

# A field trial with a difference

→ **ADRIAN BLACKMORE** reports on The English Setter Club's 'Bettie Town Glenprosen Challenge'.

Saturday, August 13 2016, was a very special day in the history of the English Setter Club, the country's oldest gundog club running under Kennel Club rules. Founded in December 1890, the English Setter Club's first field trial took place on the Bradfield Estate, Devon, in April 1893 – though it was another 58 years before its very first grouse trials were held at Stanhope in County Durham, in 1951. Although field trials are run as closely as possible to replicate an actual shooting day, they have historically rarely involved the shooting of live game, so there has nearly always been an element that is missing. However that was not to be the case with the Bettie Town Glenprosen Challenge.

This 'one-off' field trial was run as a proper day's walked-up grouse shooting with a team of four experienced Guns, one of whom was Robin Batchelor, owner of the Glenprosen Estate. The estate is not only an exciting driven grouse shoot, it has also been a flag bearer for shooting over pointers and setters for many years, and the home team has a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the sport. It is a magnificent mixed sporting estate which straddles the south-eastern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park in the Angus Glens, and a superb venue to hold this very special event in memory of the English Setter Club's late president, Bettie Town,



**Adrian Blackmore** is Director of Shooting at the Countryside Alliance. County Durham based he is especially knowledgeable about our uplands, moorland management and grouse shooting.



who died in 2013, aged 89.

The Pointer Club, the Gordon Setter Field Trial Society, and the Irish Setter Association, were each invited to select a team of six dogs from their respective breeds, to compete with the English Setter Club, each handler being restricted to a maximum of two dogs. With English, Irish and Gordon setters and English pointers competing against each other, the dogs were tested not only for steadiness on the wing, but, because the grouse were being shot, also on the fall. Stamina also played a major part in the day, as each dog had to run for a minimum of 15 minutes, with some having to work downwind beats. And that did not include the time taken to pick-up shot grouse, a task that was expertly carried out by the estate's gamekeepers with their dogs.

The judges for the event, Colin Organ and Fiona Kirk, have considerable experience with setters and pointers, both in the

world of field trials and game shooting. The Guns also had experience in shooting over setters and pointers, and it was marvellous to see how they were able to be selective when shooting, picking out the old or weak grouse from each covey – and avoiding the 'cheepers', or birds that were not yet fully grown, of which there were a few with it being right at the start of the season.

With blue skies and sunshine, there was a real sense of anticipation in the air, and having received a briefing from Bruce Cooper, the headkeeper, the Guns joined the competitors and spectators and set off for the hill, the excitement growing as they climbed higher and higher up the Glen.

First to run was an English setter and Gordon setter – and before long the English setter, running at full pace, slammed onto point. The handler positioned the Guns on either side of the dog, and everyone held their breath as the point was worked out. Suddenly, a covey of grouse burst from

the heather, shots were fired, and the first grouse was in the bag. This set the scene for what was to be a very special day, and it was both exhilarating and a real privilege to see the dogs do what they were bred to do, and in such a stunning location.

At the end of the day, the overall winners were the English Setter Team; Dom Goutorbe, Gerry Devine and Meryl Asbury, with the top dog being Dom's Field Trial Champion Upperwood Hera – which also happened to be the Guns' choice for best English setter. The top downwind dog was pointer Fearn Questron. The Guns' choices for best Gordon setter, Irish setter, and pointer were White Paws of Gawcott, Field Trial Champion Coldcoates Rapid Meg, and Frosted Elfin of Fleetstalk respectively, with the latter also winning the keepers' choice.

Bettie would have loved every moment of this remarkable day and the memories that it would have brought back, and it is only sad that she couldn't have been there to enjoy it for herself. At the age of 19, Bettie had gone to work as secretary to Captain William Parlour at Croft-on-Tees in North Yorkshire, and it was there that she was introduced to his kennel of Sharnberry English setters, and became a proficient shot, shooting grouse over them on the Newbiggin & Hunstanworth Estate on the Durham/Northumberland border. Bettie helped train the setters alongside his keepers, and the first one she handled was Field Trial Champion Sharnberry Whitestone. He became the top winning English setter in Britain, and won the English Setter Challenge Trophy for six consecutive years between 1951– 56.



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Gerry Devine's English setter dog Field Trial Champion Ballyellen Cody



The Gun is Robin Batchelor, owner of the Glenprosen Estate. The handler is Dom Goutorbe, captain of the winning English Setter Team with Field Trial Champion Upperwood Hera, the top dog and Guns' choice from the English Setter Team

Bettie won this trophy for the last time in 2002, aged 78. She also won the Pointer and Setter Champion Stake three times with Sharnberry English setters.

Bettie never missed being out on the moors on the Glorious Twelfth, something that she continued doing well after Captain Parlour's death when the estate was handed over to his niece Daphne Scott-Harden who, along with her family, are just as passionate about grouse shooting and dedicated to the management of the moors as he had been. The family have been great supporters of pointers and setters over the years and have hosted the Yorkshire Gundog Club's setter and pointer trials in July every year since 1949; a unique achievement.

Bettie was a true sportswoman. There could have been no more fitting tribute to this remarkable woman than the Glenprosen Challenge, and an enormous thank you must go to all those who supported this special day, in particular the Glenprosen Estate for hosting it, and making everyone so welcome. ●



Dom Goutorbe receiving the Guns' Choice Award from chief steward David Hall and Glenprosen Estate owner Robin Batchelor

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