

Introduction: Management for Temperament.

Some time ago, the ESA Health Sub-Committee addressed the subject of Temperament in the English Setter. The aim was to highlight those factors which may adversely affect Temperament and to summarise a set of good practices so that the excellent Temperament of the English Setter could be protected for the future. This culminated in the publication of a booklet in 1996 entitled Management for Temperament. A transcript of that booklet is included below:-

Foreword

The E.S.A. Committee are always anxious to consider and discuss any health or other problems that our lovely breed might experience. We are indebted to the E.S.A. Health Sub-Committee for all the time that they give, and the work that they do on our behalf.

They have recently been considering the issue of temperament in English Setters, and I am delighted that the Sub-Committee members have contributed articles on important aspects of this subject. I feel sure that both exhibitors and pet owners will find these articles both interesting and informative. I know we all wish the English Setter to remain A Gentleman by Nature.

GORDON WILLIAMS

Chairman

Temperament & Responsibility

The Kennel Club Standard for the English Setter describes his temperament as intensely friendly and good natured. Above anything else, this is probably the one most significant attribute which separates an English Setter from other breeds. Regardless of whether we are breeders, exhibitors, pet owners, or all three, we have probably chosen the English Setter as a breed we wish to live with, largely because of the excellent temperament. It is part of the breed type and is an attribute we must not lose.

However, during the last few years in particular, it has been noticeable that a few incidents have occurred in the show ring where one of our breed has shown something other than an excellent temperament. This cannot be condoned and we must do whatever we can to ensure that it does not spread. At this point, it must be stressed that suspect temperament should not be confused with the irritable behaviour of bitches around the time of a season, or the competitive behaviour of stud dogs when around such bitches. The latter is normal and to be expected.

The ESA Health Sub-Committee have been asked to consider the issue of temperament and identify possible causes of its deterioration in some of our breed. It is most probable that it does not have a single cause and is the compound effect of a number of factors such as breeding, feeding, stress, environment, etc.

If we are breeders, we obviously attempt to produce dogs which conform, as closely as possible, to the standard. We all know that the perfect dog doesn't exist and whatever we produce, we'd prefer this different here or that different there. If we produce winners, that's great, but let us not forget that the majority of dogs which are bred will go to pet homes. The pet owner is looking first and foremost for an English Setter with a typical temperament. Therefore, in our breeding programmes we should not turn a blind eye to dubious temperament. We should do our best, in the light of information available to us, to breed from stock with stable temperaments. A dog may be excellent in every other respect and may be a show winner or producing show-winning progeny, but if the temperament is not correct, he or she should not be used for breeding. To do so is irresponsible and we would fool no-one except ourselves. When a dog with an obvious problem appears, other breeders ask themselves what the likely source may be ... and draw their own conclusions.

If we are exhibitors, we get great pleasure from showing a winner and from hearing the appreciation of spectators at the ringside. However, a winner with a less than perfect temperament can do the breed great harm. Spectators get no pleasure from seeing an English Setter involved in incidents in the ring. If a dog is sent forward to represent the breed and that breed is the English Setter, its temperament must be impeccable. One of the main hurdles in such cases is that the exhibitor must first recognise and accept that his or her dog does not possess a typical temperament. This is not always the case as it is easy to shut one's eyes to this fact if the dog is winning. Once recognised, one could argue that the dog should be left at home and not shown. Again, it is easier to say this than to take a winning dog out of the ring, especially if the owner only has one or two dogs to exhibit. As a minimum, one should learn to keep such a dog under control, so that it does not get into situations where trouble is likely to flare up. Keep it on a short lead. Do not let it wander, uncontrolled, around the ring. Respect the space around other dogs. This is for the good of yourself, others, and the breed in general. Be responsible.

As far as judging is concerned, the main issue relates to the handling of incidents of bad temperament in the ring. Serious consideration should be given to sending such dogs out of the ring. Repeated treatment such as this is probably the most effective means of ensuring that such dogs are not exhibited and probably will not be used for breeding purposes. However, in doing so, the judge must be certain in his/her own mind that the incident has been correctly assessed and that the culprit is being penalised, not the victim. If in doubt, leave both dogs in the ring and continue to assess. Dogs with a bad temperament should not be placed.

We are only guardians of the breed for the period of time we choose to own them and our aim should be to improve the English Setter both in terms of conformation to the standard and health status. Let us not leave our descendants with problems which we should have tackled. Always remember that it is easier to get a bad reputation than to keep a good one, and given the chance most of us would choose to be remembered in a favourable light by those who follow in our footsteps.

