

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, October 1988

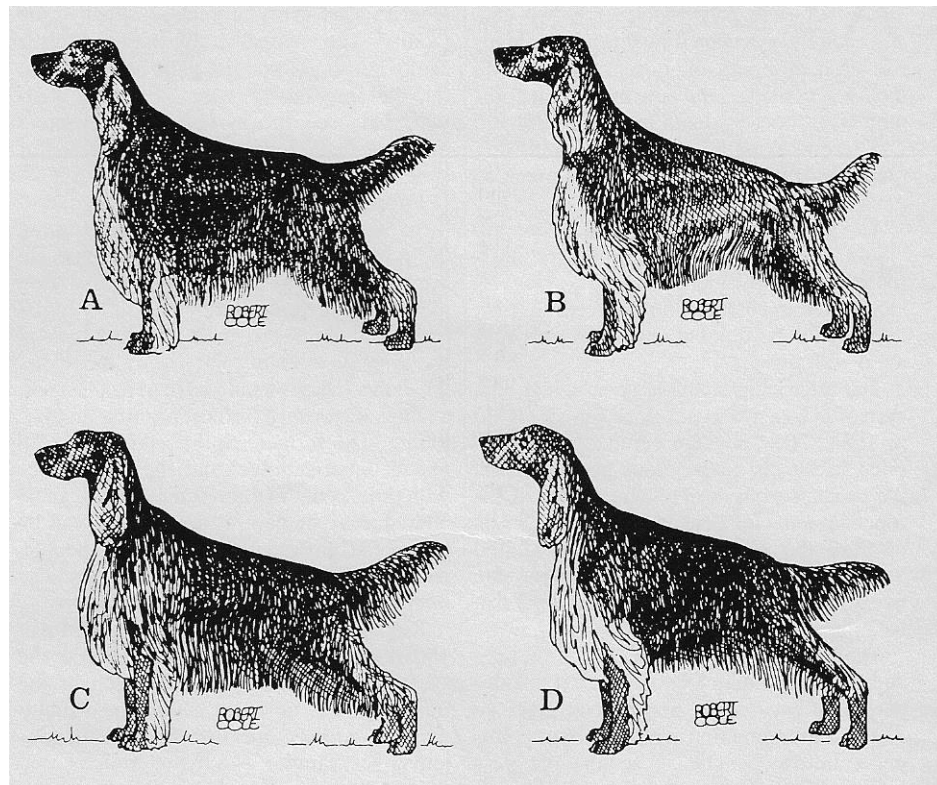
THE IRISH SETTER

You are in the process of judging Best of Breed. The four dogs competing possess varying degrees of bred quality. Two of these four real life Irish Setters are Best in Show winners. All four are adult Champions. One of the four is a bitch. How many placements will you make?

In this instance, at this level, you have two placements to make: Best of Breed and Best Opposite Sex. However, to increase the number of decisions, one of these four Irish Setters will represent Winner's Dog and another will represent Winner's Bitch, thereby providing you with an opportunity to also make a Best of Winner's placement. For the sake of simplicity the order of placement will be: BB, BOW, and BOS. The A,B,C,D sequence is the sequence they would like up in the show ring. Dog A having a lower category than Dog B.

BEST OF BREED

Stacked in profile, dramatic differences can be seen between these four Irish Setters. Each possesses many virtues and, of course, faults. All are eligible for BB. If you selected Dog B we are in accord. If you selected Dog A you are not alone. Both of these BIS winners possess the delicate balance between substantial and elegant. Or you may prefer Winner's Dog C or Winner's Bitch D for BB.



DOG A

This real life Irish Setter has won more than one BIS. He has many of the virtues possessed by my BB selection (Dog B) so I shall only draw attention to where this dog departs from my choice. Two of these departures centre on the head, one more each relate to the body, the forequarters and the hindquarters respectively.

