

Ollie!!

by 'Tich' Bray

As we neared a thick patch of bullrushes Olly sent his dogs into flush, but he didn't appear too hopeful.

"I've never got a damn thing out of that patch in five years", he commented. "Probably too much open ground around it". But I noticed he didn't take his eyes off the dogs.

I trailed slightly behind Olly and his two retrievers, with my camera slung loosely around my neck to record his first shot for the day. I had a special reason for filming this hunt and purposely left my shotgun locked in the ute.

Two rabbits blurred into the open, two shots blasted the air and two furred bodies buckled in mid stride. As the dogs raced out to retrieve, Olly looked at me and said: "Well, did you get that?" I stood like a stale bottle of Carlton carrying a sickly grin.

"You caught me unawares you old bugger", I said. "You've got better eyesight and reflexes than most 20-year-olds".

Olly Michelson was 82 this year.

Well remembered in the Victorian gundog world as a field sportsman, breeder and specialist gundog judge, he is still an active shooter and works his dogs every week. His Tabilk kennel prefix can be found on hundreds of pedigrees throughout Australia and overseas, but he retired from judging 24 years ago at the age of 60, when he handed in his license. These days he is content to line-breed Cocker Spaniels, but his first love has always been the Curly Coated Retriever — a lifelong enthusiasm carried over from his father who bred and worked them in the late 1800's. However, he has bred and worked most sporting dogs popular in his more active years, including Gordon Setters, English Pointers, Springers, Cockers, and all retrievers.

"I've shot over some of the finest dogs to grace a field", he said. "I put the Gordon Setter on the map in Victoria and was hunting with them before most shooters had heard of them. Bred some damn good ones in my day too".

As a showring judge, he often put noses out of joint as he studied the gundog lineup and smartly separated the workers from over-fed pets. His wealth of knowledge and experience with gundogs wasn't learnt from a book, but was born of necessity and an eye for a well conformed working gundog. During hard

times in the early days a keen-eyed hunter with a smart dog could always pick up a few bob selling skins or wildfowl to the more prosperous, Olly said.

"Since I could walk, I can't ever remember being without a gundog at heel", he said. "I was born and raised in Australia on a bush farm. My mother was Australian, and my father was Swedish, and I still clearly remember the day he taught me to shoot over a trained retriever when I was seven years of age. I've never been out for a shot since, without a dog".



Olly Michelson, 82 years . . . "I can't ever remember hunting without a dog at heel".