

Notes on the Llewellyn Setter

Written by Mr Wm Humphrey, December 1946

Fifty-one years a breeder of the pure Llewellyn breed of English setter, a breed that has established the greatest field trial winning record of all breeds of pointing dogs in the world during the past seventy-eight years.

The first two dog shows even held in the world were in 1859, the first at Newcastle, which was for setters and pointers only; the second at Birmingham which was for pointers, English setters, retrievers, clumber spaniels, cockers and other breeds of spaniels. These shows were organised by the late Mr R Brailsford, a well known gamekeeper and trainer of pointers and setters.

The first field trials in the world took place at Southill, Bedfordshire 1865. Sixteen setters and pointers competed. These trials were judged on the following point system: nose 40, pace and range 30, temperament 10, staunchness 10, backing 10. This event was won by Fleming's Gordon setter champion "Dandy" who gained the maximum of 100 points. The great field trial pointers champion "Hamlet" and Brocton's "Bounce" competed and gained 90 points each. Both this and subsequent field trials were organised by Mr William Brailsford. These two men, father and son, were the promoters of both the first dog shows and field trials. Mr William Brailsford was one of the best known pointer and setter trainers in Great Britain in those early days. He had charge of the late Mr Hayward Lonsdale's Ightfield Kennels, which were at one time the most powerful field trial kennels of pointers and setters in the world. In 1890 he took the Ightfield dogs and competed most successfully at the American and Canadian trials. The sportsmen of those countries presented him with a gold watch as a memento of the occasion. In 1924 the American sportsmen presented me also with a gold watch as a memento of the work done by my dogs at the American field trials. The first field trials to take place in America were in 1874 at which twelve dogs competed. The stake was won by a black setter named "Knight". The first championship stake was held at the National setter and pointer field trials 1869 and was won by Mr Garth's famous pointer champion "Drake". The following year it was won by the first of the new Llewellyn breed, Mr Barclay Field's champion "Bruce", a son of Mr Edward Laverack's champion "Dash II" and Mr Statter's "Rhoebe". The following year it was won by Mr Thomas Statter's champion "Dan", a son of Mr Barclay Field's "Duke, and again out of Mr Statter's "Rhoebe". "Dan" was purchased by the late Mr R Llewellyn Purcel Llewellyn at the highest price ever paid for a setter of that period. It was from this dog and the two Laverack bitches bred by the late Mr Laverack, dual champion "Countess", the first dual champion in the world and her equally brilliant field trial winning sister "Nellie" that Mr Llewellyn founded his world famous field trial winning strain, a breed later given separate registration by the American Field Dog Stud Book.

Had it not been for field trials the world would not have known such famous setters or such great pointers as champion "Drake", champion "Bang", champion "Hamlet", Lord Sefton's "Sam", "Fuist", "Naso of Kipping", Brocton's "Bounce", Statter's "Major" and "Croxteth". It was from these great setters and pointers that all the greatest field trial dogs were produced, not only in Great Britain but in America. It

must not be forgotten that even though stud books were unknown in these early days, English breeders were careful in recording the breeding of their dogs, and that the bloodlines were as pure as any dogs of the present day, for there were a number of breeders who guarded the

blood in their kennels long before bench shows and field trials, and long before the formation of The Kennel Club.

As a boy of nine years old I witnessed my first field trial in 1892, and winning my first field trial stake in 1894, at that period being the youngest field trial handler in the world, and from that date winning at field trials not only in my native land, but in other countries, and producing many of the greatest field trial dogs in history, even as late as 1948, heading the field trial winning list in Great Britain with my Llewellyn setters. This is probably the longest field trial record for any person past or present. If I may be allowed to give my candid opinion of field trial dogs and judges of the present day, which applies not only to Great Britain but possibly throughout Europe, it is still that far too many persons have judged and are in fact still judging setters and pointers who have probably never owned, much less trained a successful shooting dog, much less many brilliant field trial performers. Unfortunately these persons do not know a high quality bold ranging game searching dog from a common meat dog, as the Americans would term such a dog. That all such persons know are the mistakes a dog may make and are lacking the experience to recognize the essential sterling qualities.

There is no question that the present day dogs are over broken and that their natural hunting and self reliance abilities have been curtailed, and are afraid of making mistakes. That they range too close and keep cutting in and back to their handlers, and far too much attention is paid to quartering, that is expecting a dog to quarter and range over ground that the dog's experience should have taught it does not hold game. An experienced natural game hunting dog should know whether the ground it is hunting is holding game or not. The dog's natural instinct should be to cast out with its head high, searching with nose in the air feeling for any body scent, and go to the game. As long as a dog leaves no game behind, and will ever respond to its handler, no dog can be going too wide, neither can it be out of hand. The ideal dog is the one that possesses a choke bore nose; the dog that finds game at a great distance, which is most important when hunting wild game; the dog that willingly acknowledges its brace mate's point; that is steady to wing and fur and shot, and ever hunting in front and for its master. A great field trial and shooting dog should require but little handling.