First, his muzzle is shorter than the skull, although muzzle and skull are parallel. Second, the finish of the muzzle (front) is not as square as I like to see it, however it is deep enough (deep is not as deep as the English or Gordon muzzles). The body could have a smoother topline, however to the touch and moving this particular dog's topline is firm. In addition, I would like to see the elbow angles back a little further on the body, which in turn would provide a little more forechest. The hindquarter difference between Dog A and Dog B is the length from hip to hock and one that I am sure has influenced decisions (for and against) between these two dogs. The CKC Standard calls for: "Hind legs long and muscular from hip to hock." Dog A has more hind leg length than Dog B – I believe too much.

You be the judge. I have made my decision. Part of my decision in favour of Dog B was based on words also in this Standard which read: "The correct specimen always exhibits balance whether standing or in motion." Standing, this rear doesn't match the front to the degree that Dog B's does.

DOG B

This is the dog I selected for BB. His muzzle from point of nose to stop is equal in length to length of skull from occiput to eyes, the lines of muzzle and skull parallel. The skull is very slightly domed in profile (and head on). There is a delicate chiseling down along the flat cheeks, below the eyes and along the muzzle. The lips are not pendulous, the muzzle (front) is squared off and the underline of jaw is almost parallel with the top of muzzle. This dog has a scissors bite and the nose is black (the nose can also be chocolate.) The dark eyes (to medium brown) are somewhat almond shaped and the ears are set well back and low, hanging in a loose fold close to the head.

The clean (no throatiness) neck is moderately long, strong but not thick, slightly arched and flows smoothly into nicely laidback shoulders. The body is "sufficiently long to permit a straight and free stride." A long upper arm angled back sets the elbow rearward and level with the brisket, ensuring a degree of forechest. The topline of the body as described in the Standard: "from withers to tail slopes slightly downward without sharp drop at the croup." This is a BIS winner – as for the degree of slope, you be the judge as to how much you consider "slightly downward."

The feet are rather small, the toes arched. The legs are sturdy, the front pasterns are slightly sloped. The rear pasterns are vertical with angulation at stifle and hock, the ends appear to balance. The mahogany coat (or rich chestnut red with no trace of black) is straight and free of curl. He (and Dog A) stand 28 inches (the Standard advises the ideal is 27 inches and a variance beyond an inch up or down should be discouraged). He weighs 70 lbs.

BEST OF WINNERS

Your next placement is Best of Winners. Selection is between Winners Dog C and Winners Bitch D, unless you chose one for Best of Breed, in which case BOW would be automatic.

Both heads depart from typical, interestingly in different ways. The dog's skull is lumpy and his muzzle is Roman; the bitch's muzzle and skull are on two different planes and the back skull could be more in evidence. Body-wise she appears better balanced front with rear than he does, his rear overpowering his steeper front. He appears as though he would have a difficult time to move a front foot without first bringing forward a hind foot.

The bitch would appear to have slightly better shoulders than the male, more beauty and elegance in combination with strength and more overall balance. I would give BOW to the bitch. A male having won BB and she being the only bitch, she would then automatically be awarded BOS.

MOVEMENT

All four of these Irish Setters exhibited what to an endurance trotting breed would be considered extreme action. I am referring mainly to front action. The Standard reads: "The forelegs reach well ahead as if

to pull in the ground, without giving the appearance of a hackney gait.” All four of these examples tended to lift the front paws somewhat high on forward reach, much higher than the diagonal hind foot was carried out, but far from a hackney degree (the forearm almost horizontal). I call this characteristic Setter movement (when it is not overdone) ascending action. Watch a large class and decide yourself as to what degree of ascending action you will accept for the Irish Setter; I think you will find deciding on correct does not present as large a question as to degree of acceptable departure.

It is not mentioned in the Standard that, seen in motion from the side, a correctly proportioned and constructed Irish Setter will maintain a firm, slightly sloping topline and that the front pastern, as it is carried forward, will only flex parallel with the ground, no higher.