

**D**ECEMBER 26, 1975: in the arcane world of horseback shooting dog competition, it was the best of times and the worst of times.

Di-Lane Plantation, Mr. Henry Berol's Georgia field trial mecca, stood at its zenith, thanks to drip torch and dozer. The quail population soared; nature for once complemented man's efforts. In one morning Tommy Olive, Mr. Berol's trainer, and neighboring pro Harold Ray worked their strings on 41 coveys of quail! But Henry Berol was dying, and Di-Lane would soon be gone.

Shooting dog standards had also soared. Inspired by the founding of the National Open Shooting Dog Championship and the Shooting Dog Futurities, all sights had been lifted. Better and better trials emerged. Classics became Championships, one by one. But Guy Lewis, on whose Virginia grounds the National had been founded, had passed from the ranks, and with him the fabled Hawfield grounds.

Better dogs appeared each year, in the strings of talented and hard-working young pros: Larry Moon and Harold Ray, Billy Kuser and Eddie Rayl, Gary Miller and Bob Herrington, Gerald Tracy and David Grubb and Robin Gates.

Sage Doc Nitchman concentrated on shooting dogs now, and had his best yet in Champion Smart. But inflation raged, interest rates and gas prices soared, the stock market was just emerging from the tank. All but the die-hard owners of trial dogs were leaving the game, as happens when hard times come.

On the porch of a bungalow on Elm Street in High Point, N. C., a graying shooting dog handler and his wife said good bye to their children and grandchildren and watched them drive off, leaving memories of a warm family Christmas. The handler, Arthur Bean, took deep satisfaction in those

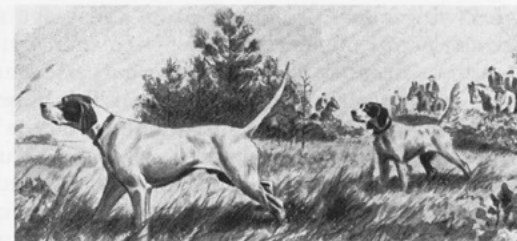
## Arthur and Sam

By THOMAS S. WORD, JR.

three children, reared and educated with winnings and training fees earned over 25 years. But Arthur's career was in sunset, and he knew it. In two months he could draw Social Security. His string, never deep, had withered to just two adults—a setter named Pride and a pointer named Sam—and a single Derby, Pride's son, Zeb.

Just five years before, things had been different for Arthur: with Auburn Jill, he had beat them all in the Virginia Classic (now the Eastern Championship) in a record field of 76; with Elhew Summer Tan, littermate of Doc Nitchman's Smart, he had done the same in the North Carolina Classic (now also a championship). Tan had made North Carolina Shooting Dog of the Year. Two years before that, Tan had topped a record field of 107 as Georgia Champion when less than three years old. Arthur then carried the Elhew Kennel banner with Sundown and Knickerbocker and Chesterfield. But Tan had died suddenly, and Sundown and Nick and Chesterfield and Jill were gone from his string. Had Jimmy the Greek handicapped the coming 1976 Georgia Shooting Dog Championship scheduled for February 1, the Arthur Bean entry would have rated the longest of odds.

With the Bean children seen off to their own homes, Arthur drove to his kennel on the outskirts of town. Its sandy runs adjoined tobacco farms Arthur and other Carolina trainers (English, Grove, Jordan, Walker) had long leased for training grounds. Now urban sprawl and cattle farming, with its insidious fences and fescue, had reduced Arthur's lease to one twisting hour. Few native quail remained. A far cry, Arthur mused on this cold gray day, from the February afternoon in 1938 when, with snow gently falling, Sport's Peerless Pride, bound next day for Grand Junction, Tenn., and immorality, had pointed seventeen bebies in



his jaunt from the Fairfield Grocery back to Dewey's kennel just over the hill. Yes, things looked bleak for Arthur Bean the day after Christmas in 1975. But in the number one run in the Bean kennel, there boarded a young pointer that gave Arthur hope.