Breeding for Type and Temperament

When deciding to breed a litter many factors have to be taken into consideration ... two of the most important being type and soundness. You must also realise that adequate facilities are required, not only for a whelping bitch, but also for a growing litter, some of which may not find new homes until they are 14 or 15 weeks old. The first step is for you to honestly assess your bitch, weigh up her good points and not ignore her weaknesses and then try to select a male that will complement her. Remember the perfect English Setter has never been born - even the very best example of the breed will still have some points that could be improved! It may be tempting to use the breed's top winning male or the dog that lives just down the road but unless they fit your criteria it could be an unwise decision.

Breeding for Type

There are several approaches to breeding and these are as follows:

Linebreeding

This is the mating of animals that have many common ancestors in their pedigree. Typical linebreeding would be matings between cousins, grandfather to granddaughter, and half brother to half sister. This method of breeding is used in an attempt to establish type in a line. Careful linebreeding is often very successful, consistently producing puppies of a similar type to their parents. It should be noted that it can also fix undesirable traits as well as the good points you desire.

Inbreeding

This is only for the very experienced breeders as it involves very close matings i.e. brother and sister, father and daughter, etc. This type of mating will fix a type much more quickly than line breeding but can also have disastrous results and it is essential that only top quality animals are used and that a great deal is known about their ancestors from many generations. Generally speaking this type of mating is best avoided.

Outcrossing

This is the mating of unrelated or distantly related partners and generally results in a litter of puppies that may vary tremendously in type. If one is lucky a top quality specimen may be produced but one must bear in mind that because it has inherited characteristics from a number of lines it is quite likely that its future offspring will not appear of a similar type.

Breeding for Temperament and Soundness

Temperament

Please remember that the majority of puppies are destined to become much loved family pets and when contemplating a litter much emphasis must be placed on breeding for soundness and temperament. At no time should the desire to breed for type override these considerations. One of the English Setter's greatest assets is its friendly, easy going nature - it is imperative that this is not sacrificed in an attempt to breed the perfect show specimen.

Soundness

The term soundness in a dog refers not only to movement, but also dentition, temperament, and general condition. Animals to be used for breeding must be free from any major defects in all 4 of these categories. An inherited condition called Hip Dysplasia is quite common in our breed and can cause much suffering. It is not sufficient to presume that because a dog does not limp it is free from this problem and before breeding it is advisable that the hip joints are X-rayed and the plates then sent for scoring to the BVA. The Kennel Club standard states that English Setters should have level jaws with a scissor bite and great thought should be given about mating an animal which has any major deviation from this.

Deafness and skin problems can also be a problem and it would be very unwise to breed with affected animals. Please bear these points in mind if you are considering breeding a litter but please also remember that good homes can be hard to find and our rescue service is already overstretched.

Feeding Recommendations

The amount and type of food which we feed our dogs is determined by age, weight, size and breed.

Type of Food

Before starting to use a complete food, read all the information available. There are many dog food manufacturers, each one ready to sell you their top-of-the-range product. Ask yourself 4 questions:-

Can you and your customers afford to use it ?

What are the ingredients, protein levels, fats, calorie, vitamin and mineral content ?

Is it readily available to buy ?

Will it suit your breed ?

Do not change overnight to a new complete food or to biscuits and meat. Any change must be slow over 3 - 4 days. Avoid foods containing E102, E110, or E112. These are colouring agents which have been shown to cause hyperactivity and extreme naughtiness in children as well as injury to themselves. When removed from their diet this condition was shown to cease.

Age

A dog goes through three stages of growth:-

Puppy is the period from birth, through to weaning at 3-4 weeks, to an age of 6 months.

Junior is the period from 6 months to 18 months.

Adult is the period from 18 months onwards, when their full height is made, and they begin to fill out and mature into full adulthood.

Weight

The rate of growth is remarkable over a very short time:-

At birth weight is 10-24 ozs approx

6 months weight is 30-45 lbs

18 months weight is 60-70 lbs

Adult weight is 60-80 lbs

Size

The English Setter is classed as a large dog in most manufacturer's food charts. Dogs are on average 25 - 27 inches high, and bitches 24 - 25 inches.

Breed

Read your standard - English Setters are described as intensely friendly and good natured. Known throughout the dog world as being very trustworthy with humans. This is what customers expect when they buy an English Setter.

