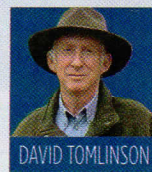


WINNERS AND JUDGES (L-R): DENNIS LONGWORTH, DAVID AMSDEN, RICHARD MACNICOL, FIONA KIRK, DOMINIC GOUTORBE AND SARA CHICHESTER

## Fresh blood

The best English setters may not be found in these islands



DAVID TOMLINSON

**I**t's easy to explain why English setters have had something of a resurgence in pointer and setter trials in recent years, as several leading breeders have gone out of their way to introduce fresh blood from overseas. This is now paying dividends, as the results demonstrate so clearly.

Though the English setter may have been originally bred, developed and refined in these islands, it's much more popular overseas than it is here. It's the top gundog in Norway, where it is used for hunting willow grouse and ptarmigan. It's also popular as a shooting dog in the southern US, and most of the Norwegian dogs have been bred from American lines.

English setters are also popular in the Mediterranean countries, and I've seen some great examples in my travels in Spain, Greece and Italy. For rather too long we assumed that, because the English setter has its roots in the UK, this was where the best working dogs could

**"For too long we assumed that the best working setters would be in the UK"**

be found, but the truth is rather different. They are popular in the show ring — there were 188 entries at Crufts this year, for example — with the result that show-bred dogs are more numerous than working examples in this country. As with most show-bred gundogs, the animals destined for the bench tend to be heavier and less athletic than their working counterparts. It's hardly surprising that British-bred dogs have lost their edge in the shooting field when the emphasis for so long has been on showing rather than shooting.

Continental setters are invariably expected to retrieve, something that we don't ask our dogs to do. However, many are natural retrievers. Enthusiasts will tell you that they aren't asked to retrieve here because their work is to find the game, and picking-up when shot is the work of the spaniels or retrievers. There's always the worry that asking them to retrieve will make them unsteady.

I've always had a sneaking suspicion that we have adopted the Continental pointers at the expense of our own native setters and pointer. Given the right dog with the best breeding (possibly overseas), is there any reason why an English setter can't be worked like a German shorthaired pointer? If the Spaniards and Greeks can do it, why can't we? **ST**

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breeds of pointing dogs: English setters, Gordon setters, Irish setters, Irish red and white setters and (English) pointers. All these were competing in the stake, while the list of handlers included most of the leading names in the sport, including several past winners of the champion stake, the top prize for pointing dogs.

### Setters dominate

It was several years since I had last been to a pointer and setter trial, and then pointers were dominant. Today it's setters. Dominic Goutorbe, the president of the ESC, told me that in the first eight open stakes in the mainland UK this season, four had been won by English setters, three by Irish setters and one by a Gordon.

In only one of these stakes did English setters fail to finish first or second. Seven different English setter dogs were involved, so it's not a matter of domination by one particularly talented individual.

Dogs are great levellers, and none more so than pointers and setters. They are high-performance dogs that run on a knife-edge between brilliance and being out of control. Even the top handlers are all too familiar with the long walk to retrieve an errant animal that has ranged too far. However, there are few more stirring sights in the gundog world than to see one of these dogs quartering at a gallop, head up, nose working, and feet not apparently touching the ground. As a mere spectator it's easy to see why working a setter or pointer is so addictive.

Conditions at the trial I went to, held at Great Livermere in Suffolk, could not have been more difficult. The ground was as dry as a bone, the sun shining brightly, the wind gusting from the north and east. There was no shortage of birds (pheasants or red-legged partridges), but there was precious little scent for a dog to find them, so points were few. Pointed birds are always saluted, when flushed, by the Gun: only three shots were fired during the open stake.

It was anyone's guess as to whom the eventual winner might be, but the judges, Richard MacNicol and David Amsden, had been impressed by Dennis Longworth's seven-year-old Gordon setter, *Ensay Tiva of Bringwood* in the first round, when he had an outstanding find. This, coupled with clean ground work, was sufficient to clinch the stake, and to make Tiva an FTCh, as it was his second open win. It was a popular victory, for Dennis — a retired headmaster and all-round field sports enthusiast — is a long-standing supporter of the sport.

Fiona Kirk, the ESC's secretary, came second with her dog *Upperwood Zeus of Woundales*, so took home the silverware for the best English setter, a trophy won several times by her mother. Dominic Goutorbe came third with his English setter, *Gibeltarik Troy at Upperwood*, a dog imported from Gibraltar. Sara Chichester won the award for the best Irish setter at the meet with her dog *Bowward Carrabullawn of Wiscombe*. It was unarguably a setter-dominated meet. **ST**

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