**T**HE pointer Sam had come into the world three years before in the Winston-Salem kennel of master breeder A. Bracey Bobbitt. He'd passed at weaning to Virginian L. W. Kelley, any pointer pup's best friend, a man who searched for the gifted pointer like the Holy Grail. (L. W.'s system was simple: take two from a well-bred litter, put them on a farm and give the farmer his choice in exchange for six-month's board and freedom to roam. The farmer would always choose the closer hunter, and L. W. would get what he sought, the potential trial dog. Not foolproof, but now and again it worked; L. W. had discovered many a good one.) From L. W. the pup had passed to another faithful pointer booster, Arthur's friend Dwight Smith. When Arthur had gone to Dwight's to look at Sam, Dwight had said:

"If you're getting the pup for Miss Anne (Arthur's wife, who had owned and still grieved for the fallen Champion Tan), he's yours for \$75. If you're buying for a customer, the price is \$375."

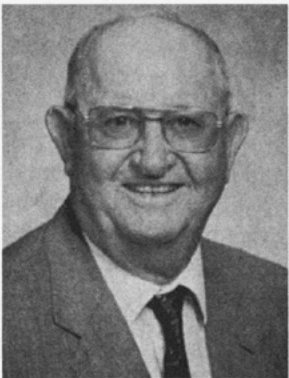
Arthur watched the pup run for fifteen minutes, and tendered his check for \$375. He wanted the pup for a new customer from New York.

Arthur had campaigned Sam as a Derby with marked success—four good placements. And as a first-year shooting dog, he'd put four more notches on Sam's gun barrel. But in phone calls with the owner, Arthur could now detect doubt, and waning enthusiasm. When he arrived at the kennel this day after Christmas, planning to pack for tomorrow's trip to Waynesboro and his traditional January

work with fellow pro Fred Bevan, a message waited: call Sam's owner.

Arthur dreaded returning the call. He had an omen the owner meant to sell Sam. This time the owner didn't say that, he just wanted to know how to get in touch with Arthur in Georgia. But he sounded discouraged, in spite of Arthur's encouragement: "I'm getting him right. He's not quite there yet, but I've got a month, and Fred says there's worlds of birds this year."

Next day Arthur and Anne, Sam, Pride and Zeb, plus the horses, Strawberry and Midnight, struck out at dawn for Georgia in the old pickup and trailer rig. When they made Waynesboro next day, Fred Bevan, much Arthur's senior (he'd won the National in 1935 with Homewood Flirtatious), waited at his kennel. The first words of the tall, slim trainer with the eternal grin came as no surprise to Arthur: "Haven't you got rid of that Midnight yet . . . that's the roughest ridin' walkin' horse this side of Tennessee." (It was true, but Midnight was tireless and surefooted and knew how to watch a dog. Arthur wouldn't let him go until he could find his better at an affordable price.)



ARTHUR BEAN

Fred Bevan had found a house trailer nearby for the Beans to rent. Better quarters than usual for their Georgia stay, but with a drawback they would soon discover. Its tiny propane tank often emptied in the middle of a cold Georgia night, leaving Arthur and Anne shivering beneath their blankets, and Arthur scurrying at dawn for a refill.

Next morning, Arthur and Fred saddled up to work their prospects on Fred's ample leased acres of pine and farm land.

"He's turned into a right good lookin' pointer," Fred said as Arthur put Sam in the roading harness for the ride to their starting place.

As the days ticked by, the two old pros worked patiently to "put the numbers" in Sam's head. In hour-and-a-half workouts, Sam searched and reached and found six to ten coveys (and now and then a rattlesnake, the one feature of Georgia training Arthur didn't much like).

"Arthur, I've got a feeling that dog can win it. I've never seen a dog hunt this country like Sam is doing it now," Fred said two weeks before the drawing.

Arthur could feel Sam's self-confidence building, but he kept a check on his own. He watched now for signs of overtraining or staleness, but each time Sam went down, he seemed more ambitious and happy at his work.

