

# AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL KENNEL COUNCIL



## Extended Breed Standard of **THE IRISH SETTER**

Produced by

Irish Setter Club of Victoria (Inc)  
Irish Setter Club of NSW (Inc)

In conjunction with  
Australian National Kennel Council

Standard adopted by the Kennel Club (London) 1994 amended 2009  
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Country of Origin: Ireland

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## **HISTORY OF THE BREED**

The breed was developed in Ireland as a working dog for hunting game.

Irish Setters are members of the "Setter" sub group. Each variety of setters has its own characteristics which underline the purpose intended for the breed and which distinguish one breed of setter from another.

Setters: Described in "Of Englishe Dogges" (1576) by Dr. Johannes Caius (translated from the Latin by Abraham Fleming).

"Another sort of Dogges be there, scruiceable for fowling, making no noise either with foote or with tounge, whiles they followe the game. These attend diligently vpon their Master and frame their conditions such beκες, motions, and gestures, as it shall please him to exhibite and make, either going forward, drawing backward, inclining to the right hand, or yealding toward the left, (In making mencion of fowles my meaning is of Partridge and the Quaile) when he hath founde the byrde, he keepeth sure and fast silence; he stayeth his steppes and will proceede no further, and with a close, couert, watching eye, layeth his belly to the grounde and so creepeth forward like a worme. When he approacheth neere to the place where the birde is, he leyes him downe, and with a marcke of his pawes, betrayeth the place of the byrdes last abode, whereby it is supposed that this kinde of dogge is called Index, Setter, being in deede a name most consonant and agreeable to his quality. The place being knowne by the meanes of the dogge, the fowler immediatly openeth and spreadeth his net, intending to take them, which being done the dogge at the accustomed becke or vsuall signe of his Master ryseth vp by and by, and draweth neerer to the fowle that by his presence they might be the authors of their owne insaring and be ready intangled in the prepared net." (1)

One belief is that the foundation stock of the Irish Setter was the setting spaniel. It is undecided as to what spaniel cross was put over the setting spaniel.

In Ireland about 1770 a variety of setters called red spaniels (in Gaelic, Modder Rhu), were also described.

After 1776 there was a development of firearms. Erect standing; longer legged dogs were used to locate game for wing shooting as the dogs now needed to cover extended ground to find the scattered birds.

**1. William C. Thompson, *The Irish Setter in Word and Picture Denlinger's Richmond, 1954. P12.***

By 1800, the setter type had become well established.

In early Ireland three distinct colour strains were known, the solid red predominating in the north, the parti-coloured red and white in the south and west, and an attractive "shower of hail" variety along the northwest coast.

It was felt that the 'reds' tended to blend in with the surrounding countryside and that the dog stood a very good chance of being shot. Others argued the quarry too easily spotted the red and white dogs. A piece of white cloth was tied around the 'red' dog's necks so they stood out.

Early Bloodlines included 1770 Maurice Nugent O'Connor solid reds (however his dogs did carry traces of white), Earl of Enniskillen in 1796 and Jason Hazzard from Timaskee County, Fermanaugh in 1812.

The first pointer and setter bench show, Newcastle on Tyne, England 1859 had class divisions by colour. A year later at Cork the classes were for Irish Setters with no mention of colour.

The first field trial was held in 1865 however Irish Setters competing at official trials started in 1891.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BREED STANDARD**

The Early Days 1882

IRELAND: Formation of the Irish Red Setter Club in 1882 brought the first attempt to codify the show points of the Irish Setter. A Standard of Points for the breed was published in 1886 and is included below.

**HEAD** – Should be long and lean, and not coarse at the ears. The skull oval (from ear to ear), having plenty of brain room, and with well –defined occipital protuberance, Brows raised, showing stop. The muzzle moderately deep, and fairly square at end. From the stop to the point of the nose should be long, the nostrils wide, and the jaws of nearly equal length, flews not to be pendulous. The colour of the nose dark mahogany, or dark walnut, or black, and that of the eyes (which ought not to be too large) dark hazel or dark brown. The ears are to be moderate size, fine in texture, set on low, well back, and hanging in a neat fold close to the head.

**NECK** – Should be moderately long, very muscular, but not too thick, slightly arched, free from all tendencies to throatiness.

**BODY** – Should be proportionate – shoulders fine at the points, deep and sloping well back. The chest as deep as possible, rather narrow in front. The ribs well sprung, leaving plenty of lung room. Loins muscular, and slightly arched. The hindquarters wide and powerful.

