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SUMMER SPECIAL!

DOG TRAINING

Get the perfect
six-pack: *How to
work a gang of dogs*

The secret to saving
English partridges...
and walking-up Spanish ones

ALL THIS AND...

*Potted pigeon,
Scottish whisky...
and nettle beer!*



PLUS! Mr Darcy's shoot day • Stalking Balkan sheep • Calling roe in the rut
• Arriving on Teletubby Hill • Rod-bending Irish sea trout • BB fowling on the Fens

Racy all-rounders



The early Irish terriers were smaller than those of today

The Irish terrier has a reputation for being tenacious and lively, but one breeder wants to recreate a smaller, all-rounder. **John Glover** meets him

Ireland has always produced game terriers. In County Wicklow, the Glen of Imaal terrier traditionally drew badgers at the end of a dig, while the wheaton terrier and Kerry blue terrier performed a similar role on the east coast. Alongside them there were general duty dogs built on athletic lines in which no cover was too thick, no nettle too hot. This was the Irish terrier, also known as the red devil or the daredevil, whose precise origins are not known. It is likely, however, that its ancestor was the English black and tan.

Early Irish terriers included coats of white, blue, blue brindle and black-and-tan. It wasn't until later that red and wheaton

were recognised. The Irish terrier shares a tenacious nature with the three other types of Irish terrier, but it has been bred to be more racy. Its height varied even after the first breed club was set up in Dublin in 1879 and it became the first Irish terrier type recognised by the Kennel Club (KC).

Today, the Irish terrier measures 18in to 20in to the shoulder, but they used to be much smaller. These smaller dogs were entered into certain lines of Lakeland and fell terrier, after which it became more and more popular to see red Lakelands.

In the old days, the Irish terrier would have braved the jaws of fox, badger or otter. The dog still has a good coat, jaws

and especially good teeth and prey drive. Fortunately, its KC standard does not ask for any silly refinements in the form of impractical leg or facial furnishings.

Breeder project

I recently visited Tim Allen, who breeds, shows and works red Irish terriers in Lancashire. His dogs are the standard size at the shoulder with lovely jaws and teeth and the characteristic harsh wiry coat, but he wants to develop new characteristics. Through a breeding project he wants to recreate the old-fashioned, smaller all-rounder type of working Irish terrier that would be capable of herding stock, going ratting and rabbiting with ferrets, ►

Tim Allen with Bonny and Tilly: "The racy nature of an Irish terrier means they are good for lurcher breeding"



◀ accompanying the sporting gent on shooting days and entering to fox.

"To breed a type of Irish terrier that would be able to fulfil all working terrier duties from wildfowling through to underground work will require the breed to be worked more than is currently the case," Tim explained. "We need proven working dogs to become sires, not just show winners. I want to develop a line from the working Lakeland, which already has Irish blood. This would reduce the size, bolster the gameness and keep the coat quality. It would also act as a safeguard against the pitfalls of closed registry breeding."

He added: "The racy nature and sharpness of an Irish terrier means they are good for lurcher breeding. Philip

The Irish terriers ploughed through the thick stinging nettles with no hesitation

King from Ireland was noted for his Irish terrier x greyhound dogs and I saw a smashing Irish terrier x Saluki stud he had some years ago. Crossed with the greyhound this resulted in a quarter Saluki, quarter Irish, half greyhound lurcher — some dog!"

Out in the field

To see for myself whether Irish terriers could still cut it in the field as all-round working dogs, I met Tim on a hot and humid day in June in the beautiful village of Avon Dassett on the North Oxfordshire and Warwickshire border. I took my working whippet Jude, and Tim had his two Irish terrier bitches, Bonny and Tilly, with him.

Bonny worked well up and down the hillside



The first field we entered rose steeply to a plateau. Jude was quickly into his stride, but the two Irish terrier bitches were on his tail and they were soon on to a rabbit that found sanctuary in a warren. During the chase, the Irish terriers ploughed through the thick stinging nettles with no hesitation whatsoever!

The dogs worked well up and down the hillside, but no more quarry was found. We put them back on slips and entered a traditional English meadow left down for hay. We came across a large estate carp lake and as we neared the water, Jude gave a positive mark at a bed of nettles surrounding a fallen oak. Bonny was through the nettles like a hot knife through butter. She was unlucky not to catch the rabbit within, which bolted and made good its escape unsighted.

Back in the hay meadow, both Irish terriers put their noses up to a scent from

an unknown quarry. Without hesitation, they were "kangarooing" through the long grass and out into the field at a fast pace. All at once, two cock pheasants lifted, presenting what would have been two great shots had it been in season.

We then descended a steep hill through a gloomy wood, where the slots of muntjac and badger tracks could be seen. All three dogs were continuously marking up rabbits in warrens. I was impressed by how well these long-legged terriers kept up through the thickness of the summer wood.



Tim is conducting a breeding project

Spying a muntjac

We left the wood, whereupon the terriers entered some thick, summer vegetation and flushed several more cock pheasants. Tim pointed to a doe muntjac that had crept quietly from out of the cover and was descending the hill we were climbing. We put the dogs on slips and watched her meander down the slope to stand by the field's boundary fence. She stood there for several minutes and then started back up the hill, stopping on many occasions. We left her in peace and went on our way.

Throughout the afternoon, the Irish terriers worked tirelessly. They also proved their accuracy at marking rabbits, as Jude, my ace ferreting partner, gave a definite mark on a rabbit warren.

I think the Irish terrier is one of the few KC recognised breeds that can still be termed "work and show". Though they are certainly not earth dogs, there is much to commend the breed in many sporting contexts, be it shooting, an aid for tracking deer, ferreting or ratting. I also think it would make a superb starting point for an all-round working lurcher. ■

The terriers eagerly entered thick vegetation to flush pheasant

