

Around the turn of the century, people began to wonder what had become of the Irish setter. Few were seen in the field, and even fewer seemed capable. Nat Nesbitt was one of the outstanding trainers of the time. Further, he had been highly instrumental in raising Pointers from a rather lowly estate in the bird dog world to a plane that was now equal or above the Llewellyn. He had developed ~~Jingo~~ and handled Jingo, among other winners, and was highly regarded for his penetrating analysis of the character and abilities, not only of the pointing breeds, but of the individual performers.

As a result of letters he received inquiring as to the possibilities of rehabilitating the Irish setter Mr. Nesbitt wrote "The Irish Setter's Chances at Field Trials". The article was originally published in the January 9th, 1915 issue of the American Field. In 1962 W.E. LeGrande requested that it be reprinted "without changing a word". It was then published in the December 1st, 1962 issue of the Field. Knowing what it took to bring the Pointer to the high estate he now enjoyed, Mr. Nesbitt was well aware of the requirements to bring the Red Setter back.

THE IRISH SETTER'S CHANCES AT FIELD TRIALS By Nat B. Nesbitt

In the last year or so I have been in receipt of many letters, asking me for an opinion of the Red Irish dog and if I considered it possible to rehabilitate him as a factor in field trial competition. I confess that I have no extended experience with the Red setter, having had the pleasure of only training a few, but, taking my experience in helping to place the Pointer in the forefront with the English setter, it can be done, if someone, or if a number of those interested in this breed will come forward with the "SINews OF WAR" and the ambition and love for the red dog that will carry them through good report and evil report, until success shall crown their efforts.

A quarter of a century ago, in fact, almost at the initiation of field trials in these United States of ours, the writer began trying Pointers, confident that the short haired dogs would soon begin to catch up with the procession.

I had trained a small-sized Irish setter for a St. Louis professional man and she was a good bird dog, but not typical of the breed in form and appearance, a descendant of the old Erin Irish dogs once so popular in southern Missouri, good bird dogs but lacking in type. About this time a gentleman, an attorney of Galena, Illinois, sent me a red Irish bitch that filled the bill as to form and color. I remember exactly the date of her arrival. I was living then at Saxton, Missouri, and with her arrived Robert Van Horn and a friend to visit and look over my string of dogs. Both of these men were more than friends and, though both have passed on to the mysterious beyond, I have always considered my life better for knowing them.

The bitch I worked on prairie chickens in southern Kansas, and taking her south, I worked her on quail in Mississippi the following winter. She developed great pace and range, together with unsurpassed bird sense. Her faults were the usual faults of the breed, a rather low carriage of the head and lack of action, by which I mean a merry tail in motion.

To illustrate her qualities I will cite an instance that, to me, showed an action amounting to reasoning power. One morning I had laid out a course which carried us across the back side of the Gray plantation. The back side of this plantation had been allowed to grow up in switch cane and there always were a few bevvies in or near the cane, and on first rise they were sure to make for the cover, where no shooting was to be had, the cover was so dense. I was running the Irish setter bitch and a pointer, and sure enough they found and pointed a bevy and, being flushed the birds made for the cover, but not before the gentleman hunting with me made a "double". The red bitch retrieved a bird and I picked her up and put her in the dog wagon, though not before she had made several efforts to escape. The gentleman with me asserted that he had crippled a bird with his second barrel, but, being in a hurry to reach the "Hunter League" plantation, that had not been hunted that season, we did not tarry to look for the bird. Late that afternoon we returned across the Gray plantation on our way home, but nearly a mile east of where we crossed in the morning. Just about opposite of where we flushed the bevy the red bitch was found missing and, desiring to get home before dark, I awoke the echoes with my whistle, but no Laura B showed up. As she was absolutely stanch on point, I was positive she had found a bevy of quail and as I always made a practice to hunt up a pointing dog, thus assuring they would not be left, I at once started to hunt for her, when the driver of the wagon called out that Laura had come back. Hearing my voice, she came flying to me, the happiest dog one ever saw. She had in her mouth the dead bird killed by my companion! She had had it marked down, and, though cold, that wonderful nose of hers made it easy to find.

