

The National Championship

Safari, S. H. Vredenburg's Veteran Campaigner, Wins Stake

[Photographs by Henry Reynolds]

SAFARI, the indestructible one, declared by many to be the exact type to win the National, after coming close in the course of seven previous tries, made it big in the 1966 renewal of the bird dog classic over famed Ames Plantation near Grand Junction, Tenn. 'Twas a case of virtue rewarded. The nine-year-old white and orange pointer female, owned by Sellers H. Vredenburg of Montgomery, Ala., handled by John Rex Gates, ran in the eighth brace of the stake on Thursday afternoon, February 24. When she had completed a truly remarkable three-hour performance, chalking up six finds without an error, Safari was tabbed as "the dog to beat." Some mighty good ones had run before her, and some mighty good ones came after her, but when finis to the 46-dog event had been written, the name of Safari, like Abou Ben Adhem, led all the rest.

There was a bit of irony in the feat. For it was John Rex Gates, the son, not John S. Gates, who handled "Judy" when she scaled the heights. John S. Gates, of course, developed Judy and piloted her to many splendid triumphs, but he has been recuperating from surgery since last spring, and John Rex took over handling the entire string. The glorious victory of Safari in this 1966 National Championship, the 67th actual running of the event established in 1896, gave 25-year-old John Rex Gates the distinction of being the youngest handler to ever win the National, supplanting his own father who had the record by virtue of having won the National in 1940 with Lester's Enjoy's Wahoo when John S. Gates was about thirty. Just about two months before his son's birth—on May 26, 1940.

This year's National Championship was a distinctive and distinguished event. It was hailed on all sides as highly successful with most of the plaudits going to the Plantation organization for the amazing transformation worked on the Ames Plantation field trial grounds in the course of a year. Reuben H. Scott, who was manager prior to his retirement at the end of '65 and supervised the renovation, and James M. Bryan, now moved up to manager from his assistant manager post, received praise from everyone. The excellence of the grounds was not unexpected; improvements had been publicized in previous months when such knowledgeable field trialers as Joe Hurdle, Hamlet Yarbrough, Lee Hoffman, Gene Lunsford and Nathan Cottrell had helped to check developments and made a quail census on the acreage.

In a preliminary account published in last week's issue, it was said that the Ames Plantation and the National Championship courses had been the cynosure of eyes of sportsfolk all over the country after cancellation of the 1965 renewal following two days of competition. The action of a year ago had a salutary effect when it focussed attention on the immediacy of installing a vigorous, continuing program of game management. Birds alone were not the problem. The big thing was to institute a year-after-year works program that would assure a successful quail propagation project under natural conditions, plus affording the best possible running grounds for the National Championship with its three-hour heats. It is known, of course, that you don't bring an area to its peak and then simply rest on your plowshares. Constant attention is demanded to assure maintenance of superior grounds. In years gone by, and not so long ago at that, the Ames Plantation and the National Championship grounds were riding the crest. Birds were practically everywhere. Yet not all concerned with operation of the Plantation realized that improvements should be made annually. Reuben H. Scott and James M. Bryan were fully cognizant of what was needed; they had the know-how, the experience, but it wasn't always possible to get things done that should have been attended to, and sometimes only the most urgent needs could be met. In addition, natural controls make for a game cycle that causes peaks and valleys in wildlife populations. Subsequent to the dilemma of '65, the trustees of the Hobart Ames Foundation, the trustees of the University of Tennessee, for the benefit of which the Foundation is operated, and the Plantation management concurred that the objectives of each were compatible with maintenance of the field trial grounds in the highest possible state of excellence. All realized that nothing was closer to the hearts of Hobart and Julia Colony Ames than the National Championship. All appreciated their dedication to the titular stake, its ideals and its traditions, and particularly to the profound desire of the Ameses to have it continued in a manner that would enhance the National's hard-

won and well-established prestige. The Foundation trustees, William A. Parker, the Old Colony Trust Company of Boston, Mass., and Harry Cabot, emphasized that the Plantation management should make sure that no projects inimical to maintenance of the field trial courses should be undertaken. President Andrew Holt of U-T, its trustees and the University personnel at the Ames Plantation expressed willingness to collaborate. And as for Reuben H. Scott and Jimmy Bryan, each has long been imbued with the determination to carry on faithfully the wishes of Mr. and Mrs. Ames.