LEGS AND FEET – The hind legs from hip to hock should be long and muscular, from hock to heel short and strong. The stifle and hock joints well bent, and not inclined either in or out. The forelegs should be straight and sinewy, having plenty of bone, with elbows free, well let down, and, like the hocks, not inclined either in or out. The feet small, very firm, toes strong, close together and arched.

TAIL – Should be of moderate length, proportionate to the size of the body, set on rather low, strong at the root and tapering to a fine point; to be carried as nearly as possible on a level with or below the back.

THE COAT – On the head, front of the legs and tips of the ears should be short and fine, but on all other parts of the body and legs it ought to be of moderate length, flat, and as free as possible from curl or wave.

FEATHERING – The feather on the upper portion of the ears should be long and silky; on the back of fore and hind legs should be long and fine; a fair amount of hair on the belly, forming a nice fringe, which may extend on chest and throat. Feet to be well feathered between the toes. Tail to have a nice fringe of moderately long hair, decreasing in length as it approaches the point. All feathering to be as straight and as flat as possible.

COLOUR AND MARKINGS – The colour should be a rich golden chestnut, with no trace whatever of black; white on chest, throat or toes, or a small star on the forehead, or a narrow streak or blaze on the nose or face not to disqualify.

#### SCALE OF POINTS

Head	10	Forelegs and Feet	10
Eyes	6	Tail	4
Ears	4	Coat and Feather	10
Neck	4	Colour	8
Body	20	Size, style	
		General Appearance	14

1A

*Gilbert Leighton-Boyce, Irish Setters, Arthur Baker Limited 1973  
P 20 to 28*

## FORMATION OF CLUBS AND RECOGNITION OF THE BREED

Dublin Canine Association – 1872

Irish Setter Club of America – 1891

Irish Kennel Association - 1897

Irish Kennel Club – 1908. Sanctioned by the Kennel Club (London).

Standard was revised in Dublin – 1930. Introduction of 'Style' – Must be racy, full of quality, and kindly in expression. Body description change from "should be long" to "should be proportionate".

Kennel Club (London). Adopts the Dublin Standard but drops the Scale of Points.

Irish Kennel Club Executive Council -1922 adopts constitution for putting on bench shows and field trials.

American Kennel Club - American Standard of the Breed approved in 1960  
Kennel Club (London) – Breed Standard revised with clarification of points.  
Description of the shape of eyes. Published in 1986.  
American Kennel Club - American Standard of the Breed revised in 1991. Very  
detailed and includes a guide to height and weight.  
Kennel Club (London) – Breed Standard revised - 1994

## **AN EXPLANATION OF THE BREED STANDARD EXTENSION**

The objective of this Breed Standard Extension is to provide additional comment on the Irish Setter Breed Standard to ensure all Irish Setter enthusiasts including aspirant judges have as complete an understanding as possible of the complex subtleties that “makeup” an ideal Irish Setter.

It does not replace the breed standard, which must be referred to in the first instance. The Irish Setter Breed Standard currently in use is reproduced in bold italic type throughout this Breed Standard Extension.

