

YOU BE THE JUDGE

By Robert Cole

From *Dogs in Canada*, July 2003

THE GORDON SETTER

FIND THE GORDON SETTER

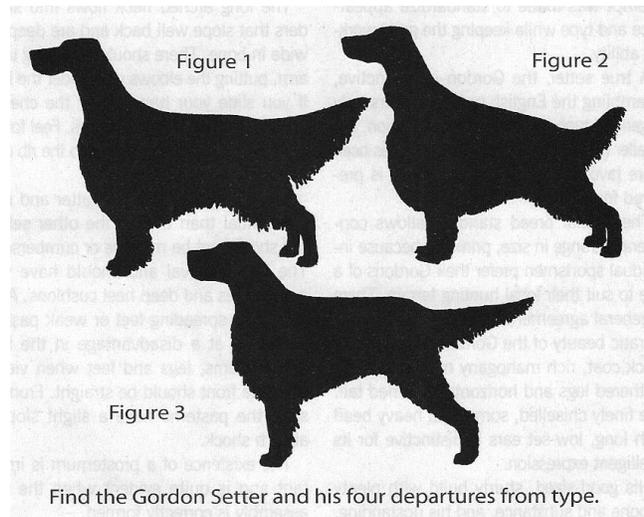
After you have determined which of the three setters is the Gordon, and have identified the other two, look closely at the Gordon Setter. What are his four visible faults? One relates to the head, another relates to the body and the last two are in the hindquarter area.

BREEDS

Figure 3 is the Gordon Setter, Figure 1 is an English setter and Figure 2 is an Irish Setter.

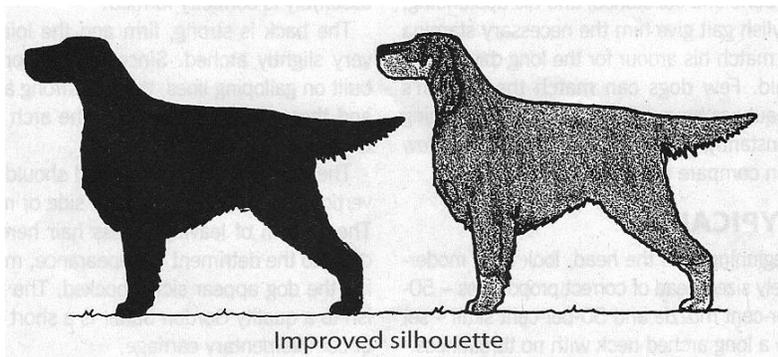
FOUR FAULTS

Figure 3 departs from typical in that 1) his muzzle is deeper than it is long; 2) his body is long; 3) his croup is not correctly angled; and 4) his tail is long.



Find the Gordon Setter and his four departures from type.

IMPROVED SILHOUETTE



For the head to be balanced, the depth of muzzle has been reduced until it is no longer deeper than long. The ratio of Gordon body length to height should be approximately equal. I have reduced the body length by two inches. The outline of the croup and set on of the tail have been changed to conform to the AKC wording, "Croup nearly flat." And, "The tail should be short and not reaching below the hocks, carried horizontal or nearly so."

HISTORY AND BEAUTY

The Gordon Setter is the only Sporting Dog developed in Scotland. Gordons were imported to the United States as early as 1840. The Fourth Duke of Gordon is considered to be the first person to make a strong effort to stabilize the breed in its native land. It was in the late 1700s that the Duke's setters, which were known as the Castle Gordon Setters, came into prominence.

A sportsman writer at the time described the dogs as easy to train. They naturally pointed well and had great stamina. They seldom made a false point and when they made a find, you could be sure they were 'on birds'. The Fourth Duke was keen on performance and inclined to breed for the best working dogs in the field.

When the kennels passed on to the Sixth Duke of Gordon, in about 1835, more of an attempt was made to standardize appearance and type while keeping the good working ability. A true setter, the Gordon is distinctive, resembling the English or Irish Setters only in general type. In field trial competition, the smaller (but not light boned) Gordon has been more favoured while the larger dog is preferred for show.

The official breed standard allows considerable range in size, primarily because individual sportsmen prefer their Gordons of a size to suit their local hunting terrain. There is general agreement, however, on the aristocratic beauty of the Gordon, with its silky black coat, rich mahogany markings, well feathered legs and horizontally carried tail. The finely chiseled, somewhat heavy head with long, low set ears is distinctive for its intelligent expression.

