

WILLIAM J. RASBRIDGE

1901– 1994

WATENDLATH IRISH SETTERS



In the Irish Setter Association, England 1994 Annual Review Mr. W. Bryden wrote the obituary of his friend William (Bill) Rasbridge who died in December 1994 aged nearly 94 which read:

“In his time he strode across the canine world like a colossus, internationally, nationally and, of course across our breed. Every subject he became interested in he studied in depth. His memory was phenomenal, his power of recall being such that pedigrees of Irish Setters through the past 150 years were produced more or less as a matter of course. It was this knowledge that helped the breed through those traumatic periods pre- and post- war II when the Irish Setter was fighting for its very existence against the ravages of PRA (rcd1). It was he, after a comprehensive study of genetics who created the PRA (rcd1 test mating) scheme which saved the breed. But he did so much more, taking over the field trial section of the Irish Setter Association before the second Great War and getting it started again, becoming Hon. Secretary of the ISAE after the war and initiating the first red setter championship show anywhere in the world in 1946, arguing the case at the Kennel Club (UK) for show champion status for gundogs, and on and on and on – the catalogue of innovations seems endless. A big man in every sense of the word, in stature, integrity, intelligence and intellect, it will be many a year before dogdom finds another like him.”

With the aim of importing a stud dog I briefly corresponded with Mr. Rasbridge in the early 1970's when investigating Irish Setter kennels in UK that were free of PRArcd1. Eventually importing in 1975 from Janice Roberts, Cornevon Dreamer of Oakdale who became a SA Champ and was twice Best on Show All Breeds. Dreamer's pedigree reflects Rasbridge's Watendlath Joao O'Pandy as Great Grandparent and so appears in the ancestry of many of today's South African Irish Setters.