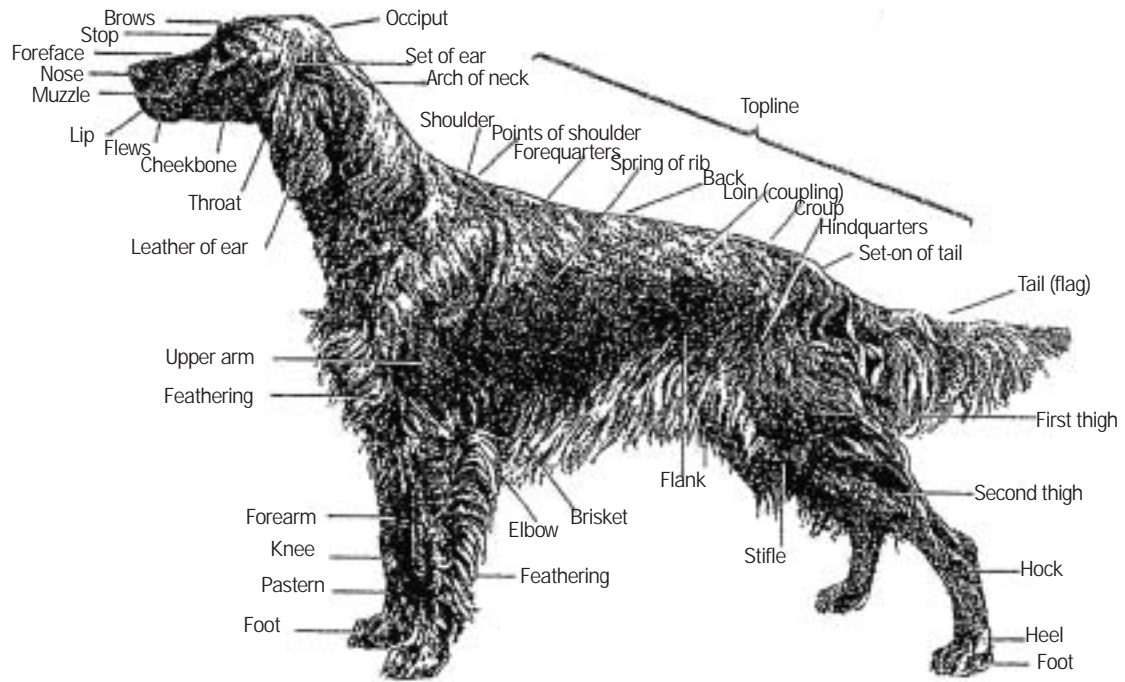


Figure 1 Image of Irish Setter with standard points

2 *Janice Roberts, The Irish Setter Popular Dogs Publishing Co Ltd. 1978*  
*Susan Oakley P110*

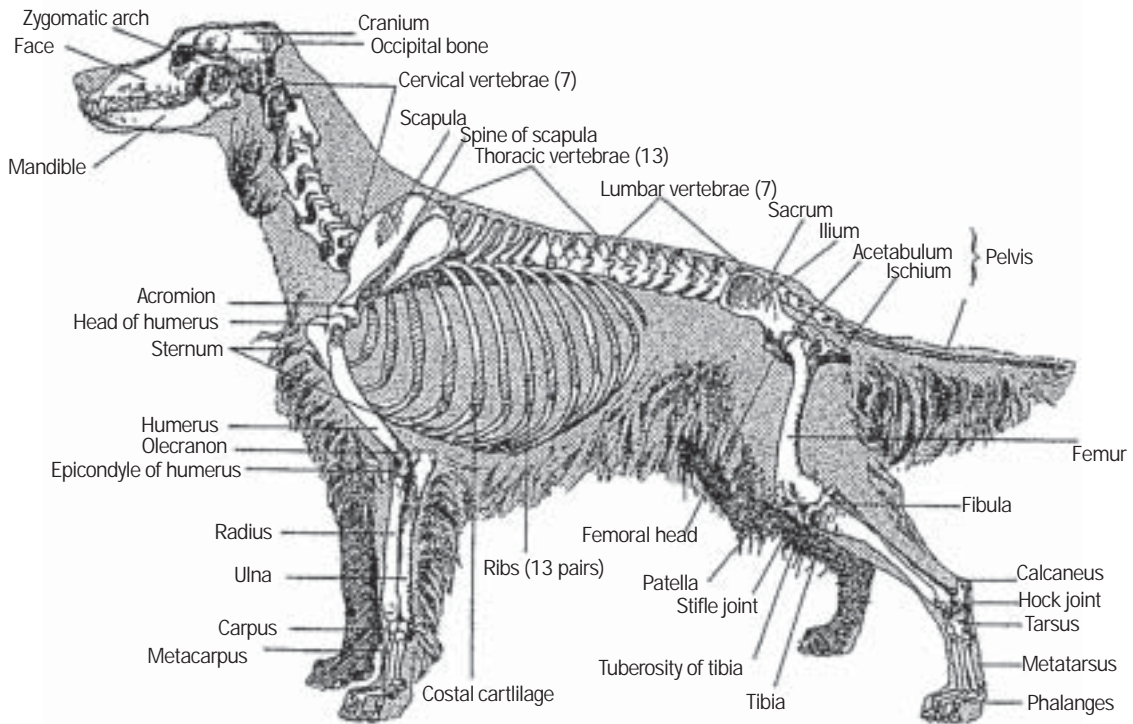


Figure 2 Image of Anatomy of Irish Setter

3 *Janice Roberts, The Irish Setter Popular Dogs Publishing Co Ltd. 1978*  
*Susan Oakley P98*

## **! GENERAL APPEARANCE**

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

The Irish Setter is a hardy, healthy, intelligent dog, possessed of excellent working ability and great stamina.

General Appearance must be racy, in conformation, proportionately balanced and full of quality. Giving an impression of speed, without loss of substance .