I sent the bitch back to her owner the following spring and told him she was an excellent bench show proposition and that he should exhibit her. He followed my advice, and from thence in through a pretty long life, as dogs go, she remained a mug hunter. She changed ownership many times, but I doubt if she ever had a chance to point a bird. Her case is an exemplification of one of the many reasons why the red setter occupies such a low position in field trials.

One thing may be relied upon -- handlers will produce the kind of dogs judges place as winners. There have been several handlers who started in with Irish setters in field trials and they were quite enthusiastic about what they proposed doing with the red dogs. There was Andy Gleason at Alma, Kansas and he simply was going to clean up all the starters, but the next time I met him, with the single exception of old Patsy D, his kennels were filled with English setters and pointers. Then George Gray came down from the Northwest with a big string of Irishmen and about one trial cured him of the reds. And so it goes. What the breed needs is some strong capable man with the sinews of war and who will not be discouraged easily.

Perhaps the advocates of the red dog might take a chapter from the bringing forth of the pointer. We all know what we had to contend against trying to convince the world -- and especially the field trial world -- that he had any durable qualities whatever. To Edward Dexter who furnished the sinews of war, and to Captain MacMurdo, who went abroad and brought back the dogs which furnished the "lever", in the shape of Mainspring and his sister, Hops, our thanks are due mainly to the present high stand of the pointers. From the union of Hops to King of Kent was produced Rip Rap and from the union of Mainspring and Queen Ill came Jingo. Here the prepotency of the "Mike -- Romp pointer blood" had its chance to demonstrate itself on

on this side of the herring pond. About this time Messrs. Heath and Anthony imported Graphic. This dog was of little benefit to the pointer from a field point of view, being a large, soft dog, neither fast nor wide, and after trial, quickly discarded. I first saw Mainspring at Grand Junction and, while he had faults, he was the best of the imported dogs, in my estimation. In conversation with Captain MacMurdo he made the statement that the pointer breeders were making a mistake in not breeding to Mainspring.

As the writer became more interested in pointers, he felt satisfied that the breed simply was suffering from neglect and from not having the best dogs or the right dogs selected. I recollect distinctly the well-meant advice given to me by a prominent judge at the time. "Nat," said he, "you are wasting your time trying to improve the short-haired dogs. They are not and never will be the English setters."

Since then I have seen that same judge place pointers over the very best of the English setters, and I am now assured the same can be done for the Irish setters. But at the start anyone contemplating such an attempt must be a person of intense determination. It has taken fully a quarter of a century to put the pointer in the high place he now occupies in the field trial world. In that time we had trials many a year strickly for pointers alone and I suppose there are plenty of field trial habitues who know nothing of those days of ~~early endeavor~~ earnest endeavor.

I am sure such sucessful breeders as U.S. Fishel must smile when they recall the pionter with which they tried to break into the game. The first dog owned by Mr. Fishel I ever saw in a field trial was a black pointer named Don Fishel, which he sent south with George McLin and started in the trials. This dog had no desirable qualities and really most of the handlers looked upon him as a joke, but to Mr. Fishel's everlasting credit be it said that he possessed a receptive mind and quickly caught on to the game, and from that first venture he has steadily kept on until now it is a fact that a pointer bred by U.R. Fishel is considered to have a "look in" in any trial in which he starts, not because of being owned and bred by Mr. Fishel, but because the followers of field trials have confidence in his judgement and feel assured that a dog backed by it merits consideration.

