



## **KEVIN FOSTER**

### ***1<sup>st</sup> Open BICC Le Mans 2017***

***The 2017 BICC Le Mans race attracted a very competitive entry of more than 3,000 pigeons and the winner of the race proved to be a yearling blue cock raced by Kent fancier **Kevin Foster** of Longfield Hill recording a velocity of 1485 ypm .***

***The following loft report is based on an interview with Kevin shortly after his National race success.***



***Kevin Foster 1st Open BICC Le Mans***

### ***THE BEGINNING.***

***Kevin began his interest in the sport at a very young age- 8 in fact. At that time, the mid 1960's, he joined his father and brother Warren in partnership. They were fortunate to win the first race in 1969, this with the now defunct Northfleet District H.S. racing on the North route.***

***Following his marriage in 1977, Kevin approached the great Arthur Beardsmore of Bloxwich and purchased some of Arthur's "Terror Busschaerts". Arthur not only supplied Kevin with good pigeons he also***

*nurtured the young fancier in how best to care for the birds. Over a three year period Kevin purchased 14 pigeons from the Midlands ace and thirteen of these imports bred Fed or Combine winners. The only one that failed to produce any winners was a hen which proved to be barren. Kevin reflects that this rate of success with imports, would be nigh on impossible to replicate in today's racing scene.*

*In a very short period Kevin went from being a raw novice to taking the first three in the old Mid Kent Fed with up to 3,000 birds competing and this with a team of just 8 widowers and very often getting three drop together. At that time he was competing against household names in the sport. However, Kevin admits that this success had very little to do with him but was more down to Arthur Beardsmore's influence and birds.*

### **THE LOFT.**

*At the time Kevin was racing his pigeons into the Kent town of Gravesend to two successful lofts. One of these was built of timber and the other later one of brick. These were used over a 25 year period. The timber loft had a sloping wooden roof and the latter brick built loft had a tiled apex roof. The original wooden loft housed the small 8 bird team of widowers. By the end of the 1990's this soon escalated to a team of 48 widowers plus 12 widowhood hens as success followed success.*



***The immaculate lofts and garden of Kevin Foster***

*The current loft is 32 ft x 6ft with a tiled roof which has a 20ft side wing for young birds and widowhood hens incorporated. The main 32ft section holds 36 widowhood cocks and Kevin has added a conservatory on the front of this loft which has temperature and humidity control with extractor fans to ensure tip top ventilation.*



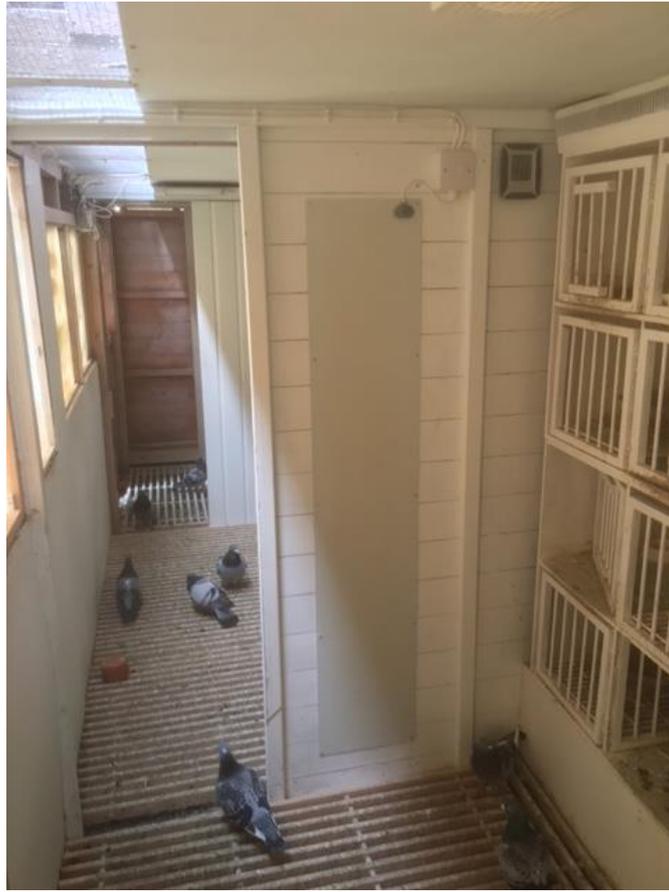
*The Lofts*



*Hen's daytime section*



*Hen's nighttime section*



### ***Main racing section***

***The young bird and hens loft has a full length aviary and after much modification Kevin says that he is finally satisfied that the loft is now as he wants it. The old bird racers have wooden grills on the floors whilst the young bird loft has a deep litter so that the babies can develop their immune systems.***