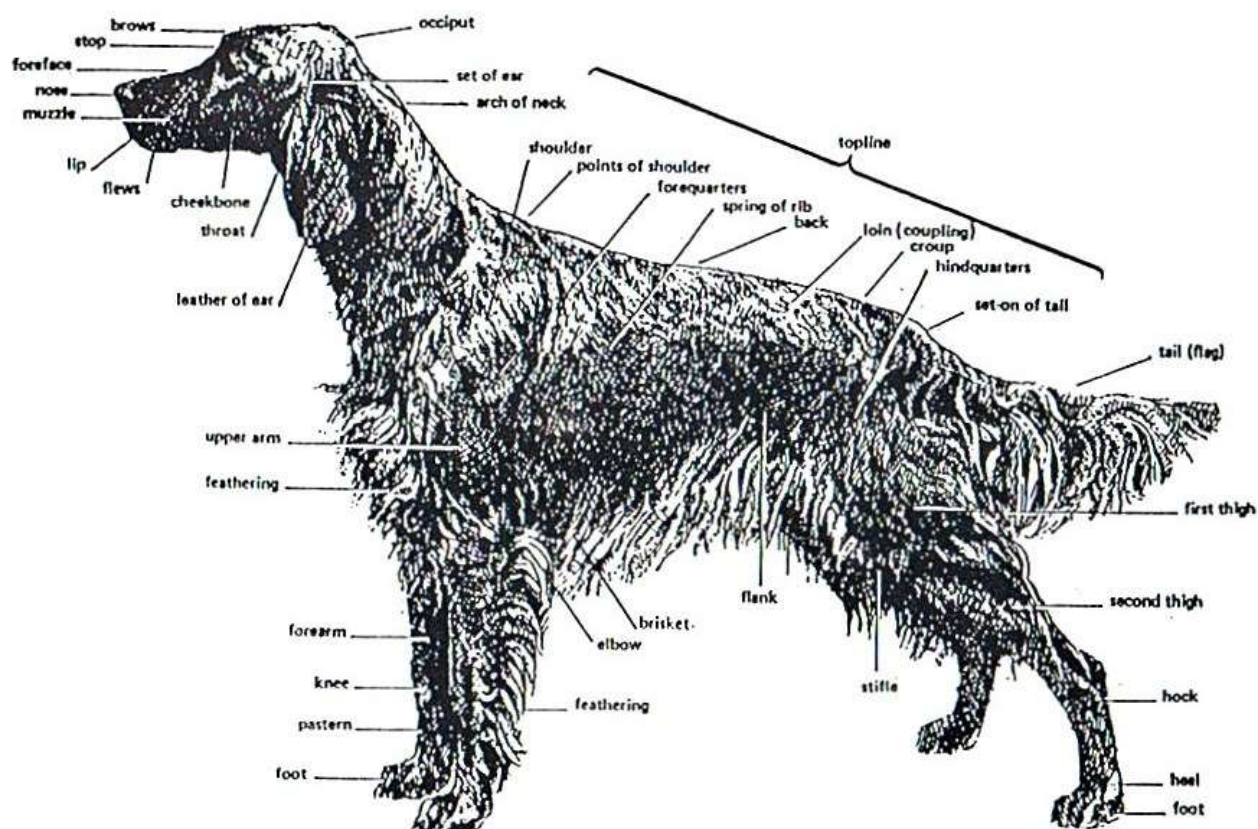


Judge William Rasbridge with his Championship Show winners

In the seventies Rasbridge intended publishing a book on Irish Setters, but contributing to so many other authors books and being a regular contributor to publications such as Our Dog newspaper and Club Newsletters his own Irish Setter book never materialized. However, one of his manuscripts concerned the interpretation of The Breed Standard which is published here for the reader's edification. Bridget Simpson

INTERPRETATION OF THE IRISH SETTER BREED STANDARD by Mr. W.J. Rasbridge

The official standard is not, and is not meant to be, a detailed description of an ideal Irish Setter. It merely sets out the essential and main characteristics. The first breed standard was drawn up by a committee of the Irish Red Setter Club, Dublin and was published in April 1886. The present day standard varies very little from that of 1885, The men who drew up the standard were nearly all practical shooting men and, when preparing it, had in mind the configuration of a dog which experience had taught them was required to do the job of bird finding under the conditions to be met with on an Irish shoot. In passing, it may also be mentioned that they were also clearly concerned, from personal motives, to boost the all red to the detriment of the parti-coloured. This idea of function must always be kept in mind in assessing an Irish Setter, even one that is intended simply as a pet. Only if it is, can the requirement "must be racy" be correctly interpreted. Shooting in Ireland where conditions can be rough, weather inclement and birds scarce requires a dog which can combine stamina with speed, which is not cumbersome, but can turn quickly into its birds, which does not get discouraged by rain and wind and which keeps on the job with zest even when there appears to be no game. A whippet dog with the build of a sprinter is hardly likely to fulfil these requirements, neither is a heavily built cloddy dog. An Irish Setter is sometimes described as being "cobby". If it is, it is not racy and therefore not typical.



The above diagram was drawn by Mrs. Sue Oakley and was first published in the book *The Irish Setter* by Janice Roberts. It is reproduced here to assist novices understand canine terminology

Mr. Rasbridge continues:

Quality is a difficult thing to describe. All that can be said of it is that a dog of quality has an air which does not come just from sleekness of coat and a well groomed appearance. Its carriage and general appearance at once proclaim it is a well bred animal.

Expression is again difficult to describe, but once seen, the true Irish Setter expression is unforgettable. It is at once wistful and alert. Nothing is more untypical than a flat deadpan look in an Irish Setter or a hard harsh look. The eyes should always give the impression that there is life in the brain behind them. Expression is not how the dog appears to you, but how it looks at you. It is dependent not only on the alertness and mind of the dog, but on the shape of the eyes, their spacing and how they are set in the head. A small beady eye is wrong, as is a large round one. Expression must suffer if the eyes are placed too close together or too far round the side of the skull. They should be on a line at right angle to the dog's long axis. Nothing helps more to ensure correct expression than a well marked stop, an almost perpendicular step-up from the top of the foreface to the top of the skull and prominent sharply cut brows, below which the eyes look straight out along parallel lines.

