

DAVE DELEA DOES THE TREBLE FROM BARCELONA.

The subject of this article, Dave Delea of Rainham in Essex has one of the finest records of success in the British Isles in BICC long distance and marathon races. In 2015 Dave achieved a milestone when his dark chequer hen raced home in the Barcelona International race to win 1st Open BICC and 95th Open International against a field of more than 19,000 hand picked long distance racers entered by some of the best fanciers in Great Britain and Continental Europe. In doing so she set a record within the BICC as I believe that no other fancier has won the Barcelona race on three occasions.

This achievement in itself is worthy of an in depth report but when you consider that in addition to these three outright wins from the Catalan capital, Dave's pigeons have also wracked up the following prizes from this most difficult of race points, the reader becomes aware of the fact that this guy is something special. Look at this record:-

3 x 1st, 2 x 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 2 x 6th; 2 x 8th; 15th, 17th etc, a phenomenal level of consistency over a long period of time in one of the world's most difficult pigeon races.

Oh and by the way, Dave's yearling blue pied hen "Greenacres Florence" also won 1st Open NFC Pau in 1988 beating a field of 5,378 pigeons at 565 miles- these birds can sprint as well!!!

The following is a report on Dave's loft and pigeons that I wrote a couple of years back and appeared as part of a series wrote on some of the top long distance practitioners plying their trade in these Islands.

Dave Delea [pronounced Delay] had his first pigeons as a school boy and once he started work as a 15 year old he set about acquiring top class long distance racing pigeons from top local fanciers all of whom were winners of Combine races at the distance. Birds were obtained from Gerald McAllister plus Stassarts from another local ace Jim Montgomery, with the addition of Osman X Kirkpatrick and Savage Barkers from Bernie Spencer and Champion Major bloodlines from Ray Wilson. Since those early days only one outside introduction has stood the test at the Delea loft and that was a bird bred by Geoff and Ian Hunt of Westmarsh in Kent. The only other birds to come in and make an impact have been those obtained from his brother Paul as the brothers regularly swap birds and often mate one brother's Barcelona winner with the others Dax winner for example.

Obviously this breeding policy has resulted in a very inbred family but Dave is not too worried about this, because as he said, "I let the basket sort out the weak and stupid" so that type are not with him long!

For most of the 60's and 70's all Dave's racing took place on the north road through to Lerwick at 600 miles and following years of selective testing at the distance, Dave clocked a blue hen after 16 ³/₄ hours on the wing to win the Combine from Lerwick. He knew then that he was on the right track!

A move to south road racing then took place in 1977 and he set his sights on winning the Barcelona race with the BICC and indeed, he and Paul were two of the early members of this trail blazing club.

The policy of severely testing each generation of pigeons at the distance, especially yearlings, was soon to pay dividends and the name of Delea was hardly ever off the results of the BICC in long distance races throughout the 1980's and 90's.

This terrific consistency was achieved by the strict application of the Darwinian theory of "survival of the fittest" as, for season after season, Dave sent his complete team of yearlings to 565- 600 miles. This ensured that virtually every pigeon in the loft older than a yearling had flown from 565 – 700 miles, as the two year olds and older were expected to compete from Barcelona at 704 miles.

This policy of sending yearlings to close on 600 miles was to bring about the King's Cup winning performance from Pau at 565 miles in 1988, the first year that the NFC allowed yearlings to be entered in the King's Cup race. Dave's Pau National winner was a yearling blue hen "Greenacres Florence" so the previous years of testing all of the yearlings at the distance provided ample dividends.

The Delea team of yearlings are only expected to compete in two races per season that is the NFC Nantes race [or equivalent] at 300 miles followed a month later by the Pau/Tarbes King's Cup race. They are never really hammered but kept fresh and eager with plenty of private tosses from the south coast of England at 50 – 70 miles and then jumped straight in to Nantes at 300 miles for their first race of the year.

Dave is only really interested in three old bird races each season and therefore sets his stall out hoping to achieve peak form in the old bird team at the beginning of July which coincides with the NFC King's Cup and the Barcelona International which are usually held on the same weekend.

THE LOFT.