His good sized, sturdy build with plenty of bone and substance, and his upstanding, stylish gait give him the necessary stamina to match his ardour for the long days in the field. Few dogs can match the Gordon's beauty as he quarters the field, tail wagging constantly, busily in quest of a bird, and few can compare with his quiet dignity.

TYPICAL

Beginning with the head, look for a moderately sized head of correct proportions – 50% muzzle and 50% skull – set on a long arched neck with no throatiness. The nostrils should be large, black and open. The end of the muzzle is straight and square at the end. The lips should be clearly defined and not pendulous. Teeth should have a scissors bite, and be evenly spaced and level in line across the front in a rather wide, strong jaw. A pincer bite is not considered a fault.

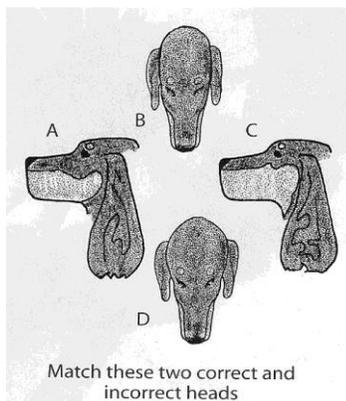
The stop should be definite, with the skull from the stop to the occiput the same length as the distance from the stop to the end of the nose. Thus the Gordon head is not a short one, but rather resembles the dimensions of two bricks propped together.

The eyes are intelligent, dark, oval, showing no haw, nor are they too deep set. The expression is kind, affectionate, bright and alert. The ears are low, of thin leather and lie close to the head. There should be a definite thoroughbred appearance in the head, helped by the chiseling around the eye area.

The long arched neck flows into shoulders that slope well back and are deep and wide in bone. There should be a long upper arm, putting the elbows well under the body. If you slide hand under the chest, it should be level with the elbows. Feel for ribs that are deep and well back into the rib cage with good spring.

The bone in the legs is flatter and more substantial than that of the other setters, but should not be massive or cumbersome. The feet are oval and should have well arched toes and deep heel cushions. A dog with poor spreading feet or weak pasterns would be at a disadvantage in the field. The pasterns, legs and feet when viewed from the front should be straight. From the side, the pasterns have a slight slope to absorb shock. The existence of a prosternum is important and is quite evident when the front assembly is correctly formed.

The back is strong, firm and the loin is very slightly arched. Since the Gordon is built on galloping lines, this is a strong area and there should be width in the arch extending around the loin. The rear pastern is short, and should be vertical when viewed from the side or rear. The custom of leaving excess hair here is often to the detriment of appearance, making the dog appear sickly hocked. The finish to a quality Gordon Setter is a short tail in complementary carriage.



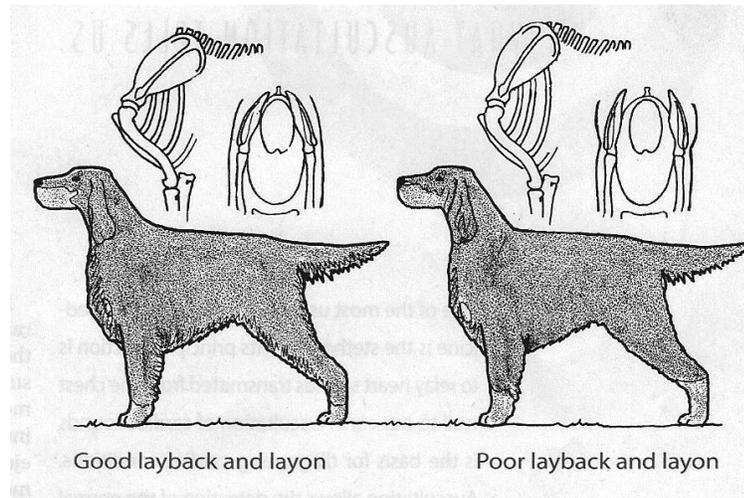
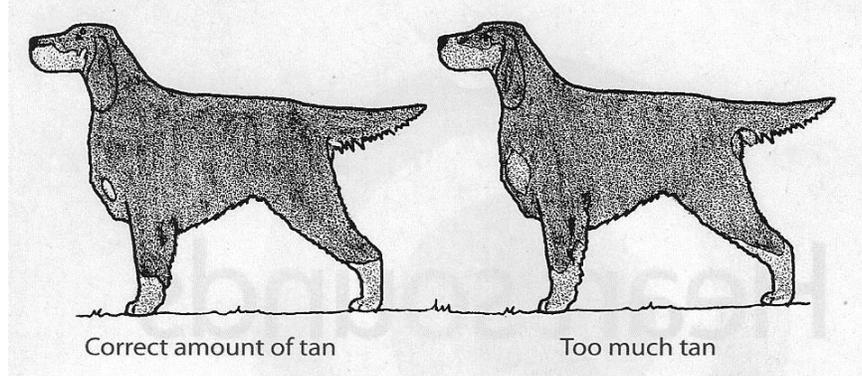
TWO HEADS

Match the correct head viewed from above, to the correct head in profile. The standard describes the head as “nicely rounded good sized, broadest between the ears ... the cheeks as narrow as the leanness of the head allows ... Muzzle fairly long and not pointed ... the same length as the skull and deep rather than broad ... the muzzle is parallel to the line of the skull” and “the ears set on approximately on line with the eyes.”