I well recall the first pointer I started in field trials. The dog was Trinket's Bang, by Croxteth -- Trinket, and he was drawn with Bryson's English setter, Lillian, by Gladstone -- Sue. I knew I had a good dog, but felt beaten before the start from the fact that he was a pointer, just simply a dog of a discredited breed. If anyone cares enough, it would be well to look up the account of the heat as reported in the AMERICAN FIELD. The judges selected did not make their appearance and a reporter for a Sportsman's paper consented to act, thus combining both offices of judge and reporter. That was repeatedly done in the old days, as it was a very good way to secure a good report, as naturally the reporter-judge would not criticise his own judging. Looking backward now after the lapse of so many years, I have to smile. The pointer found three bevvies of quail, pointed them stanchly, and some singles. The setter found no bevvies and pointed a few of the scattered birds, none of which she located. The pointer was ordered up while on point and the heat awarded to Lillian. The next season I faced the same setter bitch in the Western field trials and in a long, arduous heat Trinket's Bang absolutely smothered her in all things necessary in a first class field trial dog.

I cite the above about the conditions encountered in bringing forward the pointer simply to encourage the owners and handlers of the Irish setter, and really I believe they will not encounter as much difficulty in boosting their favorites as did the friends of the friends of the short haired dogs. In those days there were only two regular field trials; viz., the Eastern and National. Occasionally a new club would be formed and after one or two attempts at holding trials would get "cold feet" and quit. Now there are many field trials, so if one falls down in one trial he has many others in which the conditions may come his way. Then again, a few of the handlers in those times were financially able to campaign a string of dogs and the distance between the trials was so great as to keep the majority from attempting it. Now many of the handlers work on a good salary, their employers furnishing large preserves, well stocked with game, with saddle horses, kennel buildings, etc., and frequently stock cars in which to move with dogs and horses, and with one and often two or three kennelmen. A handler so situated does not have to worry, whether he wins or not. As Billy Titus said the last time I had my legs under his dinner table; "We are too old and all that is left to us is the fact that we blazed the way for the present day handler and his methods."

Now I have taken up much valuable space, but if I have said anything encouraging to owners of the red Irish dog I will feel amply rewarded.

Looking back at Mr. Nesbitt's article, We think what a pity it was that the Old Erin Irish of which he wrote, small and with good field ability, were allowed to die out. How much could this stock have helped the Red setter in 1950? The existence of these dogs or others of similar type in this era, did lead to rumors of their existence at a much later date, but they could not be found in 1950. An indication of the times is Mr. Nesbitt's reference to these dogs as lacking in type. The professional handler of this day was more closely aligned to the bench show than he is today. So when he recommended that Laura B be relegated to the bench show, it was no doubt because he felt she would be more successful there than at the trials. This in spite of her bird sense which he obviously felt was extraordinary. But Mr. Nesbitt had no cause to be concerned with the preservation of the Irish setter's field ability. This he assumed to be the responsibility of those who cared about the breed, as he, Captain MacMurdo, Mr. Fishel, and Edward Dexter had cared about the pointer.

It would be some time yet before any really effective action would be taken along the lines suggested by Mr. Nesbitt. There were individuals who worked at it, alone and remote. If Mr. Standish, Mr. Phol, and Mr. Neimeyer had had the "Flushing Whip", it could have been different.

It would be Hoarce Lytle who would sow the seed of this publication and of the National Red Setter Field Trial Club. He wrote "Irish Setters in the Field". The article appeared in the January, 1950 issue of Field and Stream. It promoted the idea of crossing Irish with English setters. It stirred controversy - but as we shall see, it produced results. Mr. Lytle, a member of the Field Trial Hall of Fame, was gun dog editor of Field and Stream for 20 years. He was twice secretary-treasurer of the ~~Amateur~~ Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America, and he judged field trials from Minnesota to Georgia, including the National Championship of 1933.

