

# *Irish Red Setter Club 1995*



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# *Divergence of Field and Show Irish Setters in the U.S.*

*By Bob Sprouse*

The field and show Irish setters in the U.S. began to be taken on separate ways soon after the first bench shows were organized. The working dog men foresaw the effect that rigid breed conformation standards would have upon the dog's working qualities. The first U.S. stud book, the American National, kept by the old Chicago Field had been turned over to the American Kennel Club when that registry was formed. The pointer and setter people in 1900 persuaded the American Field to restore a field dog registry, which became the Field Dog Stud Book and the parting of field and show dogs began. Many of the Irish setter people stayed in the AKC as Irish setters were having great success in bench shows. Over the years the AKC Irish working qualities became so degraded that the breed had all but disappeared from the field by the 1950's. A group led by Ned LeGrande decided to revive the field Irish. They found that working within the AKC breed club, the Irish Setter Club of America was unproductive and formed the National Red Setter Field Trial Club and, with the co-operation of the late William F. Brown of the American Field, began the movement to save the field Irish from oblivion in the U.S. In 1952 only about a dozen Irish setters of good field ability were found despite an extensive search by LeGrande. Of these, only three were of potential breeding stock, Dr. Leon F. Whitney the noted canine geneticist advised LeGrande.

Faced with such a small breeding base, and with the approval of Dr. Whitney, LeGrande turned to a solution that had been suggested by Henry L. Betten and Horace Lytle in articles published two years before. Betten and Lytle, who had owned the last good field trial Irish in the 1930's, advised a cross to an orange and white English setter. The Field Dog Stud Book registered crossbreds and after three generations of breeding to purebred Irish would register the fourth generation as Irish setters. Lytle had an English setter, Illsley's Chip, a son of Mississippi Zev the last English setter to win the National Field Trial Championship at Grand Junction, Tennessee. Lytle offered LeGrande Chip, who was orange and white and even carried, far back, some of the famed old Campbell red setter blood. The cross breeding was made and, being unacceptable to the AKC and Irish Setter Club of America, the separation of show and field Irish setters became a divorce.

Not long thereafter LeGrande found Askew's Carolina Lady, bred by an old market hunter of the Minnesota prairie. Lady was a superb hunting dog and pointed with the high style demanded by FDSB trial judges. Lady proved to be a field trial winner but, more important, proved to be a prepotent dam and is recognised as the primary foundation dam of the revived field Irish setters in the U.S.

Today, the descendants of Lady and a son, Ike Jack Kendrick, which LeGrande found after buying Lady, with the Illsley's Chip-Willow Winds Smada cross are winning field trials in the highest level of FDSB competition. Several are now all breed champions, a mere dream in 1952.

Meanwhile the show Irish have diverged ever farther from the working dogs. They weigh up to 80 lbs., are narrow chested, ewe necks, ears resembling Afghans and exaggeratedly long heads. They scarcely can be recognised by the description in their breed standard published by the AKC. A few ISC people have tried to breed a dual show-field type, but these aren't accepted by show judges and while some are fairly decent field dogs, they aren't up to the LeGrande dogs' performance.

By 1950, the Irish breed in the U.S. was in such low repute with hunters and trialers the founders of the National Red Setter Field Trial Club decided that, to avoid identification with the show Irish, they must use the old traditional Red Setter appellation. The Red Setters, the Irish setters of the field, are as varied in type as would naturally be expected when working performance is the primary factor in selecting breeding stock. In a 1980 article in the Field (London) by Mr. Wilson Stephens titled When Working Breeds Go To The Dogs, he states, "Any livestock to which a breed standard applies thereafter functionally degenerate". The Red Setter breeders in the U.S. have agreed with Mr. Stephens. The predominant Red Setter type is a broad chested, short coupled dog of 40 to 50 lbs. Their colour ranges from a light chestnut to dark red, most with a large white chest patch, often a blaze and brow stripe. And, of course, they point with high head and tail.

It is too bad, but the separation of field and show in the U.S. is complete and permanent. Even dogs I have imported from Mr. O'Dwyer and the late master, John Nash, are disdained by the show element of the US