And then, three days before the drawing, the dreaded call came. Sam's owner had an offer for Sam, and if the bidder came through with the cash, he would take it. Who was the bidder? At the sound of his name, Arthur's heart sank. Another handler, perhaps the only one in the country Arthur did not count as a friend. The man had for years tried to buy dogs off his string.

"Please don't sell him until I've run him at Di-Lane. He's gettin' right, and I think he can win it."

But the owner didn't buy it. "That will just be another \$100 I'll be out for the entry fee, and this offer may go down if he doesn't win."

That night Arthur told Anne of his conversation with the owner. "Why don't you offer to buy him yourself?" Anne asked. Arthur drove to a pay phone and called.

"Would you sell me Sam for the same price?"

"Well . . . I guess so."

"My check's in the mail. But remember, I told you he's going to win . . . I don't want any misunderstanding between us when he does . . . he's mine when you get my check, OK?"

Next day a good chunk of the Bean family savings went off by certified mail. (Later Arthur called Jim Moses of Danville, Va., for whom he'd had a dog that hadn't worked out. Moses agreed to buy Sam at the same price, and to send an extra \$100 for the Georgia's entry fee.)

**S**EVENTY-SIX names went into the hat in the Di-Lane clubhouse, the best shooting dogs in the country. Sam drew the very last brace; he would not run until eight days later. Arthur would work him just once more, give him four days rest to remove all soreness—and time to contemplate his hour of freedom. Meanwhile, Arthur and Fred rode enough braces to get a feel for conditions.

When Sam's call to the line finally came, the two old pros knew what Sam had to do: hunt the country, forward and fast, and find and handle quail with accuracy and style.

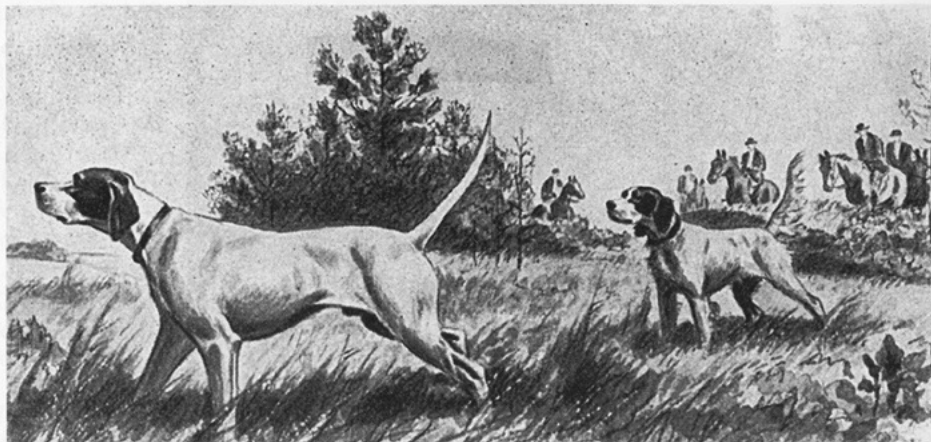
They knew Sam had an edge: eye appeal. With his floating Fast Delivery lick and high carriage, he'd look like a million on Di-Lane's endless edges; he exuded excitement. One of the judges, Billy Lang, was an all-age man; he especially would like Sam's way of going (he too would soon be dead, victim of a motorcycle crash while returning home from a field trial). And Judge Welchel, son of the handler June Welchel of Arthur's and Fred's generation, knew a class shooting dog, for he trained them for a living.

Sam started with promise, driving to the front. Then at eight minutes brown forms appeared in the pines ahead: deer! Sam's path would cross their scent. Sure enough, Sam disappeared into the pines. Arthur rode on and prayed Sam would show to the front; there was simply nothing else to do. Six minutes later Sam popped out of cover ahead. Again at twenty Sam dug into the pines for a spell, but he showed up forward again, and rolling.