The next section of the Standard, that dealing with the head and skull, is the one most frequently misinterpreted. Because the head is required to be "long and lean" there is a tendency to think that the longer and leaner the better. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is one essential requirement in any dog, that there should be a harmonious relationship between its parts typical of the breed. That is what is meant when a dog is said to be "well balanced" or "proportionate". This applies to the head as much as to any other part of an Irish Setter's anatomy, from which it follows that a head may be too long or too narrow, relative to the dog as a whole or may be too narrow for its length. To put the same thing another way, it may be too long for its width. An Irish Setter's head, broadly speaking should fit into a system of parallel lines. Looked at in profile when the dog is standing normally on a level surface, the top of the foreface should be horizontal, with the top of the skull parallel to it on a higher plane. It is entirely wrong for these two lines to converge towards one another. Setters in which that occurs usually lack stop and have blunt brows lacking chiselling. A Roman nose that is to say a downward curve to the end at the foreface, is entirely untypical, ugly and undesirable. A slight upward tilt to foreface, such as a Pointer should have was more common at one time than today. It is not desirable, but is more excusable than a Roman nose. The underline of the jaw should be clean cut and parallel in the top line of the foreface. There should be an absence of throatiness. Looked at from above the sides of the skull and of the foreface should be in parallel to one another and to the head, tail axis of the dog. Any coarseness in a Setter's head usually occurs not in the skull pan itself, but in the zygomatic arches, the bony structure at the side of the head just behind the eyes. The less these arches bulge the better. There should be no falling away before the eyes. As regards the foreface its width, which should be maintained throughout its length, should not be much less than that of the skull pan. It should finish in a square muzzle making an angle of near 90 degrees with the topline. An over jutting nose with a muzzle cut away and devoid of lip is abominable. On the other hand too much lip is undesirable.

Here I refer the reader to the photograph of the late Mrs. M. Hempel's Danny O'Moy (a litter brother of Ch. Norna) and Flair of Bowland. Note the cut away muzzle of the bitch and the rather overdone lip of the dog, the downward slope, behind the eye of the bitch's skull and her too low-set ears. Above all note how the topline of her foreface begins to slope up to the topline of the skull instead of being carried without change of direction to between the eyes. The stop should come midway between the point of the nose and the occiput, the bony protuberance at the rear of the skull when the Standard says this should be well marked it does not mean that it should be exaggerated at the back of the head. The skull pan should be elliptical, in a horizontal plane and should not be broken up by bony ridges running down its long axis, or from that axis at an angle towards the eye. The other requirement of this section, as of that headed "eyes" are self-explanatory and call for no elucidation.



Foreground dog Danny O'Moy born 31.05.1926
Behind bitch Flair of Bowland born 04.06.1932

The positioning of the ears is important and can affect expression. A keen dog will often lift its ears. That can be excused whereas misplacement cannot. As a rough guide, the top of the ear should be on a line somewhere near half-way between that of the eye and the bottom of the zygomatic arch. A fault which has recently tended to increase is that of the overlong ear. Such an ear is one which when stretched forward reaches well beyond half way between the eye and the nose.

It was not until the KC assumed responsibility for all breed standards and set itself the task of fitting all of them into a uniform frame that the standard of this breed made any mention of "mouth". Pre-war it was rare for any specialist judge to examine mouths. In other countries, however "mouth" has always had much attention paid to it and in some of them, malformation there or faulty dentition is a disqualifying fault. That is something to be borne in mind when exporting. How a British judge rates a faulty mouth depends on his general attitude to the fault and the degree in which it is manifest. Personally I would not be greatly concerned if a tooth was missing or if a dog was slightly over or undershot because teeth were misplaced or growing at the wrong angle. If however the jaws themselves were of unequal length I would take a more serious view, but how serious would depend on the extent of the inequality.

Coming now to the neck section, it is again necessary to give a warning against exaggeration. An overlong neck is just as faulty as a short one. It is often found that such a neck emerges from the body quite wrongly and results in what is described as "ewe-neck". The proper neckline is tied in with correct