This is an ordinary self built back garden structure measuring just 16 ft x 6ft facing north east. It is dry and well ventilated and the birds obviously love it as the results achieved at the distance which are reproduced at the end of this article will demonstrate. At one time Dave employed a deep litter of wood shavings in one section and the birds used to nest comfortably in this litter. Since retiring from work he now has the time to clean out more regularly but is still not a slave to the scraper, preferring to leave the birds alone as much as possible.

MANAGEMENT.

In order for the team to reach peak form in early July, Dave usually mates the birds in late February or early March. They are then allowed an open loft to come and go as they please whilst rearing the first round of youngsters. The birds are allowed to nest where they like as it is their home and everything possible is done to ensure that they are happy and content.

Feeding at this time is good quality beans and maize purchased straight from the farm. When racing the birds get a 50/50 mix of beans and maize with the addition of Red Band conditioner in the last week or two leading up to Pau and Barcelona.

In winter the birds are fed a mixture of beans and barley once the moult is complete and the birds are never separated until they are through the moult. All food is hopper fed but the amount is strictly monitored with no food wasted – once the birds have had their fill any food remaining is removed until next meal time.

When Dave is happy with their home exercise he then starts training with brother Paul and this is usually in early May which gives him a month to get the yearlings ready for their first race of the year from Nantes at 300 miles. During this month the race team are tossed regularly from the south coast between 50 – 70 miles but only on good days when the weather is favourable. The brothers like to train against the wind so the birds might go to Brighton if there is east in the wind or Folkestone if there is west in the wind. Every effort is made to keep the birds fresh and eager without taking the risk of them having a knock in training which might sabotage their preparation for the bigger tests ahead.

MEDICATION.

The Delea team are treated as a preventative for cocci, canker and worms at certain times of the year. As mentioned earlier the birds are allowed an open loft as much as possible and as such, spend a large amount of their time in the neighbouring fields that surround Dave's loft.

YOUNG BIRDS.

These are left to grow on until the end of July /early August. They are then subjected to an extensive training programme in preparation for the two races in which they are entered later in the summer, in early September. The youngsters are allowed an open loft to come and go as they please with the old birds and are kept under control by feeding just once daily at 5 pm prompt. They are then allowed to eat their fill of the same mixture fed to the old birds and any leftovers are quickly removed.

The youngsters training starts at around 15 miles and then in increasing stages to 50 and 70 miles along the south coast. Dave likes them to have at least a dozen tosses at 50 or 70 miles before being entered in their first race which is 250 or 300 miles across the channel with one of the specialist clubs. Two to three weeks later they will get the second channel race at the same distance and those that get home are left to mature for the following season. Losses under this regimen have been reduced to almost zero over the years as the family of pigeons housed has developed into one of extreme reliability.

RESULTS.

I do not intend to bore readers with an exhaustive list of the Delea wins but feel that the major prizes attained in the acid test of International racing should be highlighted so here goes:-

Barcelona: 2 x 1st; 2 x 2nd; 3rd, 4th, 5th, 2 x 6th, 2 x 8th Open etc, etc.

Narbonne 1st Open with a yearling.

Lourdes 1st, 8th Open Hens International.

Dax 1st Open.

Marseille: 2 x 2nd, 3 x 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th Open etc.

These are just the BICC Open results there are a lot more prizes with the NFC to add to these.

As you can see the above are only positions in the first ten of the Open I can assure readers that there are many more and all this to a 16 ft loft that in the peak of the season houses no more than 70 pigeons- old bird racers, youngsters and stock birds.

ADVICE.

Dave Delea is firmly of the opinion that National and International birds are a distinct breed apart from ordinary club and Federation pigeons as they have to fly many miles on their own if they are to succeed on the National and International stage. If you are to produce this type of pigeon then the fancier must test each and every generation at the distance and what survives will then go on to make good reliable long distance racers.

There you have it then, the thoughts of a master fancier who has single-mindedly set out to produce his own family of long distance dreadnoughts that has consistently produced pigeons that can achieve success in the "acid test" that is long distance International pigeon racing.
Well done Dave on yet another "master class". I look forward to meeting you at Bournemouth.

Gareth Watkins



Dave Delea 1st Open BICC Barcelona International



Dave Delea's BICC Barcelona winner also 95th Open International



Dave DELEA 's Greenacres Florence 1st Open Pau NFC