The Irish Setter is an active, noble, aristocratic bird – dog, with substance yet refined elegant build showing an impression of speed. Every part of the body is balanced, harmonious, flowing smoothly in to the next displaying natural athleticism.

Parts should not be exaggerated, coarse or calling attention to themselves.

The appearance is refined, streamlined in appearance but never lightweight, lean or thin.

Athletic and upstanding but not skinny legged, shelly bodied or slab sided.

Active and substantial appearance.

The conformation of the Irish Setter must be in harmony without any exaggeration to any part of the body.

May stand taller than the other setters. The high, proud carriage of the head adds to his commanding presence.

## **! CHARACTERISTICS**

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

It is essential when assessing the Irish Setter, that particular emphasis is placed on breed characteristics. The absence of, or weakness in, these characteristics could prevent the dog from carrying out the job for which it was bred and threatens the Irish Setter's individuality amongst the "Setter" subgroup.

A refined elegant, noble dog with aristocratic looks displaying keenness and intelligence.

An exuberant and efficient hunter obtaining air scents from prevailing winds.

Stylish free ranging movement covering maximum ground with the least amount of effort and demonstrating endurance in all conditions.

The character is demonstrative, affectionate and 'rollicking'.

A commanding presence with structure in the male reflecting masculinity without coarseness. Bitches appear feminine without being slight of bone.

## **! TEMPERAMENT**

***Demonstrably affectionate.***

The temperament of the Irish Setter is an essential part of the unique appeal of this breed displaying friendliness and intelligence.

The Irish Setter should demonstrate a rollicking, outgoing, happy-go-lucky attitude and stable personality.

Highly intelligent, responsive and boldly independent yet faithful. A very loyal companion.

Never wild, vicious or hostile.

Never wary, aloof, shy, timid or cringing.

## **! HEAD AND SKULL**

*Head long and lean, not narrow or snipy, 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.*

Skull oval when viewed from above or front. From the side, planes are parallel.

The Occiput is well defined.

Underline of the jaw is almost parallel with the top line of the muzzle.

Muzzle not as deep as that of either the English Setter or the Gordon Setter.

Gradual transition from the foreface through the brow to the skull with the stop created by the raised and mobile brows.

Beauty of head is emphasised by delicate chiselling around and below the eyes and along the cheeks.

The lips should cover the lower jaw and be tight.

The nose should be wide, filled and well developed.

The nostrils should be moist and be mobile to indicate use of the well-developed sense of smell.

For many the head of the Irish setter is the best illustration of his elegance and quality and it is in the head that one should clearly see a difference between him and his English and Gordon cousins. Like the English Setter it is a balanced head with the stop equidistant from the nose and occiput. His stop is not as well defined with much of its appearance coming from the raised eyebrows.

The occiput is more pronounced and the muzzle cleaner cut with less depth of flew than the other setters. The head is long and lean when viewed frontally or from above, but long and lean should never be interpreted as narrow and snipy. From the side all planes of the head are parallel including the muzzle.

Well-developed nostrils are essential for him to have the quality of nose necessary for a hunting animal.





Figure 3. Correct front view



Figure 4. Correct side view

4 *Janice Roberts, The Irish Setter Popular Dogs Publishing Co Ltd. 1978*  
*Susan Oakley P102*

## **! 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.***

A light eye is foreign to the breed expression.

Not staring nor prominent or sunken.

Eye lids tight to prevent being irritated or damaged by field material while working.

Expression wistful.

Expression alert changing from soft and kindly to bright & mischievous. Without this ability something of the true character of the Irish Setter is lost.

## **! EARS**

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

Leather fine in texture with the hair on ear tips short and fine. The feathering growing on the upper section of the ear is for protection.

The ears are set well back, low; not above the level of the eye, They should hang in a narrow fold with the front edge close to the cheek.

## **! MOUTH**

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

Although developed to seek rather than retrieve game, a good scissor bite with well-developed teeth is important

## ! 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.*

A good reach of neck visually pleasing, contributing to the racy appearance, but also has a practical purpose. The Irish setter works by scent, not sight.

The neck should be moderately long, strong but not thick nor exaggerated or out of balance.

It should arch nicely at the crest of the neck and gracefully blend into the shoulders.

As a breed, which relies on air-scents to find game, the head is extended moderately high and forward when travelling full speed in the field. The neckline is clean.

In the set the head is still held high by the neck but angles down to look with intensity toward the bird.

5 *Dennis & Anne Everard 2009*



Figure 5. Travelling at full speed.



Figure 6. Setting game.