### ***BLOODLINES.***

***The success achieved with the old tried and tested Beardsmore Terror Busschaerts led Kevin back to the door of Arthur Beardsmore and four more pigeons were introduced from Arthur in the late 80's. These were direct from his top pigeons at that time such as "Joan's Boy", "The Planet Hen" and the Van Reets. These new introductions took the loft's success to another level. At about the same time Arthur put Kevin in touch with another top flier who raced widow hens - Ken Rudge. From the word go in the 80s widowhood hen racing became a key part of his new management system and as he says 4 of his 5 Combine winners during that period were widowhood hens. Kevin still swears by the use of his hens, right up to the present day. His daily management during those early years was typical of the methods used by many at that time***

*i.e. depurative breakdown, carbohydrate build up leading up to basketting day.*

*Kevin has been at his present location at Longfield Hill since 2004. He joined the Malling club and during the first two years of racing had success in the sprint races principally with 3 cocks. However, he longed to develop a team of pigeons that could succeed in Channel racing at National level from 200-600 miles and so the journey started!*

*“Mister Rodwell”*

**GB16N50963**  
**1st East Sect 1st Open British International**  
**Championship Club Le Mans 2017**  
**Bred by Tim Rodwell**  
**Raced by Kevin Foster, Longfield Hill**



©Chris Sutton

*The sprint team was replaced by pigeons from lofts that are at the top today. However the plan stalled when Kevin gained a series of promotions at work. These involved moving into the management team in a big company and the hours involved meant that time with the pigeons was at a premium leading to a number of “wilderness years” with pigeons. However, the promotions at work enabled Kevin to be in a position to take early retirement in February 2015. This meant that he could resume his Channel racing ambitions.*

*This proved to be a bit of a shock to the system as it is, in Kevin’s opinion, far harder to develop a team that can compete successfully in middle and long distance National racing. As he says, he remembers a quote from a top long distance fancier which went something like this- “It helps if you start your journey about 20 years ago”!!*

*Kevin doesn’t have any stock birds at his address but has formed a breeding partnership with his good friend Tim Rodwell who lives*

*nearby. Tim is a good stockman and doesn't race so the arrangement is working well. The present race team housed at Kevin's home therefore amounts to 36 cocks, 30 hens and around 80 youngsters.*

#### **MANAGEMENT.**

*The Cocks and hens are both raced on widowhood, varying from total to dedicated stay at home partners. Occasionally some hens will be paired at the end of the season for a specific race.*

*Young birds are raced on the darkness system and as Kevin says he's no young bird racer by any stretch of the imagination but in the last two years he has tended to get a little more competitive purely to ensure that the selection process is in place right from the off.*



**36<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Alencon**



**3<sup>rd</sup> Open BICC Le Mans**

*This year the birds were mated in late January. The racers were only allowed to sit 10 days and were then parted until racing. Kevin has tried a number of variations over the years and can recall that he once had a yearling cock mated to a 10 year old hen that never laid, so the cock never saw an egg before racing and yet he topped the Fed in the first race and flew well all year.*

*Kevin's observations are that this year, up to the second week of July, not one pigeon had dropped their 3rd flight with most being on their first or second flight. He has also noticed that the cocks were much slower into form this year than the hens. As racing hens into September*

*has become more of a feature he intends to keep some of these hens going but it's a case of experimenting to see where it takes him.*



### ***3<sup>rd</sup> Open Combine Falaise***

### ***3<sup>rd</sup> Section BICC Falaise***

*This year Kevin worked on the hens earlier, starting right at the end of March with the cocks following on about 2 weeks later. He then went on holiday for a month in late February and on his return was amazed by the condition of the cocks as they looked so well. This was very much akin to show condition and their exercise, when started was laboured and really they were a month behind the hens in their preparation.*

