



Brilliance on a knife-edge

David Tomlinson looks at the high-performance Gundogs that excel in pointer and setter trials

If you've ever fancied a big silver trophy on your sideboard, forget about cricket, golf or tennis. Trialling is the sport you need to compete in, but not just any old trialling: pointer and setter trials are the sport for you. Some of the most splendid silver trophies ever crafted are competed for annually by the small but dedicated band of pointing-dog aficionados. I was reminded of this recently when I went to watch the open stake at the English Setter Club's (ESC) 168th field trial meeting.

The ESC is the oldest Gundog club running under Kennel Club rules. Founded on 1 December 1890 in Birmingham, its initial aim was the "improvement of the English setter, not only in regard to perfection of form etc,

but in respect to practical use in the field." It has remained true to those principles ever since.

The club organised its first field trial on the Bradfield estate near Cullompton in Devon in 1893, and has been holding trials ever since. In the early days, the puppy stake was the most important fixture, and it carried substantial prize-money. Some £70, plus specials (extra prizes) went to the winner of the puppy stake in 1926. This would be the equivalent of around £3,500 in today's money. Today, the prize-money is much more

Spectators and handlers at the English Setter Club's field trial meeting at Great Livermere

modest — a mere £35 for the winner of the open stake that I watched — but the silver trophies remain the same.

Arguably, the club's most impressive trophy is that for the "best English setter at the spring trial meeting, belonging to a member". This impressive piece of silverware, which is much too big to fit on the average mantelpiece, has a long and distinguished history. It dates from 1904, and was first presented in 1905. Today, so many names have been engraved on it that it has two bases, as the first became full.

For many years Captain W. Parlour had a virtual stranglehold on the trophy, winning it with the same dog,

FTCh *Sharnberry Whitestone*, from 1951 to 1958. He failed to win it in 1959, but did so again (with eight different dogs) from 1960 to 1968, and from 1972 to 1976, notching up an unprecedented 23 wins.

I soon discovered that for the handlers of English setters at the stake, this was the trophy they most wanted to win. Pointer and setter trials are open to all our traditional



DENNIS LONGWORTH, WHOSE SETTER ENSAY TIVA OF BRINGWOOD WON THE OPEN STAKE