

No Turning Back

by Steve Patrick
of Patrick Bros, Belgium



I had a lot of nice mail regarding the story of Ellen and Joop Groenen in last month's article. Now I am going to write about one of the other fanciers I told you we have pigeons from to start our sprint one-day family of pigeons. This partnership Comb Bleeker, lives right up in the far west side of Holland in a village called Sint Pancras, on the opposite side of the Netherlands to the Groenen Lofts. There was a reason for us doing this. Both race in different organisations so the racing will be a little different regarding the wind and drag etc. The partnership consists of father Jan and son Kees, not forgetting the main person in any partnership or loft, the lady of the house, Nel. This is a very happy family. Although neither Jan nor Nel could speak English we managed to get across the things we wanted to know, but son Kees speaks perfect English so all went well. His parents are very affable people and made us very welcome with lots of laughter during our stay, which put us at ease right away. Now to get on with telling you a bit about the Family Bleeker lofts and pigeons.

Jan started racing pigeons at an early age, then due to getting married in 1965 he disposed of the pigeons until 1972 when he restarted in the sport. His first pigeons at that time came from his brother Klaas who, along with his other brother Theo, were very good pigeon fanciers, Klaas at that time being top in the Combine. The pigeons then came from the early line of ange van 59 of the famous Janssen pigeons. From a fancier named Nico Pronk, a friend of Klaas, came a couple of Janssen birds which bred 72-1458117, winner of 8 x 1st and which later became a super breeder. Along came 1976 with Jan acquiring a Van Loon hen, winner of 3 x 1st, winning in strong headwinds and hot weather.

Time now to move on a bit, 10 years in fact to when Jan purchased a pigeon from a local fancier who had two super birds, mother and daughter. From the daughter he bred a young cock who, a year later, bred the absolute top breeder, Romario. It was in 1988 the Bleeker family moved to the small village called Sint Pancras, near the City of Alkmaar.

Once again brother Klaas provided them with pigeons to restart. In 1989 they had 10 pairs of racers and four stock pairs. In his first race from Roosendaal, 80 miles, Romario won 1st prize and in his next four races won another 3 x 1st, finishing up 8th National Ace Bird Short Distance. In the same year his yearling son won 2nd Provincial against 16,000 from Pont St Max, 255 miles in hot weather and a strong headwind.

In two seasons Romario won 7 x 1st and was then put to stock. He became the sire of the Etampeshen 90-2288118, the dam of the super birds De Rappe, the Super 15, The Mustang and De Rakker Dam of Romario was a granddaughter of 72-1458117, see above, and she was also the dam of 91-108 with 1st from 1,284 birds, 1st from 2,177 birds, and 1st from 6,698 birds. In the same year that Romario became 8th Best Pigeon of Holland the Bleekers had another cock, the Goede 86, which was 14th National Ace Pigeon Short Distance over four races The Goede 86 formed one of their top

stock couples with the 90-2288118, the Etampeshen. To prove this point the three best Ace Pigeons of the Combine, 500 members, were three sons of this pairing: De Rakker, the Super 15 and De Rappe. Another son, the Mustang, won 4 x 1st and is an outstanding breeder.

In 1997 a new star was born, 97-1325022, the Super 22. In only two seasons he won 5 x 1st in the CC against 3,236, 2,504, 1,490, 880 and 841 birds respectively. His dam was a daughter of Romario and his sire was a Janssen from the top fanciers Duivenvoorde/Welp from Heemskerk, a son of their top breeding pair. A full brother was the Best Pigeon of All Holland Middle Distance in 1990.

In the winter of 1999, the Bleekers purchased a brother of this pigeon. He became a great racer winning more than 20 top prizes and was given the name Crack 26. He was paired to the dam of the Super 22 in the year 2000 and this pairing produced the top racer Zidane, 00-5048601, who won in two years 5 x 1st and 6th Ace Pigeon Short Distance. Two sons of the Ace pigeon De Rappe finished up 12th and 16th Ace Pigeons. From 1995 to 2001 they were five times in the Top 10 of All Holland on the short distance. No one did better and when one considers that they are flying against fanciers with big names who send upwards to 120 plus pigeons per race, it goes to show the outstanding quality of this family of pigeons. In the last 10 years they have always finished in the top three in the Combine with a small team.

We went out to the lofts to view the pigeons. These are not at all big lofts. The widowhood loft is about 21ft long. This has one section for 20 widowhood cocks, the next section is for 12 race hens, and then there is a small section for 15 summer-bred young birds. The 35 early youngsters are housed in a 6' 6" x 6' 6" loft. The widowhood cock team consists of nine old cocks and 11 yearlings. This is the reason we went to these fanciers for pigeons to make part of our sprint one-day family. Small team flyers but very successful, no mob racing here, every single pigeon will have to fly well to retain his box for the winter. The stock pigeons number only eight pairs and are housed in a small loft about 7ft x 7ft, and a lovely looking lot they are.

