



JOHN COWLIN of Hullbridge in Essex.

1st OPEN BICC GUERNSEY 2 ANY AGE RACE.

The following article is based on an interview with John Cowlin who became a double National winner recently when his yearling Frans Zwols hen now named “Guernsey Princess”, won the BICC Guernsey 2 Any Age race. John had previously won 1st Open NFC to go alongside his many other successes in the sport.



John Cowlin 1st Open BICC Guernsey 2 AA 2017

Here's John's answers to my questions. Take it away John:-

When did you start in the sport?

I started in 1996 on my own but previously I had helped my Granddad for a year before I set up a loft at my Dad's. My Dad had never had pigeons before.

[John's father Rob is now a "silent partner" in the day to day management of the Cowlin lofts]

Who was your first major influence?

Obviously my Granddad helped a lot at the start and then when I got my own loft Jonathan Gladwin and his Mum Pam and Dad John helped a lot.

Can you give brief details of your first loft, birds, management etc ?

The first loft was an 8ft x6ft shed that my Dad knocked up for me in the garden. My base pigeons at that time were some Janssens from Louella Lofts that my Dad treated me to and some birds from Jonathan Gladwin and his Mum & Dad.

How long have you raced to your present location?

I moved the pigeons to race from my house starting with young birds in 2015.



The Racing Lofts of John Cowlin

Can you give details of your present loft set up i.e. overall dimensions , orientation , number of sections etc ?

My set up now is very different to my old lofts. This one is 110ft long and has 11 sections and is around 12 ft wide. It is constructed from brick and has a tiled roof.

Do you use deep litter, grids or clean daily/regularly?

The birds are cleaned daily between my Dad and I.

How many birds do you keep:- stock, racers, young birds?

I started this season with 60 old birds and 100 young birds.



The Stock Loft

What system do you use to race the birds e.g. widowhood, round about, natural etc?

I tend to mainly fly widowhood but did try some birds on the celibate system this year.

When do you mate your stock birds, racers?

I normally pair the stock birds early December and the race birds just after Blackpool Show in mid to late January.

Do you mate the birds you intend for the longer races at a different time to the other racers?

No all race birds are paired the same time.

What is the preparation of the racers prior to the first old bird race?

I like to train my sprint team a lot from short distances. They will normally have at least 20 training tosses from around 18 miles before the first race. The channel team will have a lot less training before the first race, normally around 6 or 7 from 18 miles.

Do you force fly your birds during exercise or are they left to do as they please?

I like to flag them for an hour once a day.



One of the racers's section

How often do you exercise the race birds?

The sprint team are exercised twice a day at the start of the season and then once trained, they go out once around the loft each day and the channel team just once a day.

How often do you train the race birds before and during racing?

Sprint birds at least 5 times a week, channel pigeons 1 or 2 times a week.

How far do you usually train ?

The sprint birds never go above 18 miles channel birds are trained out to 50 miles once racing.

Is there any specific preparation for the birds before National races?

The only thing I always do is to have the birds tested 2 weeks before the National race and I will then treat if required.

How much racing do your young birds receive and how many training tosses do they have in the year of their birth?

I like to get as much experience into them as possible so they race and train as much as possible, without over doing it and hurting them.

Do you race your young birds on the Natural system or Darkness/light system?

All young birds are raced on darkness.

How do you feed the racers, stock birds, young birds – hopper /by hand? How do you gauge how much they need at each feed?

The old bird race team are fed in their boxes but the young birds and stock birds are fed in the hopper.

What mixtures do you feed?

I use Gerry plus and Superstar Plus from Versele Laga for the race birds.

Do you feed any differently in the build up to National races?

I tend to add some high fats to the mixture.

What are the main bloodlines that you house now and which lines have proved the most successful?

The main family at present is the Frans Zwols, with all the lines within this wonderful family showing at different times.

[The sire and dam of John's BICC winner are owned by Formula 1 Lofts which is jointly owned by John along with John Gladwin. They are direct from the loft of Frans Zwols. This pair are Prince of Rekkem and Dreamy, see photos below.]

Dam of 2nd section NEC 2016 & direct from Amor x dream Girl 200



"Prince of Rekkem"

2e NPO Rekkem 19.489 p.

*Frans Zwols
Oldenhof 9
7783CL Gramsbergen (NL)*



Do you line breed, in breed outcross when breeding. Which method has been most successful for you?

We tend to cross different lines within the same family for racing and also we do cross the odd quality pigeon into the main birds for racing. For the breeding loft we like to line and inbred and then cross them back out with a different line for racing again. We are big believers in keeping the stock loft well stocked of quality bloodlines.

Is there any fancier who has helped you more than any other?

There has been quite a few over the years especially when I was younger. Theresa and John Gladwin used to help me train etc.

Can you give an outline of your many top class performances and those that have given you most pleasure?

I think winning the NFC just after my Nan passed away will always mean the most to me. For a week or more before that race I just knew I would win it for some reason, I have never had such a strong feeling before or since about a race. For many years my main aim was sprint inland racing in which I was lucky enough to have many wins but nothing compares with getting a good one from a National or International race.



Can you give details of some of the top pigeons that you have raced?

My NFC winner Lady Hamilton was a top hen as she also had other good positions. Guernsey Princess, my BICC National winner was bred at Formula 1 Lofts and has only had 3 races and been 1st Open BICC, 3rd Open BICC and she will also be about 5th or 6th section NFC in the last Any Age race.

"Guernsey Princess"

GB16S61958

**1st Sec ES 1st Open British International
Championship Club Guernsey 2 0/B 2017**

**3rd Open British International
Championship Club Guernsey 1 2017**

Raced by John Cowlin, Hullbridge



©Chris Sutton

Do you have any views on how the sport can be improved and how we can attract new members into the sport?

I think the sport needs to move with the times and maybe needs to embrace the fact that the sport is splitting and has a professional element to it these days.

Do you have a specific programme of medication?

I get my birds tested regularly by De Weerd in Colchester and I follow their advice.

Do you use any supplements such as vitamins etc?

No not really.

Do you feed any supplements in the build up to long distance / National races?

No .

How does your ideal pigeon look/ handle?

I gave up worrying about how a pigeon looks and handles some time ago. All I look for now is good health and fitness, as I've found that good birds come in all sizes and shapes but good breeders and racers all have one thing in common and that is good health.

If you could only use one product / supplement, what would it be?

Matrix grit and mineral complex.

There you go then. The thoughts of a double National winner whose simple, no nonsense, down to earth approach to pigeon racing has seen him enter the winners enclosure on race day on many occasions. Congratulations on your latest National win John, and I hope you have many more years of enjoyment and success. Best wishes to your wife on a swift return to good health.

Gareth Watkins