shoulder placement. It should emerge in a smooth running line from the shoulders so as to appear of a piece with, and not stuck on to, the body. Shoulder placement is all important. The shoulder blade must slope both backwards and inwards towards the spine and it must be fairly long and proportionate to the humerus, the bone which makes an angle of just over 90 degrees with it and links up with the foreleg, at the elbow. If the shoulder blade is too upright or too short and out of proportion with the humerus the elbow will be misplaced and front movement will suffer. If the area of the blade is small relative to the amount of muscle that is attached to it the latter will be haunched and the dog will appear "loaded in shoulder". When the Standard says "rather narrow in front" that does not mean "as narrow as possible". If the dog is to have any capacity for sustained galloping, there must be some width of chest, all that is required is that that width should not be excessive so that the dog appears broad chested and heavy. It is a bigger fault for a setter to give the impression, when looked at from the front of "two legs coming out of one hole" particularly, as so often happens, with this formation the front legs are splayed with the distance between them less at the top than at the bottom. Again the over narrow front is usually accompanied by lightness of bone which accentuates the impression of weakness, which is one an Irish Setter should never convey. It is equally important that the dog should not be too short or too long in the leg. The latter with the "up in the air" appearance it creates even in a deep chested dog is the worse fault. If the length, from elbow to ground is much more than from elbow to withers (it may be rather less) the dog is hardly likely to be typical. The requirement that the "body should be proportionate" is so vague and meaningless as to constitute a serious blot on the standard. For what it is worth my view is that the right set of proportions is one where the height at withers is slightly less than the horizontal distance between withers and set-on of tail. The body should reach to or only slightly short of the point of elbow. If an imaginary perpendicular dividing line is dropped through the point where the fly rib leaves the spine the impression conveyed by the portion behind it should match and be of a single dog. If the front section suggests a substantial solidly built dog and the rear a light whippet one the setter is unbalanced. An over long loin, particularly when it lacks muscle and gives a "wasp-waisted" impression, is functionally wrong and therefore a bad fault. The spine must be straight, neither dipped nor arched nor forming an arc, with the withers as its highest point. It sometimes happens that an irregular vertebrae placement occurs between the dorsal and the lumber regions. I think this fault is hereditary and I have found it usually results in the dog's having a lean, unthrifty horizontal plane or sloped very slightly from withers to tail is a matter of opinion. I, basing myself on those at whose feet I sat to learn about the breed, have a preference for the slightly sloping topline. A dog gets its propulsion from its back legs. In one which was evolved to gallop effortlessly and for long periods over heavy and tough ground it is essential therefore that there should be great strength in the hindquarters and therefore width and that the action should be smooth. An Irish Setter should not taper away towards the rear, but should be at least as wide in the pelvis as at the ribs. While there should be a gentle rounding off at the rump any sharp falling away is a sign of weakness and a fault, colloquially described as "goose

rumped". The second thighs should show plenty of muscle. The line from hip joint to stifle should be nearly vertical and that from stifle to hock, making an angle of about 45 degrees with the ground. While the distances from hock to stifle and stifle to hip should be roughly equal. Since the War there has been a tendency, in some strains, for the former length greatly to exceed the latter. This may result in what passes for a "nice bent stifle, but it is faulty and a source of weakness. When it is accompanied by a hock set too high, the hock to stifle line becomes almost parallel to the ground, the dog leaves his behind him when moving and consequently lacks propulsion. A low set hock is a very desirable characteristic. When the dog is looked from the rear the hind legs should not incline either inwards or outwards at the hock and when moving should go in parallel lines. Faults in high movement are failure to flex the hocks, a dragging moving of one or both legs and their moving too closely together. The forelegs should be parallel when viewed from the front or side. The dog is "back at the elbow" if its foot is in advance of its body. This spoils the profile view.

The tip of the tail should not extend beyond the hock and when moving the dog should display animation by moving the tail briskly from side to side. The tail should be of a fair circumference and strong at the root. A good indication of substance in a puppy is provided by the root of its tail. It adds greatly to an Irish Setter's appearance. If it carries its tail naturally straight out behind it, even when standing still. On the other hand a tail carried above the back like a hound's detracts from an Irish Setter's appearance.

The two final sections of the Standard require little elucidation or comment. Today, unfortunately there is a tendency to over trim the ears, the feet and the back of the hind legs between hock and heel and so the take away from the dog characteristics, the standard requires it to display. The removing of dead hair and trimming to show the outline of the ear is one thing, the shaving of it almost down to the ear produces a pointer ear which is quite wrong. Similarly the removal of all hair from between the toes tends to defeat its object of making the foot appear small, for it produces gaps between the toes and gives the foot a spread appearance.