The young birds are raced through to 366kms about 225 miles. The young cocks only go to four races and the hens to about seven races. Then they have five late races in August and September, which the summer-bred young birds also go to. The Provincial race from Abils is 505kms they try and send 10 birds to this race, mostly hens. Next year they are going to send more to the 500 to 700km races.

Kees tells me a lot of the big lofts in Holland call them National Races but they are not, they are Provincial races (NPO). National races are only the 2-day races from places like Barcelona, Perpignan and Pau. So that is a good thing for you fanciers to know. Also worth knowing is that the sales of pigeons in the auctions over here in Belgium and Netherlands always list the amount of pigeons a fancier enters for a race and also the prizes he wins in the same race. The ratio of prizes won in relation to the amount of pigeons entered is watched very carefully over here and means a lot, but it seems to mean little

"De Solo"

1e Peronne	13.439 d.
1e Chantilly	1.394 d.
3e Chimay	3.265 d.
7e Chantilly	1.766 d.
8e Peronne	3.539 d.
9e Meer	4.759 d.
9e Duffel	4.387 d.



NL.00-1797374

Comb. I
St. Pancras
Tel: (0031)

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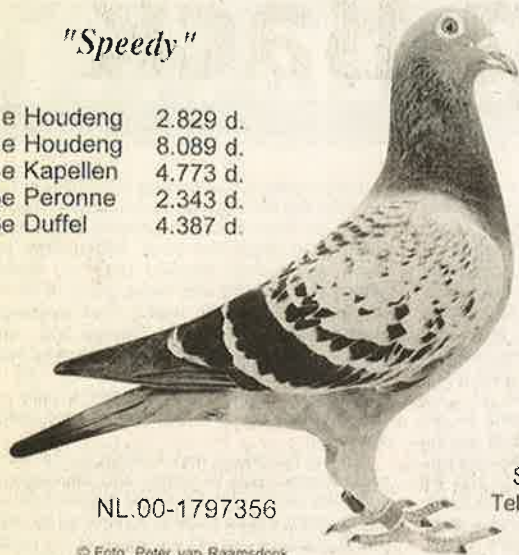
Ace Racer De Solo son of @ Rappe and Super Hen 97-055.



Friend Valere, Mr & Mrs Bleeker & Son and myself.

"Speedy"

1e Houdeng	2.829 d.
1e Houdeng	8.089 d.
4e Kapellen	4.773 d.
5e Peronne	2.343 d.
6e Duffel	4.387 d.



NL.00-1797356

Comb. B
St.Panca
Tel: (0031) 72

© Foto: Peter van Raamsdonk.

Top Racer Speedy son of Mustang and daughter of Crack 26.

"De Zidane"

1e Duffel	4.387 d.
2e Meer	4.945 d.
2e Meer	4.059 d.
2e Chimay	3.265 d.
2e Chantilly	1.766 d.



NL.00-5048601

Comb.
St.Panc
Tel: (0031)

© Foto: Peter van Raamsdonk.

Ace Racer Breeder De Zidane son of Crack 26 and daughter Romario.

in England. I notice that is not the case in the English adverts of some sales. Some of the top prizes yes, but not all, and the amount of pigeons entered are not given in a lot of the sales.

Now we can get on to some performances put up by this small team of pigeons. At National level, Kees tells me they have been the best loft in Holland on the Short Distance the last 10 years: 1995 9th Place; 1996 3rd Place; 1997 2nd Place; 1999 10th Place; 2001 5th Place; 2002 the 6th, 12th and 16th National Ace Bird Short Distance; 2004 2nd Place and 3rd National Ace Bird Short Distance.

Highlights of recent years in the Combine (350 fanciers) or the Provincial (2,150 fanciers) were: 2002 - 1st Short Distance Nominated and not Nominated Combine; 3rd Short Distance not nominated Provincial; 1st Young Birds Nominated Combine; 1st Young Birds Not Nominated Provincial; 1st Champion Combine over all races; 2003 - 1st Short Distance Not Nominated Combine; 3rd Short Distance Nominated Combine; 3rd Natoer (Late Season Races) Combine; 1st Young Bird Combine with g.daughter of Rappe; 3rd Young Bird Provincial; 2004 - 1st Short Distance not Nominated Combine; 1st Short Distance Nominated Combine; 1st Short Distance Provincial; 1st Championship Short Distance with g.son of Rappe; 3rd Middle Distance Nominated Combine. Also in 2004 they were 12th National Place Young Birds All Holland

Some of the best results in 2003 and 2004 are: Houdeng, 244kms (151 miles), 2,733 birds, 1st-2nd-6th-7th-40th-44th-45th-61st-62nd-94th. 12 prizes from 15 entered; Meer, 130km (81 miles), 4,616 birds, 1st-2nd-20th-61st-63rd-66th-68th-70th. 18 prizes from 28 entered; Chimay, 294km (172 miles), 3,705 birds 3rd-4th-5th-11th-34th-55th-56th-77th. 17 prizes from 24 entered; Morlincourt, 366km (228 miles), 2,130 birds 4th-5th-7th-8th-9th-10th-50th. 9 prizes from 17 entered; Houdeng, 244km (151 miles), 2,752 birds 2nd-7th-8th-12th-26th-31st-56th-58th. 17 prizes from 20 entered; Peronne, 330km (205 miles), 2,056 birds 2nd-21st-24th-68th-71st-83rd. 11 prizes from 16 entered; Reims, 397km (248 miles), 1,997 birds 2nd-8th-61st. 5 Prizes from 8 entered. Also 3rd Provincial against 11,655 birds; Peronne, 330km (205 miles), 1,549 birds 14th-15th-18th-85th- 7 prizes from 10 entered; Chimay, 294km (172 miles), 4,700 birds 3rd-4th-8th-21st-82nd. 18 prizes from 21 entered; Chimay, 294km (172 miles), 2,607 birds 16th-17th-19th-52nd. 10 prizes from 14 entered.