You Are What You Eat

Food is required to sustain life, help puppies grow and mature naturally into adulthood. Sensible nutrition, together with diet sheets and a help line for your customers will ensure your puppies meet the Breed Standard.

Growth - Puppy up to 6 Months

During the puppy stage, Setters require a very digestible diet and it is important that they receive the right amounts of protein, fats, calories, vitamins, and minerals. Weight for weight a puppy will need two and a half times as many calories as an adult dog. As puppies they are fairly active, but only in short bursts. This is a time of rapid growth, so they need the correct diet that will meet all these essential requirements for this period.

Growth - Junior 6-18 Months

At this stage Setters are developing muscle and bone to complete a framework for adulthood. It is a very difficult time for the young setter. Again the correct diet is required for them to reach their full potential ... too much weight too soon and the back will drop. It is easy to overstretch the capabilities of the young Setter which is not yet an adult.

Growth - Adult 18 Months +

When Setters become adults, avoid high energy or high protein foods. You are not feeding a fighting cock, a long distance runner or a greyhound, but a friendly setter who's very nature is boisterous.

Recommended Protein Intake

Puppies - 26% to 30%

Junior -- 26% to 28%

Adult --- 18% to 20%

If using a high protein complete food, do not add extras such as meat, vitamins, or calcium as you will be upsetting an already **balanced diet and this could contribute to hyperactivity.**

Activity

As puppies, English Setters have soft muscle tone. Beware of overloading the frame with weight as the bone and sinew are not yet fully formed. HPR breeds develop in a very different manner to Setters. In comparison, the HPR frame at 4 weeks is firm and the muscles strong, with a much higher level of activity as is their rate of burn-off of energy. However, most food manufacturers will class the English Setter with the Weimaramer and the Hungarian Vizsla, as a large breed with the same type of food requirements.

Weaning to Adulthood

From 4 weeks puppies are able to observe and react to their surroundings. Weaning takes place and dishes of different nourishment are provided. Also, there is an urge to move away from sleeping area to wet and pass motions. You now have become part of their life. Fighting with litter mates provides exercise, but when food arrives they greet you with great joy.

With every week that passes to 8 weeks, their world widens - different textures, carpets, television, rattle of feeding dishes, noise, your voice, words that mean food. No shouting is necessary - just tones of kindness. As a breeder, you are responsible for developing the character of each puppy under your care. Discipline, hand-in-hand with routine, will help when the biggest change in their young lives occurs - the move to their new and permanent home.

Vet new owners carefully. Show them the adult setters - not the older dog or bitch but the boisterous 2 and a half year old dog who crashes his way in. Explain the problems that arise when rearing the young Setter:-

Sleeping Areas

A quiet place which is their own, somewhere to rest, not too cold or warm, toys to chew.

Feeding

Keep to the same routine, provide a diet sheet and remember they soon get bored.

House Training

Show a puppy the newspaper near the door prior to going outside after feeding, before and after bedtimes. Puppies are like children - they wet a lot. When puppies perform their toilet duties use the same words - "be clean" and offer lots of praise when he/she is good.

Socialisation

If the litter has not been used to children, care must be taken when moved to a new home where young children are present. Ensure that they do not play too rough. An adult should supervise and say when enough. Before vaccination is complete, training on a lead can be undertaken in a garden. Commands of sit, stay, come, can be now tried - never forgetting praise and reward. English Setters can be obedient - a lot can be achieved before introduction into the big outside world.

Training

Take short walks down drives or lanes before any introduction to traffic. Take the puppy to the local pub if dogs are allowed and let people talk and pat the puppy if they wish to do so. Walk (if not far) to the local school. Everyone will love the puppy but watch he is not over crowded. Introduce to traffic slowly - sit him down at kerbside and pat and talk to him. Miles of walking are not the answer for the fast growing puppy - just a little and often. SMELL THE BREEZE AND ENJOY THE BIRDS - They do. Remember not to allow children to over-exercise the puppy whilst they are playing. Training classes when 6 months are good - you meet people, the puppy meets other dogs.

Good Manners

These will be taught when your puppy lives with an older English Setter. When playing has become too rough or gone on too long, the older dog will put a stop to it by a growl or a snap. Do not interfere since puppies will learn to limit the strength of their bite and the roughness of their games this way. If the puppy is the only dog, then you must take the role of the older dog and become pack leader. Discipline is essential to his upbringing. Check jumping up at people - NO strongly said. A Setter is a big dog when grown up - start early. When meeting other dogs, do not let him smell them - all do not have good temperament. Do not put him in a position of being fearful. English Setters are too bold for their own good. They were born with a good temperament - GUARD IT WELL. English Setters give a lifetime of love and fun but we all have to live together.