Work initiated in the spring of 1965 and last summer's programs bore fruit in the single year. In a measure, certain parts of the grounds were transformed, inspirational teamwork was brought about by a meeting of the minds of intelligent leaders, and most encouraging of all was the fine aura that pervaded the entire 1966 running. An atmosphere of accomplishment which had overtones of amiability and it goes without saying that the same sort of interest, of cordial cooperation on the part of all

Through the seven decades of its history, the National Championship title holders have wielded a tremendous influence on pointer and setter breeding. A dog that captures the crown immediately gains favor with fanciers. During the early days of the stake, it was all setters. From 1896 through 1908, setters dominated the event. Manitoba Rap was the first pointer to ever win the title, doing so in 1909. In the next ten years, the pointers began to come fast. The last time a setter won the National Championship was in 1946 when Mississippi Zev accomplished the feat. Setter representation has been low in recent renewals. This year there were only two. It is recalled that in 1948 and again in 1951 not a single setter started in the stake. The records reveal that in National Championship competition, the title has been won 44 times by 34 pointers and 23 times by twenty setters. No stake was run in 1897, 1938, 1944 and last year.

Eligibility requirements for this year's National were the same as in effect since 1963; that is, two first-place wins in Open stakes (Derby, All-Age, Championship) with heats of an hour or longer. Back in the late 1930s, starting fields became so large as to be unwieldy. It was in 1941 that the NFTCA tightened eligibility requirements by making it necessary for a dog to have a first-place win. Then, in 1946, this was stiffened to a first-place win in an Open stake with hour heats. During the 1962 running, officials found it necessary to further increase the qualifications, announcing that with



TROPHY PRESENTATION

Safari, the new champion, posed proudly by John Rex Gates and his father, John S. Gates. Standing, from left: Dr. J. W. Morris, vice-president; Rowan A. Greer, judge; Reuben H. Scott, president, National Field Trial Champion Association; W. A. (Dick) Dumas, judge, and Secretary James M. Bryan, manager of the Ames Plantation.

concerned, will guarantee a glorious future for famed Ames Plantation and the prestigious National Championship.

The desire is to dwell at length on the fine condition of the two three-hour courses, but this was touched upon in the previous issue. The most impressive message to convey is that the authorities do not intend to rest on their laurels, for as Mr. Scott said of the grounds—"We intend to make them even better."

In connection with the quail census made on the field trial courses during the National Championship running, it is interesting to note that forty separate beevies were identified individually on the morning course. How were these covey ranges distributed? Remarkably even, all things weighed, for in the first hour, there were fourteen bevy locations; in the second hour, ten, and in the third hour, sixteen. What about the afternoon course? A total of 34 separate beevies, distributed ten during the first hour, eight in the second hour and a whopping sixteen for the third hour. The two-week census tallied with Jimmy Bryan's experience. He had said, "When we work the courses, we find beevies in about a twenty to seventeen ratio on the two arrangements, morning and afternoon." The census worked out precisely to this ratio.

the 1963 renewal two first-place wins would be needed. But the size of starting fields has increased steadily even under the new regulation. Thus at the annual meeting the NFTCA excluded Derby placements. Henceforth, two first-place wins in Open All-Age stakes in recognized trials will be necessary for eligibility. This includes, of course, All-Age Winners' Stakes and All-Age Championship events.

The Ames Plantation personnel has practiced skill in putting on the stake. It is a large undertaking, but every detail is attended to properly. Fine horses are available, though many bring their own and all attendants are urged to bring saddles and bridles; J. Herman Jenkins of Grand Junction again was marshal; sumptuous luncheons are provided in huge tents on the Manor House grounds by the ladies of the Grand Junction P-TA; and one of the most attractive features is the opportunity to rub elbows with field trial VIPs from all parts of the country.

Did you ask about the weather? That's always of importance. The first week was just about the best brand one could wish for—pleasant days for riding, excellent footing for dogs and horses. Indeed, the trial ran nearly the two weeks without interruption—except for the intervening Sunday, as this is always a holiday here—but the charm was broken on Thursday afternoon of the second week when a

