

**English Setters**  
**April 2019**

## **Versatile English Setters**

We're fortunate this month to have a guest column from former AKC *Gazette* columnist Jill Warren. Jill and her dogs, with the Esthete prefix, have excelled in many venues, so it seems appropriate that she should address the subject of the versatile English Setter. Here's Jill.

The English Setter Association of America (ESAA) recently approved a Versatility program for its members. Its goal is to recognize achievements of English Setters and their owners in many different venues and encourage them to try new things. Success will require a clear understanding of the function of English Setters and how it affects their ability to perform in other venues.

The primary function of English Setters is to find and point upland game birds. Though retrieving doesn't come naturally to them, they can be trained to retrieve, even from the water.

Like most other pointing breeds, their working style is very independent. They know where the birds are when, often, the hunter doesn't. They lead us to our mutual objective, a wily bird determined to stay hidden, hold it with their pointing "power" until the hunter is in gunshot range, allow the hunter to flush the bird while remaining in a steadfast point until the bird is shot, and then, on the hunter's signal, go out to where the dog saw the bird fall and bring it back to the hunter. The hunter can train the dog to go to places where birds are likely to be with hand signals given from a distance, but most of the act of finding the birds is up to the dog. When hunting, we need them more than they need us.

Most pointing breeds are exquisitely aware of any tiny movement near or far because such a fluttering, fleeting movement could be a bird. This awareness of the environment is great for hunting but translates to a high degree of distract-ability for most other activities.

These traits – independence of thought and action and awareness of the environment – have become hard wired in English Setter DNA through the process of selective breeding over many centuries. Because scenting is an integral part of hunting, English Setters have that in their dowry of natural skills, so scent work and scent articles in obedience come pretty naturally to them. Anyone who wants to participate in companion sports such as obedience, rally, and agility, must first understand what the breed's primary function is and how that function affects the way they are trained and perform.

This breed is extremely soft. Indeed, we fanciers love them for their gentle and sweet nature. Training methods that work for other breeds often do not work for our breed. ES trainers must use creativity to invent training methods that are positive, upbeat, and fun. We are beginning to see a corps of pioneers who have figured out the best ways to train our unique breed and who generously share their experience with others to help them take the first step.

ESAA is well aware of the challenges facing ES trainers who want to branch out beyond hunting and conformation. They have designed a Versatility Program that is inviting to newcomers while acknowledging those who have achieved at the highest levels. The hope is that more and more people will try more and more activities with their English Setters, find it fun and rewarding, and inspire others to come on board.

The program will be rolled out soon. Information on how to earn parent club Versatile English Setter (VES) titles will be available on the versatility page of the parent club web site, [www.ESAA.com](http://www.ESAA.com).

Jill Warren

Thanks to Jill Warren for this look at the upcoming ESAA Versatility Program. We'll be looking for more information about it in the future!

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