There is no question but that the best field trial dogs are not only the best shooting dogs, but are the best suited for falconry. This kind of ancient sport is far more exacting and dependable on the dog's sterling qualities than that required of a field trial dog. For this purpose the falconer must have the perfect dog that not only keeps contact with its handler but with the falcon, high in the sky. Not only must such a dog be of high courage and boldness but must be positive on point, and which possesses great scenting power, the dog must range over the ground at great speed with a high head, and never stopping to potter or foot scent, or waste time by hunting over barren ground, but must bore out into the wind and go right to its game with the least uncertainty or effort. Nothing discourages a noble falcon more than waiting on high above a slow pottering, foot scenting, false pointing dog. Ever since I was able to support a hawk on my gloved fist, I have found that all the greatest setters and pointers that I have worked were always the best hawking dogs, and during these many long years my best field trial dogs have always been used chiefly for the sport. To have made the following bags which I have done with three peregrines, one tiercel and two falcons, thirty-seven brace of grouse in one day and three hundred and nine brace in five weeks, not only have I had to have three perfect game hawks, but I was fortunate in having at the time five of the best field trial setters that has been my pleasure to have owned at one period.

The chief faults of the present day field trial dogs are back casting over the same ground, creeping, foot scenting and false pointing. If judges would only pay more attention to these wretched faults, and less attention to the small mistakes that are made by a bold hunting dog, we in Europe would not be witnessing such moderate dogs, not only in competition but winning at field trials. In England the time allowed for each pair of dogs in competition is at the discretion of the judges, which from my experience is a great mistake and leaves this method to the element of luck. Having competed and judged at the American field trials, I consider that the American system is by far better than ours, and much more favourable for the competitor. In that country, each pair of dogs are down for an allotted time, and in the big events such as the National Champion Stake are for three hour heats. If a dog falls out during the period it is cast out of the competition, and seldom are dogs running for a second heat. After such tests, it is quite easy to find the best dog. I consider that the judge's first duty is to sum up a dog's great and natural qualities, and its faults lastly.

Two of the greatest endurance tests on record took place in America. In each case two native bred setters were matched against two Llewellyn setters; Campbell's "Joe Jrn", an Irish setter, was run against Bryson's imported Llewellyn dog "Gladstone", December 1879, for five hundred dollars a side, the dogs to hunt from sunrise to sunset, that only the number of points on quail scored by each dog to decide the winner. At the end of the two days contest "Joe Jrn's" score was 61 and was the winner. "Gladstone's" score was 52 points. It may be said that "Gladstone" was heavily handicapped by having to run with a recently broken tail which was wrapped in separate layers of canvas, bound and stuck together by coats of varnish, but despite this his actions were by far the smoothest and he was the fastest mover.

"Joe Jrn" was however a crossbred dog, his sire "Elcho" being an Irish setter. whilst his dam "Buck Jrn" was a native English setter. At that period "Joe Jrn" was one of the outstanding field trial dogs in America, having won the American field trial champion stake 1877. This stake was first competed for in 1876 and was also won by the imported Llewellyn setter "Drake". The following extract is taken from the Chicago Field, 14th December, 1878: "Drake" the champion 1876 and "Joe Jrn" champion of 1877 tie for the championship of 1878 and agree to divide, shake hands, bury the hatchet of the native versus the blue blood question, and call honours easy. It was but fitting that two such grand dogs, each a champion of previous years, should show their ability to defend their championship against all comers and divide the honours. The work of both was grand, and he who would not give full credit to each is so prejudiced that his opinion lacks weight. Looking at them as they ran we could not have decided which was the better of the two, and felt perfectly satisfied that the judges would tie them. Talking with one of the judges after the trials were over, he informed us that were his life the forfeit he could not decide which was the superior. "Joe Jrn" proved a harder nut to crack than he was credited to be, and like "Drake" demonstrated what he had done so well once, he could do it again.

"Drake" is black and white, owned by Lather Adams and is by Mr Llewellyn's Laverack dog champion "Prince" and out of his "Dora", litter sister to his celebrated "Dan". "Drake" was imported from Mr Llewellyn's kennel and was bred by him. He was run but once before the trials in 1876 at Memphis when he won the championship. It is a curious coincidence that at this meeting and also at Memphis in 1876 he should have gone to the front in both the championship and brace stakes, the only four races he ever ran; at Memphis he made four of his points in ground bare of cover but oak leaves, and this year got three of his points in the same way. The third place winner Dog

Whip in this stake was also a Llewellyn. "Gladstone" was also bred by Mr Llewellyn and was by his champion "Dan" and out of his Laverack bitch "Petrol".