He began in field trials with an Irish Setter, Smada Byrd, descendant of Otto Phol's line. Mr. Lytle bought Byrd from Dr. L.C. Adams in 1921. How great was Byrd? No one today could really say. Without a doubt she was second to none in the fields around Dayton in her heyday, and Dayton was the center of bird dog fanciers in the twenties. Her field trial record was not exceptional, but was singular in that she was about the only Irish entered in field trials in her day. She had 12 placements out of 24 times down. Her "press was good", because Hoarce was a writer and Byrd was his beloved.

If the writings were accurate, she was exceptional in at least one respect - she hunted anything with feathers with the same finesse - grouse in Michigan, pheasant and quail in the middle states, quail in the south. This feat in itself gave her some claim to immortality. Byrd has been nominated for the Field Trial Hall of Fame. She may never make it, because her trial activities were less well publicized than her hunting ~~experiences~~ experiences. Of a certainty, though, if ever there is created a Hall of Fame for bird dogs, Byrd will be a front runner.

Concerning Byrd in field trials, Mr. Lytle wrote, "What were the factors behind the wins of Smada Byrd? In my belief they were these: (1) The keenest brain of any canine I have ever known: (2) Conceit- of the sort that prompted Julius Caesar to explain: I'd rather be first in a little Iberian village, than second in Rome: (3) Experience in how and where to find birds - lots of it: (4) Complete understanding and love between herself and her master." He wrote of two first place wins. Byrd won the Miami Valley All Age with such a wide going race that Hoarce felt she might run out of Fayette County and clear to Chillicothe. But she didn't quite go that far, and with a hard hit find, beat the best Ohio had to offer.

The other first was at the Southern Ohio Field Trial Association, a highly prestigious club. Judges were Charlie Jordan of Monticello, Georgia and C.W. Campbell of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Byrd was first, while second to her was the great Phil Essig. Hoarce writes that "Soon as the decision ~~was~~ had been annouced, Hochwalt came to me and handed over his hat, saying, I've allways said I'd take my hat off to her the day she'd ever show me a performance to force it - which she has just done".

Byrd's fame may have outshone her fortune, but that same fame gave the Irish setter stature in a time when it was hard to come by for a representative of the breed. Surely the bright flame of her fame cast a ray of encouragement through the gloom of a lot of dark days of little hope. Thank you Byrd, for keeping us in the search. And thanks to Hoarce Lytle for sowing the Red setter seed.

IRISH SETTERS IN THE FIELD

A strain of red dogs, distinct from the bench variety, can be produced for hunting by selective crossbreeding

By Hoarce Lytle

This is a subject on which I may exercise a fraternal prerogative and speak frankly about Irish setters as field dogs. I was an Irish setter man myself some years ago. I always had other breeds, but my first field trial win was with an Irish setter and this associated me with the breed. There probably were many that didn't know I had any other dogs. So, as one Irish setter man to another, I shall speak somewhat crisply.

In the field trials at Sauk Center, Minnesota, about 1884 an Irish setter named Friend was the winner. She was a bitch owned by Fowler Stoddard of Dayton, Ohio. Dr. Bruette once wrote of an Irish setter that outran, outranged, and out-birded the famous Cowley's Rodfield's Pride in a field trial on the prairies - and Pride still rates as one of the great chicken dogs of all time. Then, be it remembered, it was Joe, Jr., that defeated the great Gladstone in a match race of three days. Joe, Jr. was the son of Elcho, an imported Irish setter.

Coming to more recent days - 25 to 30 years ago - we had my own bitch Smada Byrd, McKerry's Pat, and Madoc Bedelia. Between them, these three cooled the pointers and English setters a good many times. But the good ones were becoming fewer and fewer. I shipped Smada Byrd to Oklahoma to be bred to McKerry's Pat; but she didn't catch. There wasn't another living Irish sire worthy of her. At least none with a record to prove it. The breed's popularity as show dogs is what proved their undoing.