*The hens on the other hand this year have flown easily with vigour for an hour. Getting the hens to drop after their exercise has been the problem. The cocks exercise has been different and he recalls what Arthur Beardsmore told him years ago regarding the cocks home exercise. This was that Arthur's widowers, when in form, didn't fly for an hour in one go, but were up and down 20-30 times in an hour breaking away and back. In this way they use their pectoral muscles lifting off the loft rather than fill up their air sacs and become lighter than light while flying.*

*The hens are exercised just once daily in the evening. The racing cocks go out twice daily. As far as training is concerned the old bird racers get 4 or 5 before racing starts and then selective training in preparation for the National races. Young birds on the other hand get approximately ten tosses before the first race and then one toss mid week throughout the young bird programme. These training tosses are from around 25 miles.*

*When preparing the team for this year's BICC Le Mans race Kevin decided not to train the cocks in preparation but as his son in law was working in Hastings he thought that he would train the hens for a 40 miler about 6 or 7 times in the 10 days before the race . However, come race day his first four birds in the clock were cocks!!! So much for special preparation of National race candidates!!*



**6<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Le Mans**



**7<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Falaise**

*In recent years Kevin has given the young bird team just 4 or 5 races. In times past his cocks wouldn't see the channel until they were 2 year olds. He now likes to select harder especially his hens so these go across the Channel as young birds plus some of the young cocks. Kevin has become more convinced that we tend to test our pigeons as a group rather than as individuals. To back this theory up he recalls a visit he made some years ago to one of the UK's top long distance partnerships, John and Spencer Nicholson. It was August and he remembers asking John where the youngsters were. John replied that they had their first race the weekend before and would be working their way back over the next few days and weeks !!! Developing that individuality early on in life, is Kevin believes, an essential requirement of the long distance pigeon. The young birds have been raced on the darkness system for many years, and in all that time, Kevin has not witnessed any bad after effects in their adult racing life.*

#### **FEEDING.**

*Vanrobaeys and Versele Laga widowhood mixtures have been fed at different times and Kevin likes to add various grains, fat mixtures and oils to prepare the birds for the task in hand.*

*The birds are hopper fed but with 5% barley in the mix. They are fed a little bit at a time until they start leaving the barley.*

*The young birds have 10% barley and 10% pellets added to the same widowhood mix. Kevin believes that pellets are useful in a young bird mix as they digest quickly. He has found that if there's one baby a bit off colour or holding corn, which is rare, then a feed of 100% pellets the next day is all they need to put them right. As he says:-*

*“I haven't broken the birds down, as in my sprint days, for some years, nor have I used a diet or depurative. I know my sprint performances have suffered but I don't care, from the first week in May to end of July this year I've had 14 channel races so breakdown /diet mixes aren't part of my regime. I'm still learning about this area. When Arthur Beardsmore gave me his feeding regime in 1980 I followed it to the letter and for races up to 400 miles it worked fine.”*

### **PRESENT DAY BLOODLINES.**

*In recent years Kevin has bought in a few pigeons from different sources and most haven't worked for him. That doesn't mean they weren't any good, just that they didn't respond to his management.*

*Some that have stayed are two from Geoff Cooper, a son of Farm Boy/ Brother to farmer George, and a hen direct from Wiggler. These have been responsible in 2 generations for 5th, 6th, 7th National and Ken McGowan's 4<sup>th</sup> BICC National at Pau this year. One cock and 3 hens from Mark Gilbert are also showing good signs with a 11<sup>th</sup> National Poitiers this year and 7<sup>th</sup> National previously.*

*There's also a couple from Neville Spracklen, the Bullens and more recently Robert Rome. In the last couple of years as part of the breeding partnership with Tim Rodwell the Koopmans and John Searle's Denney/Chris Gordon lines are also set to be part of the future plan. In this area Tim has the control of the breeding program so that Kevin can get on with testing them.*

*Kevin regrets the fact that he let the original Beardsmore pigeons dwindle as they bred winners both pure and when crossed with almost every introduction.*