And then he was pointing. Arthur lifted his hat and Strawberry broke into a canter. Arthur flushed and fired, and Sam seemed tempted to chase, but he stayed. That find inspired him, and for the next twenty minutes he scorched the course. Then he stood again, a classic limb find, birds handled to perfection.

Watered and released, Sam took a swamp edge forward; he then dipped into cover. Quail flew from the swamp and darted along the edge, a covey not seen before in the trial. Had Sam bumped them? Arthur prayed he would find Sam on point; if not he would likely be ordered up. Sure enough, Sam was on point near the place from which the birds had flown, his tail ticking slowly to signal, "I know they've gone."

How would the judges call it? If they judged Sam had bumped the covey, they could count him out. But they could not in fairness make that call, for they had not seen Sam in motion with birds in the air. The only fair calls were the possibility of a find with birds leaving early or a stop to flush—neither cause for a demerit. Arthur held his breath,



but the dreaded order "pick him up" did not come. They would give Sam the benefit of the doubt, as they should.

Fred released Sam, and Arthur hit the whistle for a finishing cast. Sam responded by driving to the front, a perfect finish. It had been a thrilling run, the two old pros knew, but would it be enough?

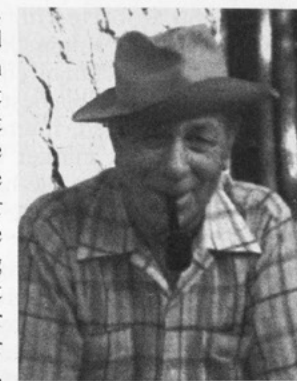
At the clubhouse, the judges conferred a long time; they were not in total agreement. Finally, the stake manager took their slip and announced the results:

"Judy Warhoop, runner-up; Sam, the champion."

Once more, and for the last time, Arthur Bean had made a shooting dog champion of a promising young dog. He'd done it before with McCaskill's Mr. Ranger (National Open, 1962), McCaskill's Mr. Bill (National Pheasant, 1971) Elhew Sundown (Northeastern, 1968), and Elhew Summer Tan (Georgia, 1968). And he'd put his children through college on the earnings of thirty-time winner Shehasit, sister of National Champion Spacemaster and The Haberdasher, a daughter of Fast Delivery.

As he and Anne drove back to North Carolina for the Quail Shooting Dog Futurity, which Arthur had co-founded and now served as vice-chairman, Arthur reflected on Sam's unlikely win. How had he done it? Simple, just as before—for one month he'd had the grounds, the birds, and the help (thanks to ageless Fred Bevan). And he'd had the dog, thanks to Bracey Bobbitt and L. W.

Kelley, like Arthur old in years now, but not in spirit, and Dwight Smith, still young but of the same mind as the elders. That was all he needed, all he'd ever needed. One last time he'd shown the young handlers you couldn't take Arthur Bean for granted—no matter how short his string, how devastated his home grounds, how short on help at his kennel.



FRED BEVAN

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The Futurity had a record entry. The serious shooting dog fans in the East were at the drawing to congratulate Arthur on Sam's Georgia win. Among them was Bob Wehle, Arthur's old patron in the shooting dog wars. When his Elhew Shagger made the one-hour finals, it was Arthur he asked to handle. Arthur took second with Shagger, beating 102 of the country's best Derbies. Very sweet icing on that February's cake.

Arthur would make the long pull to Georgia one more January. He'd take second in the Derby Classic with Wehle's Elhew Alligator. He'd win some more with Sam in Virginia and North and South Carolina, and he'd place the setter Pride runner-up in the Eastern Open. And then he'd retire from the circuit and build a house at his kennel. There he and Anne would live with his

younger son Bill, concentrating on starting puppies, breaking gun dogs and gardening, and teaching grandson Josh about bird dogs and life. When I called him in June, 1997 to verify facts for this account, Arthur had just finished planting five acres of vegetable garden. He's 84 now, and still thinking about finding another good one.

The pointer Sam's registered name was Ch. Drug's Class Delivery, FDSB No. 939264, by Ennis Drug Delivery ex Stormy Becky.