

WINNING THE EUROPA CUP IN THE BICC.

A loft report on F.Knowles & Son of Wingham in Kent.

FOUR TIMES WINNERS OF THE EUROPA CUP

The Europa Cup is open to competition to members of the BICC and is awarded annually to the fancier whose pigeons record the best average velocity in all the International races each year. As you can imagine, in International races, the small yet significant British entry is faced with the challenge of pulling out of a convoy of many thousands of pigeons racing home to all parts of continental Europe. Nevertheless, one fancier in particular has found the magic formula of producing and conditioning a succession of top class long distance racers to achieve this daunting feat. That man is Simon Knowles of Wingham in Kent who has taken the Europa Cup not once, not twice, not thrice, but an incredible FOUR times in recent seasons.

The 2015 season saw Simon Knowles's team of long distance pathfinders win the Europa Cup for the fourth time and the following are some details of the prize winning pigeons in each race kindly provided by Simon's wife Sarah. Many thanks Sarah I know how hard it must have been to get any info' out of the more than reticent Simon!!



Simon Knowles 4th Open BICC Marseille

First race up in the 2015 Europa Cup programme was the Pau International and here we saw Simon clock for 22nd Open BICC with a four year old Mealy Cock of Geoff Hunt and Krauth is bloodlines. The cock's previous performances are 40th EECC Canapeville 2013; 94th Open BICC Pau 2013; 33rd Perpignan 2014; 19th EECC Canapeville 2015 and 75th Open BICC St Vincent 2015. The mealy's Dam was GB06J 06406 and her performances were equally impressive:- 198th open NFC Chale 2006, 245th open St Malo NFC 2008; 25th open Tarbes 2008; 23rd open Tarbes 2009; 86th open Pau 2011; 11th open Perpignan 2011; 53rd open St Vincent 2012; 47th open Pau 2010; 5th open Narbonne 2010. So he was bred for the job.

Next race up was the Agen International and Simon's first in the clock was good enough for 94th open BICC. This three year old Blue Cock is bred down from Mick Parish bloodlines and his previous performances are 29th Pivithiers EECC 2014 and 18th Open BICC Narbonne 2014.

The Barcelona International saw Simon's first timer take 24th open BICC. Here he clocked a five year old Dark Cock of predominantly Southwell bloodlines, whose previous performances include 4th open EECC Boves; 22nd Open BICC Perpignan 2012; 36th open EECC Pivithiers, flew Barcelona 2013; 12th open BBC Barcelona 2014; 36th open BICC Barcelona 2014.

The winner of 50th open BICC St Vincent is a three year old Chequer Cock of Southwell x Cyril Wells bloodlines, his "previous" are 29th open BICC St Vincent.

The Marseille race saw Simon's timer come oh so close to winning the race finally ending up at 2nd open. This is a four year old Blue Cock of Cyril Wells x M. Parish bloodlines and he is the son of 9th Barcelona 2010. The cock's previous performances include 8th Open BICC Marseille 2014 and 27th EECC Canapaville 2015.

The final race in the International programme is the Perpignan International and here Simon's first in the clock was good enough for 12th open BICC. This one proved to be the only hen in the above list and she is once again of Mick Parish bloodlines. Her previous performances are:- 447th Open NFC Carentan ; 21st EECC Canapville and 25th EECC Canapville.

That's a brief outline of Simon's 2015 Europa Cup prize winning pigeons. I have included below a report I wrote on Simon's loft, written after a visit to Kent following his last success in the Europa Cup marathon series.

Having studied the race results of the BICC over many years I had previously marked down the partnership of F.Knowles & son as one to watch. As a result, some months ago, prior to the 2011 season, I approached Simon, who is the active fancier in the partnership, with a view to compiling a loft report. Simon, as most people who know him are aware, is a very laid back guy and although he agreed to collaborate on the report he got sidetracked by his other passion – supporting Manchester United football club. As a result, the initial project fizzled out but on approaching Simon a second time, he agreed to let me cover his lofts' fantastic series of performances achieved in the 2011 old bird season.

So let's start at the beginning. Simon's dad Derek was a fancier who also trained racing greyhounds. Derek encouraged young Simon's interest in the birds by building him a small loft in which Simon kept a few unrun pet pigeons. By the time he was a teenager the bug had really bitten and Simon entered partnership with his father.

At this time Derek Knowles had established a pigeon breeding stud – The Malibu Stud and racing took place alongside the management of the breeding stud.

In 1988 the Wingham RPC came into existence founded by Simon and Derek Knowles along with long distance legends, Geoff Hunt, Jeff and John Lyden, Brian Williams and Alan Annis. Both Alan Annis and Jeff Lyden have become good friends and a constant source of inspiration to Simon in the intervening years since the Wingham club was formed. This is the same club that Simon competes with today and as he says it is an excellent method of conditioning long distance pigeons for the tasks ahead. This is because the Wingham members race mark their birds on the morning of the race. They then transport them to the race point, which is usually Bedhampton a distance of around 100 miles to east Kent, to be liberated in the early afternoon. This ensures that the birds spend the absolute minimum amount of time in the baskets.

After four or five of these 100 mile training races the race team is entered in a 200 mile channel race with the East of England Continental Club. They then have a week off from racing before going once again to 200 miles with the EECC. There then follows a four or five week preparation period when the birds are entered weekly in the 100 mile Wingham club races prior to going to the International long distance events.

Very little if any private training is carried out, as the birds are kept fit with voluntary home exercise. The birds are not forced to fly around home but are allowed an open loft to come and go as they please from around 8.30 am to 5 pm in the evening.