Two faults are now to be seen in the breed, thin coats deficient of furnishing ("Pointer coats") and wavy coats. I regard the former as much the more serious simply because a "pointer coated" Irish Setter not only fails in appearance but also functionally. I have seen such dogs shivering in a wind, something no Irish Setter should ever do. The breed does not show the same wide range of coat colour that it used to do say 30/40 years ago. The yellow and ultra dark liver coats are now seldom seen and taking the breed as a whole coat colour has never been as uniform as it now is. The colour of a newly shelled horse chestnut remain the ideal. Light feathering and linty ears detract from an Irish Setter's appearance. How a judge regards thin coats, wavy coats and light "breeching", if he objects to them at all is a matter of individual taste

Discussion of the Standard must close with a warning. Although the Standard considers the Irish Setter feature by feature no dog should, or can be judged bit by bit. It must be seen as a whole and assessed in the light of the overall impression it makes. More important than any individual point is whether there is that harmonious relationship between the various parts which should characterise the typical specimen, what is usually referred to as balance or symmetry. To reason thus is, in a sense, to argue in a circle, but the dilemma is inescapable. In the final analysis knowledge of what constitutes a true and typical Irish Setter will come not from repeated reading of the Standard, but from careful and objective detached study of the best specimens in the light of the Standard. Equally a dog cannot be judged with a ruler and protractor. The only measure to apply is the eye and that must have behind it a mind backed by experience and knowledge of the breed and free from all preconceptions and irrelevant prejudices.

**The current Irish (Red) Setter Breed Standard adopted by KUSA from KC
Is little changed from the original**

GENERAL APPEARANCE:

Must be racy, balanced and full of quality. In conformation, proportionate.

CHARACTERISTICS:

Most handsome, and refined in looks, tremendously active with untiring readiness to range and hunt under any conditions.

TEMPERAMENT:

Demonstrably affectionate.

HEAD & SKULL:

Head long and lean, not narrow or snipey, not coarse at the ears. Skull oval (from ear to ear) having plenty of brain room and well-defined occipital protuberance. From occiput to stop and from stop to tip of nose to be parallel and of equal length, brows raised showing stop. Muzzle moderately deep, fairly square at end. Jaws of nearly equal length, flews not pendulous, nostrils wide. Colour of nose dark mahogany, dark walnut or black.

EYES:

Dark hazel to dark brown, not too large, preferably like an unshelled almond in shape, set level (not obliquely), under brows showing kind, intelligent expression.

EARS:

Of moderate size, fine in texture, set on low, well back and hanging in a neat fold close to head.

MOUTH:

Jaws strong, with a perfect, regular and complete scissor bite, i.e. upper teeth closely overlapping lower teeth and set square to the jaws.

NECK:

Moderately long, very muscular but not too thick, slightly arched and free from all tendency to throatiness, setting cleanly without a break of topline into shoulders.

FOREQUARTERS:

Shoulders fine at points, deep and sloping well back. Forelegs straight and sinewy having plenty of bone, with elbows free, well let down and not inclined either in or out.

BODY:

Chest as deep as possible, rather narrow in front. Ribs well sprung leaving plenty of lung room and carried well back to muscular loin, slightly arched. Firm straight topline gently sloping downwards from withers.

HINDQUARTERS:

Wide and powerful. Hindlegs from hip to hock long and muscular, from hock to heel short and strong. Stifle and hock joints well bent and not inclined either in or out.

FEET:

Small, very firm; toes strong, close together and arched.

TAIL:

Of moderate length proportionate to size of body, set on just below the level of the back, strong at root tapering to a fine point and carried as neatly as possible on a level with or below the back.

GAIT / MOVEMENT:

Free flowing, driving movement with true action when viewed from front or rear, and in profile, showing perfect co-ordination.

COAT:

On head, front of legs and tips of ears, short and fine; on all other parts of body and legs of moderate length, flat and as free as possible from curl or wave. Feathers on upper portion of ears long and silky; on back of fore - and hindlegs long and fine. Fair amount of hair on belly, forming a nice fringe which may extend on to chest and throat. Feet well feathered between toes. Tail to have fringe of moderately long hair decreasing in length as it approaches point. All feathering to be as straight and flat as possible.

COLOUR:

Rich chestnut with no trace of black. White on chest, throat, chin or toes, or small star on forehead or narrow streak or blaze on nose or face not to disqualify.

FAULTS:

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect on the health and welfare of the dog and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.

NOTE:

- Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.
- Only clinically and functionally healthy dogs with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.