Only recently I was invited to judge an exclusive Irish setter field trial in another state. I accepted - both for old times sake and to bring myself up to date on the breed. With but two possible exceptions, the performances were of the sorriest sort. The breed, from the standpoint of hunting excellence, seems to have slipped farther and farther since my active days with it. I found that the conflict of the shows is still what's doing the damage. This fact is incontrovertible. One man in the gallery owned several but had no entry in the trial I was judging. When I asked him why, he told me that his best dog was entered in a show next week and he couldn't afford to let him get a burr in his tail or damage his feathering!

After the trial the secretary came to me with a question: "Mr. Lytle, is it worthwhile trying to go on as we are? One reason we asked you to judge for us was because we wanted to ask you this question firsthand.

"Are you sure you want me to tell you what I really think? I asked him. "I'd rather not; for if I do, I'll speak honestly."

He asked for it - and was so manifestly sincere that I gave it to him straight from the shoulder. This was the gist of what I told him. Irish setters were once red and white. All of the white has been bred out of them - and along with it has been lost too much of the breed's "heart for the hunt." There's no use at all to try to keep going on now on a basis of show and field. The sacrifice has been too great. The breed has gone too far over the hill and is now too close to the bottom as a hunter. There are not enough good ones to provide any basis for breeding. As field dogs the breed is doomed - unless a few bold, determined men get together and divorce themselves from show dogs and develop field specialists. I told him what I would do about it if I were 30 years younger. I believe there is only one thing that can be done.

The best possible bitches from Ollie H. Neimeyer of Ohio or F.J. Lefferdink of Nebraska must be obtained. I believe that these two have the best red dogs in America that have been used constantly for hunting. Breed these bitches to the best sons of such an English setter as Mississippi Zev, National Champion of 1946. Register the offspring as cross-bred setters in the Field Dog ~~Studbook~~* Stud Book. Thereafter, breed back offspring to purebred Irish setters - but the dogs and bitches in the meantime should have seen as much hunting as can be given them. Then when the English setter mating does not appear in a four-generation pedigree, the offspring resulting therefrom again will be - and can be so registered - purebred Irish setters. Yet that potent "Zev influence" will be in there, and should linger on beneficially for a long time. Even then, the dogs resulting from such matings, should be kept ye hunting - and far, far away from the effete influence of the shows.

Will anybody do it? I wonder. If they don't the breed's a gener as a hunting dog.

✓ a charter member of the NESFC ;

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Mrs. Myra Berol had had an interest in the Irish as ~~much~~ as her husband. After his death, she continued the Cloister Kennels, and ~~was~~ to breed and campaign the Red dogs. Rufus produced a number of winners. Cloisters Wendy McTybee was campaigned by Mrs. Berol. Pride of Erin or Pride of Millis was run by J.J. Cassidy, Autumn Mike by Dr. F.A. Shuffleton, Cloisters Red Robin by Austin Smith, and Rufus Killarney O'Kerry by Al Kipp. The Cloisters breeding became a part of Schnet's Red setters also. Schnet's Hellfire and Rufus of Havelock were two of Rufus's sons. He had Cloisters Mona McTybee and Schnet's Timuquana Jackie was 75% Cloister's breeding. She the granddam of Schnet's Tara who produced Saturday Night Ed. Then The Golden Doll and Wilson's Red Doll were by Schnet's Hellfire, who is also prominent in Miss Colleen of Kaymar, Shawn of Kaymar, and King Flame of Kaymar.

Sally Rambler out of Cloisters Red Robin was campaigned by Ray Hagan, and she in turn, figures prominently in the Dale Bruns, Hubert Hines, ~~and~~ Dave Stout, and Floyd Lopez dogs. Pride of Millis produced Erin's Sally who produced Mighty Fawn, foundation bitch of County Clare Kennels.

So the Cloisters breeding, itself built on the Elcova breeding of Elias Vail, ~~lives on in many of today's Red setters.~~ these in turn tracing to the kennels of Otto Pohl, lives on in many of today's Red setters.