## ! 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.*

Refinement at point of shoulder (junction of the scapula and humerus bones) and at the withers.

Shoulder blades long, wide, sloping well back fairly close together at withers, upper arm and shoulder blades are approximately the same length and are joined at sufficient angle to bring the elbows rearward along the brisket in line with the top of the withers.

The elbows moving freely, inclined neither in nor out.

Forelegs are strong, straight and sinewy and the length of forelegs contributes to the overall racy appearance of the breed.

Viewed from the front the elbows and legs are perpendicular and from the side the legs are well boned with nearly straight pasterns.

The dog should be able to lower the forequarters when setting its game.



Figure 6. Correct shoulders .



Figure 7. Incorrect straight shoulders and upper arm.

6 Eva Gardner, *Irish Setters Today*, Ring Press Books Ltd. 1998. P59

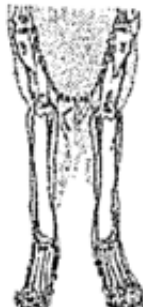


Figure 8. Correct. Figure 9 Too narrow feet turn out. Figure 10. Exaggerated feet turn in.

7 Janice Roberts, *The Irish Setter Popular Dogs Publishing Co Ltd. 1978 Susan Oakley P109*

## ! 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 the withers.***

Overall not a square dog, slightly longer than tall.

Body sufficiently long to enable a free ground covering stride.

A clearly defined pro-sternum but not so wide or round as to interfere with the action of the forelegs.

Viewed from the front the Irish is the narrowest of the setters but in no way pinched. Ribbing must be well sprung but not barrel-like.

The gently sloping topline distinguishes the Irish Setter from other setter varieties. Free standing or in motion the topline of the dog should be firm and flow gently from the withers neither with no break and no sharp drop at the croup.

The loin should be muscular, strong, slightly arched.

## ! HINDQUARTERS

***Wide and powerful. Hind legs from the 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.***

Hind legs should be muscular and powerful. The well-turned stifles are solidly muscled with well-developed second thighs there should be a good width of thigh.

Angulation of the forequarters and the hindquarters should be balanced. This is essential for efficient, accurate and balanced movement.

When viewed from above, the pelvis should be of sufficient width so that the dog does not taper to the hindquarters.

The pelvis should be of sufficient length to allow for optimum muscle attachment to allow for good breadth of first and second thigh.

The pelvic structure should be covered in muscle.

A short, strong hock to heel should provide good drive when moving forward.

Must not be sickle hocked. That is where the dog in motion cannot straighten or flex the hock joint on the back reach of the hind leg. It is also apparent in some dogs when standing naturally, the hock joint is bent in such a manner that the rear pastern slopes forward from the hock joint to the foot when viewed from the side.

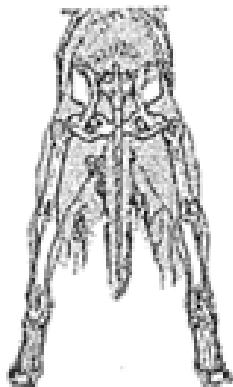


Figure 11. Correct.

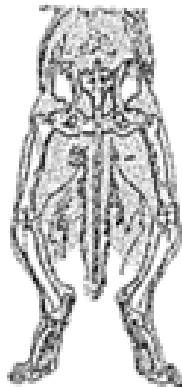


Figure 12. Cow hocked, splayed feet.

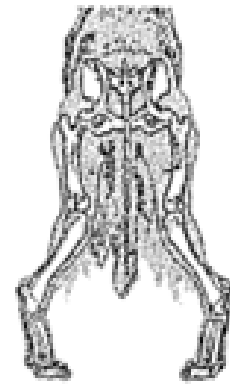


Figure 13. Stifles turn in, hocks out

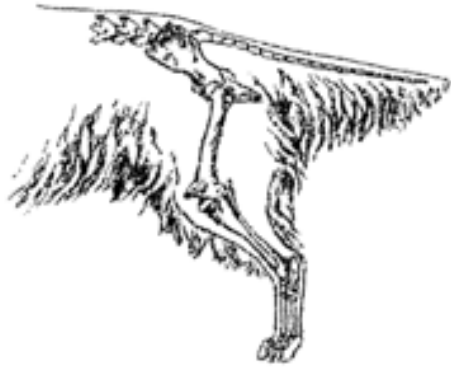


Figure 14. Correct

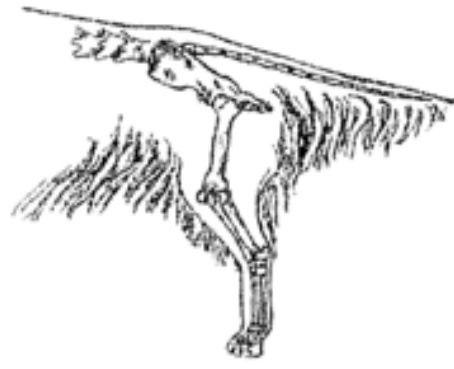


Figure 15. Straight stifle, too long from hock to heel.