This laid back, easy going approach is also applied to the mating of the birds which does not take place to a specific plan. The birds are allowed an open loft in the early spring and are mated when, as Simon put it, "they start to play me up by not coming in when I call them". This usually occurs around late April each year. The doors to the sections separating the sexes are then simply left open and the birds allowed to choose their own mates. Simon rarely rears from his racers before the season begins but if two top class racers decide to pair together he will float the eggs under a foster pair. However, once racing is finished for the season the old birds that have survived the rigours of International racing are allowed to raise a round of late bred.

The Lofts.

The lofts at Wingham are quite substantial measuring some 100 ft in length. There are ten sections and most of these have a deep litter floor dressing, the only exception being the sections housing the "sprint" team which are cleaned twice daily during the racing season. Simon is grateful to his son Ryan and daughter Lucy along with Mum Sarah for looking after the birds when he is away on his many jaunts following Manchester United.

The Birds.

The pigeons that have attained this remarkable success on the International stage, are a mixture of strains from various sources. These have been moulded together over the years by strict adherence to the Darwinian theory of "survival of the fittest". If fit and well they are put to the test and any that survive are deemed suitable subjects from which to breed. Needless to say the original stock obtained from fanciers of the calibre of Cyril Wells and Geoff Hunt had already been thoroughly tested at the distance over generations. Some Krauths and Ko Nipius pigeons along with some Tuplin Barkers have been added to this base plus the occasional introduction purchased at Lier Market. Whatever is brought in is thoroughly tested before it is allowed to breed at the Knowles loft. If they fail to do the business on the road and at the distance the whole family is eliminated

no matter how well bred they might be. Simon is not interested in what a pigeon looks like – PERFORMANCE and performance alone, is what counts at the Knowles loft.

Over the years Simon has found that the birds that can score from the two most difficult race points i.e. Marseille and Barcelona, are without exception, the slow steady type. These pigeons never seem to be tired and usually turn up around mid day on the second day of an International race looking as if they have just been released in nearby Dover. They seem to have bags of stamina and an iron hard constitution. Simon houses around twenty pairs of stock birds which are made up of proven breeders and retired performance pigeons – pigeons that have proved themselves on the road at the distance. The stock birds usually rear two rounds of youngsters for Simon's own use, making a young bird team of 70 – 80 pigeons. As mentioned earlier, the racers are not reared from until after the old bird season and any survivors have undergone a severe testing at the distance.

Youngsters get a fairly gentle education in their first year with just a few run outs at 100 miles with the Wingham club.

The old bird race team is quite substantial with around 150 birds in total to begin each old bird campaign. This is made up of around 80 old pigeons supplemented by a yearling team of around 70 birds. This may seem a large team but Simon rarely sends more than a dozen birds to each long distance race and on most occasions his entry is as little as six pigeons.

Feeding.

Feeding is yet another aspect of the sport that Simon has no firm views on- as long as the food is sound and of good quality then Simon is not too bothered. He uses a variety of mixtures and adjusts the daily feed to what he thinks the birds require depending on the work they are doing and the distance to be flown. All feeding is done via a hopper so the birds generally have food in front of them at all times. As for supplements he uses Gerdon1 on a regular basis i.e. Tuesdays and Thursdays each week as well as a product named Sliepsanol which is administered via the drinking water once a month.

Performances.

As mentioned above in the opening paragraph the Knowles team has now won the Europa Cup with the BICC on four occasions. This feat in itself is a record for the BICC, however, in the 2011 season they also won the SG Biss Trophy for Highest Points Total in International races. Other trophies won were the BICC Cup for 2 Bird Average Marseille; The Frans Van Den Heuval Cup for 2 Bird Average Barcelona and the F Roberts Trophy for 1st Marseille. Listed below are Simon's 2011 performances in National long distance races:-

Pau 554 miles [entry 8 pigeons]: 23rd, 41st, 59th, 60th, 78th, & 86th Open.

Barcelona 683 miles [entry 9 pigeons]: 3rd, 18th, 20th, 32nd, 47th & 50th Open.

Agen 491 miles [entry 14 pigeons]: 13th, 44th, 50th, 57th, 65th & 72nd Open.

Marseille 605 miles [entry 6 pigeons]: 1st & 9th Open when only nine pigeons were recorded in the whole of the UK in race time.

Perpignan 590 miles [entry 14 pigeons]: 11th, 12th, 28th & 43rd Open.

To sum up the 2011 old bird National and International campaign – a total of 51 pigeons were entered in races amounting to nearly 3,000 miles and just on half of these 51 pigeons won Open prizes. Not a bad strike rate by anyone's standard when you consider the distance flown in each race.

Over the years, the Knowles pigeons have also won a Fiat Punto car when winning 8th Open National with young birds and some of the loft's top pigeons have been "Little Pea" the 2011 Marseille winner along with "Gregory" winner of 4th Open Barcelona and "El Ced" another big winner in long distance Nationals for Simon and named after Simon's good friend and National winner Ced Allwright of Ashford in Kent.

It has been a bit of an effort to say the least to get Simon to agree to this loft report as he shies away from the limelight and likes to let his pigeons' performances do the talking on his behalf. The 2011 long distance performances outlined above are fairly typical of the level of performance achieved by these pigeons for some years now. With Simon Knowles' totally pragmatic approach I cannot see this status changing any time soon. Congratulations Simon on some truly outstanding long distance pigeon flying.

Gareth Watkins



Adrian Ware, Jeff Lyden, Geoff Clark, Ieuan Williams & Simon Knowles



The lofts of Simon Knowles