if you breed to show dogs because of temperament. At six months, show Irish setters are running around like lunatics, but the red setters are calm. Why, it takes me more time to train a bench dog than a field dog."

Although the red setter is far behind his show Irish cousin in numbers—the Field Dog Stud Book registers 2,500 a year while the AKC registers more than 40,000 Irish setters annually—the breed doubtless will become more popular as its hunting abilities become more widely known. Puppies are inexpensive, \$100 to \$150 on average, and there usually are ads of dogs for sale in *The Flushing Whip*, the National Red Setter Field Trial Club monthly, which is edited by Bob Sprouse in Graytown, Ohio.

Red setters can be trained to work in close, and some foot hunters prefer them for grouse because, they say, the reds won't spook a bird the way a white dog might. But to field-trialers, the pleasure of owning a red setter lies in the challenge. Thixton Miller, chief of the Division of Wildlife Resources in the Illinois Department of Conservation, ran two of his dogs at Rend Lake, and he says, "Anyone can go out and buy a pointer and win. But you take a red setter and you go out and beat those rascals—as I have—and it's fun." **END**



Dainty Celtic Sally, trained by Clair Gross and owned by Peggy Boling, is one of the best around.