

Daffodils in the U.K.

June, 1998

My own daffodil season was probably the worst daffodil season I've ever had. Sure, we complain about the weather every year—I suspect most gardeners who have a favorite plant do—but this was the worst in memory. It began as an early season, then we got killing frosts that ruined the early buds, then it got hot and everything came out at once. In effect, my season was over by mid-April, and it usually lasts to mid-May.

Fortunately, I had planned to go to Britain for the celebration of the Centenary of The Daffodil Society there. Members of The Daffodil Society had planned a fun-filled week of activities, which was followed by another fun-filled week in Northern Ireland—The Second World Tour of Northern Ireland.



The first event in London was The Daffodil Show of the Royal Horticultural Society. The weather had proved troublesome in Britain as well, with the flowers well advanced; so we were pleased to see a good number of flowers on display. This is the premier daffodil show in Britain where the competition is held for the prestigious Engleheart Cup. This is for twelve daffodils raised (hybridized) by the exhibitor, and competition is always keen. This year it was won by Brian Duncan, of Northern Ireland, with wonderful flowers including 'Goldfinger', an all yellow trumpet daffodil; 'Dorchester', a white and pink double daffodil; 'Surrey' (pictured), a large cup daffodil with yellow petals and a brilliant red cup; and 'Cheetah', a trumpet daffodil with yellow petals and an orange trumpet. 'Bouzouki', another yellow and red large cup, and his new 'Chobe River', also a yellow trumpet, were included. These last three drew lots of attention from the eighty or so American visitors on the tour.

Best bloom in show was 'Moon Shadow', a short cupped white and yellow flower. Bred by Clive Postles, it was exhibited by amateur Paul Payne. Shows in Britain have Open Classes, Amateur Classes, and Novice Classes. Several Americans entered blooms, carefully carried across the Atlantic, and Eileen Whitney of New York won the award for Best Miniature in the Show, a miniature poeticus, still under number W-12 from John Kibler. Another American flower, 'Sammy Girl', attracted attention because it was a white and pink tazetta hybrid, perhaps the first of that type.

Rain the next several days dampened our visits to Wisley Gardens and Hyde Hall Garden, but the sun shone for our visit to Hofflands Daffodils. Here, as at the London show, we spotted 'Lavender Mist' which on opening has a pale pink cup, but with age, the pink fades to leave a distinct hint of lavender. Who knows, someday we may have white and lavender daffodils!

The Daffodil Society Centenary Year Show was held in Solihull, near Birmingham. John Pearson of Hofflands Daffodils was a big winner here. He won the Bourne Cup for twelve raised by the exhibitor and a good many other trophies as well. Besides entering the competitive classes, he also staged a "trade stand." This is a display table about twenty-five feet in length, with four tiers loaded with vases of seven daffodils each. This makes an impressive display! Some that impressed me were the yellow and red 'Doctor Jazz' and 'Lighthouse Reef'. This last is a reverse bicolor, where the trumpet fades to creamy white. John has been breeding wonderful reverse bicolors, beginning with 'Altun Ha' (pictured) several years ago. While judging was in progress, others had the opportunity to visit Clive Postles' Daffodils. During the visit, Clive was presented with The American Daffodil Society Gold Medal for his work with daffodils.



From Birmingham, many of us traveled on to Belfast where we were met by the organizers of the Irish tour. During our week in Northern Ireland, we visited Carncairn Daffodils, where the charming 'Foundling' was raised. This little cyclamineus hybrid was one of the first pink and whites in its class. Later we visited Brian Duncan Daffodils. Here the weather turned rainy, but Brian had in effect staged a "trade stand" in his bulb shed and greenhouse. 'Bouzouki' was again impressive, as was the yellow and red 'Jackadee' and the new 'Sun Trap'.

The last show of the tour was in Belfast, at the Belfast Spring Fair. Here the premier class for twelve raised by the exhibitor is for the Championship of Ireland, and it was won by Brian Duncan. Included were 'Ethos', a yellow trumpet; 'Soprano', pink and white'; 'Jake', a short-cupped yellow and orange flower and named for Brian's grandson; and 'Goldfinger'. Best bloom was 'Achduart', shown by an amateur.

Everywhere we went, we had wonderful hospitality. Don't pass up an opportunity to take a tour with like-minded garden friends. You'll have a ball!

As I had to stay over in London after the tour, I had an opportunity to visit the Late Daffodil Competition. Brian Duncan won most of the prizes, and 'Jake' was best bloom in show.

If you are interested in ordering bulbs from any of these people, you can find their addresses on the American Daffodil Society home page. (see links.)