Exercise & Housing

It is an established fact that, some people have the gift of bringing out the best in their dogs and making them do what they wish. These owners are usually firm and kind with a real understanding of how the dogs will react. Other owners have the reverse effect and although devoted to their dogs, seem to have a most unfortunate effect on them. These dogs are usually owned by over-anxious people, one moment being too strong and the next moment allowing the dogs to do as they like. In handling dogs consistency is essential with firmness exercised when required.

Exercise

If a dog is always kept on a lead or behind railings and only sees other dogs at a distance, he soon begins to feel thwarted and will bark and become excited - this is the first step. If you gather up a dog on a short lead and retreat behind a garden gate, you are well on the way to fixing aggressive and quarrelsomeness as a dominant trait. If you allow your dog to mix freely with others from an early age, he will accept them as a matter of course - a strange dog will not be a novelty.

English Setters are renowned for their agreeable temperament and one should be able to exercise all dogs/bitches together (of course not in-season bitches).

Free exercise is essential where possible in a controlled environment - i.e. an area with secure boundaries, away from livestock and busy roads.

Housing and Bedding

Where a number of dogs are kept it is essential they should be manageable and well controlled, If your dogs are well fed, housed and exercised, kindly treated, they should be contented and quiet. Give dogs a bed each - even if two decide to sleep together. English Setters often like to snuggle up together - but give them the choice. Beds should be off the floor, away from draughts and large enough for the dog to lie down and turn around comfortably.

Guarding

Dogs are natural guards up to a point. Success of general management depends on one's efforts. It is worthwhile taking trouble to plan things out so that the best results are obtained making for happy dogs.

Training Dogs to Agree Together

Your verbal approach does a lot and your dogs will usually live up to what you expect of them. A puppy and an adult should not generally be put together nor puppies of widely differing sizes or ages (unless under your constant supervision). In the proper circumstances, a dog and a bitch make an ideal combination. However, you must have suitable housing arrangements to keep them apart when the bitch is in season (unless one is neutered). After about 4 months puppies are best in pairs. When a number of English Setters in kennels are owned, it is a good idea to occasionally change the arrangements for kennelling in order that all the dogs/bitches really get to know each other, then jealousy should not occur.

Stress and Health

A tense dog will often be suffering from a stressful situation which could cause it to become unpredictable temperamentally. The tenseness could be caused by visits to the vet, a car ride (if the dog is not used to it), change of home or being put into a claustrophobic position.

Dogs should not be left unattended on the show bench for prolonged periods or allowed to bark incessantly as this also upsets other dogs (and their owners). Dogs should be controlled in the show ring, especially in rings with limited space.

Illness or health problems can alter a dog's temperament. An ill animal who is running a temperature or suffering from digestive disorders could just become quieter. There are painful illnesses that can have a major influence on the temperament, such as any arthritic or skeletal conditions (e.g. Hip Dysplasia, Spondylitis or any other limb, joint or spinal pains). Dogs can also get head, eye, ear and mouth, throat, abdominal, anal gland or general internal pains. Hormonal imbalance, brain tumours, epilepsy and chronic skin conditions can also make a placid dog aggressive.

Between 12 weeks to 6 months, teething takes place. Avoid putting the dogs under stress at this time. Watch for reddening and swelling of gums, eyes and ears. These require cooling. Give bones (or similar) to chew as this will assist the teething process.

With correct diagnosis and treatment to either help, alleviate or cure the condition the dog should return to a healthy, happy animal. It is very important to observe and recognise that one's animal is not reacting normally.

Summary

The Association does not want to create an alarmist attitude to temperament, but we are confident that all English Setter owners are united in their determination to ensure that our breed retains this wonderful quality for which it is renowned, and trust that the articles in this booklet have given some food for thought. It is quite clear that the temperament of any dog can be affected by a whole range of factors and the owner needs to be aware of possible causes so that preventative action can be taken to avoid them or corrective action can be taken when an undesirable situation is identified.

If any owners have concerns regarding temperament or constructive suggestions regarding the approach by the ESA, then they are welcome to contact any member of the ESA Health Sub-Committee to discuss the matter further in complete confidence.