In December 1883 the second endurance test took place. Again the native English setter "Grousedale" was matched against the Llewellyn setter bitch "Lit" for one thousand dollars a side for a three days test. This was described in the Press as a real test between a native bred dog and the blue bloods, as the Llewellyns were termed. The weather conditions were the worst possible, sleet and ice covered the ground. By the afternoon of the second day the native dog quit and the contest was given to the Llewellyn bitch, who it is said, despite the sleet, ice and cold rain flitted over the frozen ground with the greatest ease, and from all appearances seemed fit to run the entire three days, for during the time she ran she did not show the least desire to give up.

The greatest field trial endurance test ever recorded in Great Britain was between the two celebrated field trial setters, Armstrong's Llewellyn champion "Dash II" and MacDonna's English setter dog champion "Ranger". The following is a Press report of the competition for the Kennel Club champion cup for the best setter or pointer, 1877: Mr Brewis has a grand dog in "Dash II" who has now won all four all-age stakes out of five, being a good second to "Ranger" in the fifth. Between the two it is a near thing, as the two judges must have thought when they gave them three hours and twenty minutes trial, after seeing them down an hour together the night before. My opinion is that "Ranger" goes the fastest, as for pace no setter has been bred that can beat it, but "Dash" is the better worker; he goes to his game with more method and he is so beautifully broken that it is a pleasure to see him work for his owner. I cannot believe that one is better than the other as regards nose, for both are perfect in this respect, and as for stoutness, one would have to follow them for a month before one could get to the end of either. "Dash" is by far the best looking one that has ever been brought out at field trials. He is very powerfully built, being twice the size of his sire, Mr Laverack's "Blue Prince". Then for blood he cannot be surpassed for he is rather more than three quarters Laverack blood, whilst his grand dam "Kate" was own sister to Barclay Field's "Duke", the sire of Mr Llewellyn's famous "Dan". I have held a strong opinion that "Dash" is the best setter in England, and I would rather breed to him than any other.

Perhaps I may say that after Mr Llewellyn purchased this dog from Mr Brewis at one of the highest prices ever paid at that time for a setter, it was chiefly from this dog and his "Countess Bear", winner of the first Kennel Club Derby 1875, from which he founded his Bondhu family.

Although "Ranger" is not a pure Llewellyn setter, yet he is very high in that breeding. His sire possesses a very high percentage of Laverack blood, whilst on his dam's side is from nearly the same breeding as that of Statter's "Rhoebe", who was without question the greatest field trial producing dam of all time. From this brief record of endurance tests I have not given any that have taken place with pointers, in fact there is not any record that a pointer was ever competed in such a test.

The first dog show in America took place in 1876, and the first Annual Westminster Kennel Club, New York Dog Show was in 1877. At this show champion classes for native and imported dogs, also for bitches that had won a first prize at any bench show in USA or abroad, Class I, champion English setter dogs. The winner was the Llewellyn setter champion "Leicester", a son of Mr Llewellyn's "Dan" and his Laverack bitch "Lill II", whilst the

champion class for bitches was likewise won by the Llewellyn bitch champion "Dart", a daughter of Mr Llewellyn's Laverack dog, champion "Prince", and out of his "Dora", sister to his "Dan". Class 6 was for native English setters and there were thirty-one competitors. There were also classes for Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Irish Water Spaniels, Retrieving Spaniels, other than Irish Water Cocker Spaniels, also Field Spaniels, also classes for Fox Hounds, Harriers and Beagles, as well as most breeds of sporting dogs. In the special prize list class for setters of any breed, dogs and bitches, thirty-five competed, the winner being champion "Paris". In the class for both English and native setters the winner was again champion "Dart". I am not able to give the names of the other winning setters or pointers as the catalogue which I have of this show is not marked. Several owners of setters and pointers in Great Britain competed. One of the judges for this show was the Rev J Cummings Macdonna of England of field trial champion "Ranger" fame who judged Gordon setters, pointers, mastiffs and St Bernards.

In these early days setters and pointers were of the dual purpose working type. Many of those early bench champions were winners in the most important field trials. Champion "Paris" for example was the outstanding bench champion in America, yet he was equally as great at field trials and was placed third in the American Field Trial Champion Stake 1876 and again third in this stake 1878; and he was also bred by Mr Llewellyn. "Gladstone" and "Drake" were also big winners on the show bench. These remarks also apply to all other breeds of pointers and setters. Today unfortunately we see two different types, one the field trial and working type and the other the bench show champion type which is not capable of doing the work that it was intended to perform. This sad state of affairs also applies to all breeds of spaniels.