### **PERFORMANCES.**

*Here I'll let Kevin tell you in his own words what he has achieved in the sport:-*

*“In the early years, it was all about being top prize winner. Wherever I went in the Kent Federations at the time, we were either top or r/up top prize winner at Fed level over several years. Alongside this winning the London South Coast Combine/ Kent Combine 5 times; the London and South East Classic Club; the Kent Specialist club; the Bromley 2 bird; and top 10 performances at National level, I think 5th NFC Herstal the year we raced east when the first four birds were all north of the Thames in a south west wind pleased me.*

*Apart from the London Region Merit Awards won around that time I remember winning the George Barrett south road trophy and seeing the names in there and thinking what right have I to be on there. There were names on there that as a kid I thought were the gods of pigeon racing.*

*At Longfield Hill where I have been attempting to establish a team to compete at 200-600 miles, I now realise I have a far bigger job than previously. Although some would be happy with a peppering of top 10 results in the last few years the bar keeps getting higher each year with some wonderful results from Messrs cooper, Gilbert etc .*

*However the BICC National win and team performance from Le Mans has to be the best here.*

*Since getting going into the middle/long distance racing today, I've now realised two things 1-I spent too long in sprint middle distance racing and should have made the change earlier*

*2- I now realise that all of the above performances count for nothing against National and International racing and getting top1% results at this level is all I am focused on . I suppose a measure of improvement is that in the five National races this year my leading pigeon has been a top 1% performance in section or Open, followed by others at that level.*

*As for top individual performers:-*

*Many of the sprint middle distance birds were multiple performers but Judge Jules 12 x 1st 4x1st Feds, and “06”; 10 x 1sts 4 first Feds stand out. In recent times “75” a Cock which won 6<sup>th</sup> National and sired a 4<sup>th</sup> National Pau also spring to mind.*

## ***VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF THE SPORT.***

*“It's an amateur sport and very often it shows. Most information we receive today is through media of some sort, I don't know what a media team would cost but let's start by advertising the positives from our sport and selling ourselves in a better light than so often happens.*

*Secondly, we need to focus on where our target audience is, to attract into the sport. Are we really going to get under 20's into our membership? (Unless they are family ) we know there is a growing more senior population , retiring earlier, and in many cases able and willing to get involved in something , what an opportunity!*

*A recent inclusion in our journals ([www.oswaldtwistlehomingsociety.co.uk/](http://www.oswaldtwistlehomingsociety.co.uk/)) showed how one club is growing its membership with some great initiatives there.”*

## ***MEDICATION & SUPPLEMENTS.***

*Nothing other than what appears to be the norm now. He tests and treats the birds only when and where necessary.*

*Kevin puts more emphasis on adding oils on the corn now, once upon a time it was additives through the water. Otherwise nothing that people aren't already aware of. The pigeons get extra protein, carbohydrates, fats in their feed in a timed programme depending on the distance to be flown and duration between the races.*

*Kevin's views on his perfect pigeon:-*

*“I am sure various factors play a part in the make up of the perfect pigeon but in terms of physical attributes I only insist that a top pigeon has good soft feathering. Outside of the mire of subjective preferences that people offer, I am far more interested in performance- the more top 1% performances at National level I see in a pigeons breeding the more excited I get.”*

*Additional thoughts:*

*One thing I find lacking in our sport is the lack of definite statistical evidence. In my previous working life I worked daily with statistics and I find that the subjective and gut feel responses in some adverts about performances and the importance of one or more physical attributes,*

*completely over the top "bred many winners " ,"goldmine producers" and "wonderful breeding eye" mean what?*

*When I can read in one of my horse racing stud books the number of horses a stallion has sired , how many were group 1,2 or 3 winners and a whole host of other stats I can immediately establish levels of performance. I would love to see ace pigeon awards given more profile in this country."*

*There you have it then, the thoughts and methods of an obviously very intelligent fancier who leaves no stone unturned in his pursuit of his goals within the sport. With Kevin's determined attitude and purely objective outlook on the sport, I don't think it will be long before he achieves his ambition of consistent success at National and International level. You have been forewarned.*

*Gareth Watkins*

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