

Gordon Setter History

By Esther Joseph

The Gordon Setter is a unique dog and as such has certain characteristics, which are unique to the breed. One of the most important features of the Gordon is its distinctive build. A Gordon that looks like a black and tan Irish or English Setter is not built correctly and therefore is not typical of the breed.

One must remember that the Gordon Setter is an air scenting breed; he was developed over a long period of time for the sole purpose of setting game birds (mostly Grouse) on the heavy heather covered Scottish moors.

It is said that the Setter was evolved from the old "Setting Spaniel" and its main function was to work. These were the days before "Dog Shows"! At that time Setters came in all colors there were some preferences for one color over another but as early as the 17th century "black and fallow" dogs are mentioned Alexander, the fourth Duke of Gordon (1743-1827), established his famous kennel of wonderful working setters at Gordon Castle near Fochabers not far from the River Spey in UK. It seems certain that these setters were black, white and tan, black and white, and black and tan. The Duke was believed to prefer the Gordons that were black and tan. If this is so he would have encouraged the breeding of this color in preference to the others. It's a known fact that there were black and tan setters at Gordon Castle as early as 1825.

History has it that the Duke would not shoot over his setters until they were 5 years old, as they were very wild when they were young and slow in maturing. Most breeders and Gordon owners would say the Gordon Setter has remained unchanged in this respect today.

Alexander the 4th Duke died in 1827 and George the 5th Duke (and the last Duke of Gordon) in 1836. During these 9 years the kennel was reduced. Dogs were probably given to various friends and possibly many went to the Duke's keepers. At the dispersal sale at Tattersalls in July 1836 only eleven setters were sold (maybe the remainder of his kennel) of these eleven setters only one (Duke a 5 years old male) was black and tan. Five were black and white, one black, one black white and tan, one red and white and two black and white 4 months old pups.

On the death of the 5th Duke Of Gordon in 1836 the title became extinct and the estate was passed on to his nephew the 5th Duke of Richmond. In 1875 the sixth Duke was created "the Duke of Richmond and Gordon. It is interesting to note at the Tattersalls sale, the Duke of Richmond purchased "Juno" for 34 guineas and it is generally accepted that he got together a strong kennel of working Gordon Setters.