That's all that that is needed to show you good people the achievements of this loft. You will notice that they are predominantly a sprint-type of family. That is not to say they will not win at a longer distance and they will send them more to the 500 to 700kms this year. That is another reason why we purchased from this loft, because it proves that this family has an abundance of speed. That, together with the pigeons we have purchased which are more tested at the 500 to 700kms by the fanciers we had them from, should see the eventual team cover all the those distances. Our own long distance family, while flying these same distances, can then take over for the ultra long distances - in theory of course - but we have done it several times before in different parts of England so I do not see that it can be any different over here. If you have the type and class enough pigeons for the job, it matters not where you live, but however good fanciers think they are, there is always someone just that bit better. Having said that, if fanciers themselves do not have any confidence in their own ability then they will surely fail. We are not one of those fanciers who lack confidence when it comes to racing and breeding pigeons, and I don't say that in a big-headed way.

To get back to this excellent partnership of the Bleeker Family. They never go too much into giving the pigeons a lot of antibiotics; they give the team a course of Parastop against paratyphus for seven days. When sitting on the first round of eggs they give a treatment for trichomonas in the water. During

racing nothing is given, unless the results are down then they will find out why and treat accordingly. Nothing else is given. That is another reason why I like these pigeons. The owners treat them very much the way we treat in our own loft, natural Immunity as much as possible. Keep off the tablets and bottles and let the pigeons maintain their own good health.

Feeding is Teurlings' AS Senior for the widowhood cocks and hens; the young birds get Teurlings' Junior, also added is P40 and Tovo pelleted feed plus of course grit and minerals. No extra vitamins are ever given on the food or in the water, not do they give or breakdown mixture, they give the same feed all season.

All the pigeons are let out twice a day for an hour. The loft is not closed nor are the pigeons flagged; they suit themselves. Prior to racing, the old birds and young birds are given around six Training tosses from 15 to 30kms, so they do not get a lot.

As regards the system of breeding, they practice half line breeding and half crossing. Some pairings are the same as the year before.

There is not much else I can add to this report except to say that they are excellent fanciers, above all kind and genuine people. I have done my best to portray the loft as best I can, and if you enjoy this report then the pleasure is mine.

I will not put in any more about the other sprint one-day pigeons we have. Now we will have to see what we breed from these pigeons and at the end of the season we will all have an idea as to how they have raced as young birds and, the most important thing, the choices we made. Talk about putting your head in a noose, but I did say I would tell all and it will be so.

Now to another subject. I read with great interest the article written by Jim Boucher in the January 6th BHW. Albert Bennett was, to my mind, the best long-distance pigeon fancier of his generation. His performances stand above all, in my opinion. It was Albert, unknown to him, who was one of the reasons we moved to Shropshire to race. It was my wish to compete against someone I held in high esteem as a pigeon fancier. Unfortunately he had a major sale and by the time we had established our loft he had all but finished racing. It would have been great to have competed against such a fine fancier over a period of time but that is life. Not only was he a good pigeon racer, he was to me an even better stockman and there are few pigeon fanciers of his calibre around no matter what country one lives in.

Now it's time to get back to our own loft. The aviary roof has been completed and no longer leaks. We have made, or I should say nearly finished, a few modifications on the aviary front. Being wide open it is certainly no good for early breeding, although we only wanted to pair up the short-distance pigeons not our own family. There's plenty of time for the long-distance pigeons when the weather improves. It has been very cold here. When you lads have had 8 to 10 degrees over in England we have been 6 to 7 degrees below freezing.

By the time you read this article we will have lived here for 12 months. It does not seem to be that time but when you are working all hours to get things up and running, time flies. I guess it's time to close this column for another month, but just before I go I must tell you of a funny thing which happens on occasions and it is true. Every village in Belgium has a church, and from ours in Gelmen, we hear the bell ringer pull on the ropes and the bells ring out at 7 o'clock every day of the week with seven chimes of the bells. On the odd time he has not done this. On Monday last, he started ringing and it went on and on. 'The bell ringer is bloody p----d again,' I said to Philip. 'He's lost count of how many times he's rung the bells, it's now 57 times instead of 7.'

The best of luck to you all this year. Many thanks for the cards and mails, we look forward to them. Any views to Steve, E-mail: steve.somerslad@skynet.be or Tel 0032-1174531. Website www.patrickbros.com