

## CONSISTENT PERFORMANCES AT THE DISTANCE

### A LOFT PROFILE ON JACKIE HARRIS & DAUGHTER OF DAGENHAM.

Jackie Harris has been a “regular” on the BICC International race results for some years now. During this time he has been quietly plying his trade as a dedicated long distance devotee to his modest back garden loft in the town of Dagenham in the East End of London.

Dagenham is an area that I know fairly well as I spent a year there in the early 1970’s when at college. At that time the racing pigeon community was thriving, as there were clubs with as many as 50 active members in the area. In recent years many of those fanciers have either left the sport or left the East End and moved further out into more rural areas of Essex. Jackie, however, has remained at the same location since 1972 and his present loft is a 32 ft x 6ft four sectioned structure designed by multiple LNRC and BICC winner Jimmy Peters and built by Jimmy with the help of Lenny Bennett.

This is a far cry from Jackie’s first loft which was a 16 ft x 6ft structure that housed a “dolly mixture” of pigeons. Jackie raced his birds to this loft from 1957 and he was guided at this time by the advice of his father who told him to remember the “Three C’s” – Clean air, Clean water and Clean loft. Jackie won the first race that he competed in, a 60 mile dash from Chatteris with the youngsters, to this modest loft.

Getting back to the present loft now and this has a sloping roof – 7ft at the rear descending to 6ft at the front which faces due East so that it gets the full benefit of the early morning sun. Each of the four internal sections has a Perspex skylight in the roof so that the interiors are fairly bright. There is a six inch gap at the top of the rear wall which allows stale air to escape and each section has a louvered section let into the front wall allowing air to enter. A six inch gap at the eaves of the loft front allows air to enter at roof level and descend to the loft floor and drive stale air out through the six inch gap at the top of the rear wall.

The loft is cleaned daily 365 days a year as Jackie is one of the “old school” and likes the lofts to be spick and span.



Jack Harris with Oscar winner of 1st section 2nd Open BICC 21st Open International Agen 2015



Jack Harris's loft

## THE SYSTEM.

The race team amounts to 24 pairs with a stock bird team of just 3 pairs, all of which fly out daily. From this fairly modest team a round of between 25 and 30 youngsters are reared annually.

All birds are mated in mid February and once the young birds are reared the old bird racers are separated and flown on a form of round about / celibacy system for the remainder of the old bird season. Some hens do tend to mate together and if this happens Jackie simply places a nest bowl where they are congregating and allows them to sit eggs.

In preparation for the trials ahead, the old birds get approximately half a dozen trainers out to 30 miles and then go with the local club to a few 100 mile inland races before their first tilt at the channel.

The birds always exercise well around home so road training is kept to a minimum. However, if the old birds miss a couple of week's racing they may get a couple of 30 mile trainers just to keep them sharp. Jackie takes both the cocks and hens releasing the cocks first and then the hens approximately 15 minutes later. Jack's wife is always at hand to get the cocks into their section before the hens arrive and by the time Jack returns the hens are frantically trying to get into the cocks' section.

As mentioned above the birds exercise well at home and both cocks and hens have their liberty twice per day throughout the season and are never flagged or forced to fly.

Jack has not raced a young bird for more than 20 years but does train them well in the year of their birth without putting them under any real pressure. In the early years of south road flying he used to train them from the south coast at about 50 miles. For the past three years they have had just half a dozen tosses out to 30 miles and then left to mature. The only medication they receive is the annual jab for paramyxo.

## FEEDING.

The racers are fed twice daily. Their breakfast meal consists of ½ ounce per bird of Gerry Plus followed by an evening meal of one ounce per bird of Super Widowhood Mix. From time to time some oils may be added to pinhead oatmeal and once the oils have been allowed to soak into the oatmeal overnight, this is given to the birds as a tit bit .

When the birds are rearing they get a good breeding mixture followed by the racing mixtures when racing and a good moulting mixture when moulting. In the weeks leading up to mating in mid February the birds get a strictly rationed amount of depurative to ensure that they are not carrying any excess weight when pairing time comes around.

## THE BIRDS.

The present team is made up of birds originating from Jim Biss along with some Jan Aardens and Southwells, plus a bird purchased from the BBC Stud. These are then "mixed and matched" as Jack see fit although he does resort to line breeding and inbreeding within certain lines. He then outcrosses to produce more vigour in the progeny.



Jack Harris Perpignan team



Hens section in the Harris loft

## MEMORIES OF TOP FANCIERS.

During Jack's time in the sport he has met and befriended many fanciers and has learnt a great deal by talking and listening to fanciers of the calibre of Dave and Paul Delea along with Jim Peters . These three fanciers have won SEVEN FIRSTS from Barcelona over the years. Then there was Jim Biss a legend in the sport but now sadly passed away. Jack's great friend and former Dagenham fancier, Dickie Pearmain, was a top class fancier, winning many races on the north road before turning his sights on the south road with the BICC where he and son Steve have already gained an enviable level of success in International races.

Jack has listened and learned a lot from these fanciers. He always recalls visiting Jim Biss and the legend stood outside the loft and pointed up into the sky and said to Jack "See that up there"

To which Jack replied "I can't see anything Jim".

Jim Biss replied "No its fresh air and it doesn't cost anything either- that's the best thing you can give pigeons".

## MEDICATION AND SUPPLEMENTS.

This will prove to be a very short section of the report as , apart from the annual jab against paramyxo virus, the birds receive nothing apart from the occasional addition of cider vinegar and garlic to their drinking water. However, if the birds encounter a hard race and are forced to spend a night out then Jack does occasionally give the some vitamins and elecroytes in their water.

## MEMORABLE PERFORMANCES.

Over more than 60 years in the sport, Jackie has enjoyed many top performances with his pigeons but some of the most memorable was when he sent two birds to Lerwick on the north road and clocked both birds on the day at 597 miles to finish 3<sup>rd</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Combine. His memory of the first time he sent to Pau on the south road and getting one of his entries on the day is also fondly remembered.

Some of the top class distance pigeons that Jack has raced include:-

"Toey" was raced from Scotland into London on 13 occasions and was clocked on each and every occasion.

"Billy" flew the channel 25 times and was always consistent.

"Jacko" featured three times in the top dozen of the result from Perpignan.

"Laura Jane" won 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Pau, as did "Jos" in the Perpignan race. "Oscar" has won 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Agen and

"Margo" has been three times in the top 18 Open prizes from Perpignan International with the BICC.

So it seems that Jack's down to earth, no nonsense practical methods are able to produce a veritable conveyor belt of top long distance performers.

I won't bore readers with a long list of some of Jack's past wins but will give a brief run down of some of the top long distance performances achieved with the BICC.

Pau: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> etc.

Saran: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Dax: 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> etc.

Barcelona: 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>.

Perpignan: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2 x 18<sup>th</sup> etc.

Biarritz: 5<sup>th</sup>.

Gellainville: 1<sup>st</sup>.

Clermont: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Agen: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> etc.

Not forgetting the 2015 performance from Agen where Jack's great racer "Oscar" finished at 1<sup>st</sup> section 2<sup>nd</sup> Open BICC 21<sup>st</sup> Open International only beaten for 1<sup>st</sup> Open BICC by the Besant's International winner.

It's been good to report on one of the BICC's "unsung heroes" of International pigeon racing . Keep up the good work Jack and here's wishing you many more successful seasons of pigeon racing.

Gareth Watkins