Incorrect Head D is too wide in skull, and incorrect Head C's muzzle and skull are not on parallel planes.

COLOUR AND MARKINGS

Black with tan markings, either of rich chestnut or mahogany colour. Black penciling is allowed on the toes. The borderline between black and tan is clearly defined. No tan hairs can be mixed in with the black. The tan markings are located as follows: 1) two clear spots over the eyes, not more than three quarters of an inch in diameter; 2) on the sides of the muzzle (The tan does not extend over the top of the muzzle, but resembles a stripe around the end of the muzzle from one side to the other.); 3) on the throat; 4) two large, clear spots on the chest; 5) on the inside of the hind legs, showing down the front of the stifle and broadening out to the outside of the hind legs from the hock to the toes (it must not completely eliminate the black on the back of the hind legs.); 6) on the forelegs from the carpus, or a little above, downward to the toes; and 7) around the vent. A white spot on the chest is allowed, but the smaller the better.



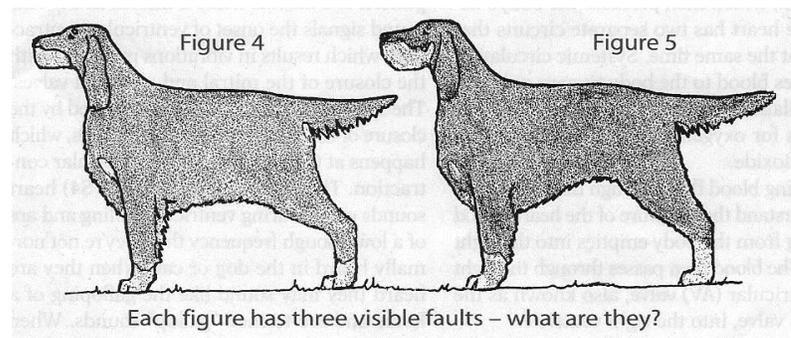
SHOULDER LAYBACK AND LAYON

The Gordon Setter standard is one of the few that take the layon of the shoulder blades into consideration. The desired shoulders are described as “fine at the points, and laying well back. The tops of the shoulder blades are close together.” Breeders tell me as close as two inches. One of these dogs has such an assembly, the other has steep shoulders and, when viewed from the front, the muscles (not shown) have thickened beneath the blades and forced the blades apart, which in turn usually causes the elbows to turn out.

The extra muscle that tacks onto the outside of the blade, again to gain strength, is called “bossy” after the projecting bosses sometimes attached to dated furniture. Viewed looking down over the dog, the tacked on bossy muscles stick out like bumps on the sides, spoiling what should otherwise be nice, clean body lines.

JUDGING THE MEDIOCRE

The standard advises that symmetry and quality are most essential. To appreciate the need for both I have given each of these mediocre Gordons one quality fault and two departures from symmetry. You are invited to determine what the six visible faults are then choose between the two dogs. The faults for both dogs are confined to the head, the body and the hindquarters.



ANSWERS

The muzzle should be the same length as the skull; Figure 4's is shorter. This shortness reduces quality and could limit the size of game that could be picked up. Figure 4's body lacks tuck up, suggesting less agility and activity. And Figure 4's faulty rear pasterns are long providing initial speed but not endurance.

Heavy, drooping flews take away from Figure 5's head quality and are a problem when picking up and carrying game. Figure 5's body is long; the Gordon Setter should be approximately square. The extra body length does not contribute to the Gordon's field ability. The second thigh should be of a length that a line dropped straight down from the point of buttocks will fall just in front of the hind foot – not on the toes as happens with short second thighed Figure 4.

These are the six faults, their degree of departure and their effect on function. The question now is: given these two Gordons, which one do you prefer?

Taking the six departures into consideration and asking which one looks more like a Gordon, I prefer Figure 5. In so doing I am reminded of the difficulty that sometimes arises when your choice is between two different but mediocre dogs.