9 Eva Gardner, *Irish Setters Today*, Ring Press Books Ltd. 1998. P61

## ! FEET

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

Well cushioned pads.

Pasterns nearly straight but not weak. The pasterns act to absorb shock in the field and to permit sudden turning and stopping without knuckling over. It needs sufficient angle to prevent sore feet when in the field and should not be completely straight.



Figure 16. Correct.

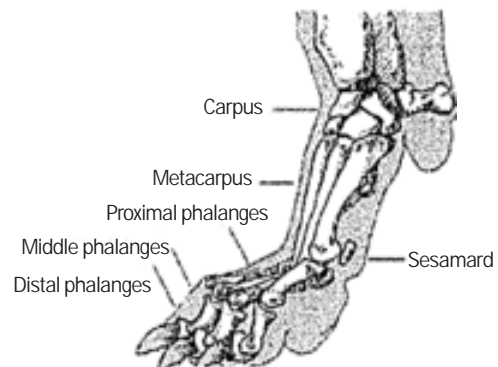


Figure 17. Incorrect too sloping in pastern.

10 Janice Roberts, *The Irish Setter Popular Dogs Publishing Co Ltd. 1978*  
Susan Oakley P108

## ! 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 nearly as possible on level with or below the back.***

The tail should be a natural extension of the topline.

If the tail is set on correctly and allied with a moderately sloping croup (the portion of the topline extending from the hip bones to the set on of the tail) it will be nearly as possible on level with or below the back.

Apart from being one of the beautiful parts of the Irish's furnishings, next to the eyes, the tail is the most expressive part of the Irish Setter's make up. It communicates the happy-go-lucky nature of the breed

In the field the action of the tail indicates the dog's activity at the moment. When he is travelling full speed it serves as a rudder. When on the set the tail is held rigid with intensity.

## **! GAIT/MOVEMENT**

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

On the move the correctly constructed Irish Setter remains balanced at all times, keeping the firm gently sloping topline.

At all times movement has purpose; drive and direction with good reach in front and powerful hind action complementing smooth effortless action.

The action must be efficient and smooth to enable the dog to be tremendously active with untiring readiness to range and hunt under any conditions. Free ranging covering maximum ground with the least amount of effort.

The front legs should be directly under the shoulder points, so that a perpendicular line from the withers passes through the centre of the elbow joint and comes to rest at the heel.

A dog with excessive width of chest is inclined to move with a rolling action, especially if the dog is out at the elbows. Out at the elbows is usually accompanied by toeing in.

Too narrow a front with elbows pinched and toeing out results in a lack of freedom of action and a lack of development for fieldwork. Toeing out produces a paddling gait and the nails fail to function so as to grip the ground and furnish traction.

A hackneyed gait where the forelegs are raised excessively is inefficient and lacks reach and drive.

It should never be stilted behind, high-stepping in front or crossing and weaving.



Figure 18. Correct



Figure 19. Hackney



Figure 20. Over-reaching



Figure 21. Pacing

11 Eva Gardner, *Irish Setters Today*, Ring Press Books Ltd. 1998. P62

## ! 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 hind legs long and fine. Fair amount of hair on belly, forming a nice fringe, which may extend on chest and throat. Feet well feathered between toes. Tail to have a fringe of moderately long hair decreasing in length as it approaches point. All feathering to be as straight and flat as possible.*

Long, flat and silky to the touch feathering on the top of the ears.

Moderately good length of fringe to protect the throat, chest and belly from damage in the field especially stubble.

Not exaggerated, overstated or profuse so as to become impracticable in the field and draw attention to itself rather than being in balance with the rest of the body.

## ! 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.*

The Irish Setter's coat in its glorious colour is the crowning glory of the breed. The frequencies with which white markings appear are a reminder of the origins of the breed.

Coat colour ranges from rich chestnut to brilliant red mahogany.

Feathering on ears, forechest, chest/brisket, tail and back of forelegs and hindquarters may show lighter variations of red.

## ! 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 upon 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.*

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