

Derek Flowers of Pontypool

Winner of 25 x 1st Welsh Nationals, plus 20 x 1st Welsh Combine, WHPU Queen's Cup winner 2011 and 2017. Runner up to Queen's Cup winner 2015 and 2016

I first wrote about this fancier in 2009 when he had only recently returned to the sport after a prolonged sabbatical. However, in the intervening years he has amassed more than 150 x 1sts at Club level, plus scores of other top three positions in strong Club competition. Added to this Club success, there are many wins in Federation races in the Welsh North Road Federation with, at one stage, up to 400 competing lofts. This success at Federation level has continued since Derek joined the Rhondda Valley Fed which at one time could boast a membership of 28 Clubs spread throughout the South Wales valleys.

The National performances listed below can only be described as phenomenal, and clearly show that Derek Flowers, aided and abetted by his brother Clive, is a fancier of the highest calibre and proves beyond doubt, that his selection of stock at the time of his return to the sport was spot on.

If what had gone before was exceptional, then the 2017 racing season can only be described as phenomenal with a capital P. During this all conquering season the Flowers team amassed a further four National wins plus 3 x 2nd Open Nationals as well as 7 x 1sts Rhondda Valley Fed. Add to that the winning, for the second time, of the Queen's Cup which is awarded by the WHPU to the pigeon with the best performance(s) in Wales in races over 300 miles during the season and you have the 'complete package' of wins at sprint, middle distance and long distance.

The 2018 and 2019 seasons have also been extremely successful ones for the Flowers team with many Fed wins and on a number of occasions taking the first three and four Open against thousands of pigeons in the largest Fed in Wales.

The Beginning

Derek had pigeons with his father some years ago but left the sport for quite a time in order to concentrate on his business. In 2006, with his brother Clive's help, Derek started up again with young birds and immediately set about the opposition in the strong Torfaen SEFC, winning 9 x 1sts, 6 x 2nds, plus 2 x

1sts Fed Open and 3 x 1st Section. The young bird season ended with Derek's babies winning 32 positions at Club level and 15 Federation prizes.

The success story has continued unabated right up to the present day.

One of the loft's greatest racers is a lovely blue hen now known as The Giessen Hen. This outstanding hen of Janssen x de Klak bloodlines originates from pigeons purchased from the Lancashire partnership of Wall, Lunt & Green crossed with Borgman Brothers de Klaks. She amassed more than 14 top National turns, including 1st National Pont-a-Mousson in 2011 and won 1st Section, 6th Open National Lillers in the build up to that win. The Giessen Hen featured nine times in the first ten Open positions in National races. Incidentally she also finished at a highly creditable 6th Open National in 2015 at 9y! Unfortunately she suffered a violent reaction to a worming treatment and died at 11y.

The Loft

The main racing loft is a custom-built 36ft x 9ft structure containing five sections with a 3ft wide corridor fronting the internal sections. Two sections for cocks contain the very popular up and over style nest boxes with grid floors incorporated to reduce the workload. Next to these sections is a small section that houses the hens plus a further two sections to house the 80 strong young bird team. Sliding doors on the outside of the loft are covered with a fine green mesh which allows air and light into the loft but stops any rain driving into the interior. These are in place throughout daylight hours as the loft doors are only closed at night so there is no lack of ventilation here.

A second racing loft has now been added and this is a 12ft x 6ft structure with a pan-tiled roof and is used to house a separate team of young birds bred down from the very best long distance bloodlines currently available in the UK. Once a team has been established then Derek & Clive intend to take up the challenge of long distance racing with the various National organisations.

The stock birds are housed in a separate loft with aviary and all lofts are cleaned twice daily 365 days a year.

Management

The old bird team of 30 pairs is raced on the ever popular roundabout system. Both cocks and hens are raced throughout the season. The racers and stock birds are mated around the second or third week in January and allowed to rear a young bird before the hens are taken away once the babies are ready for weaning. Cocks and hens are exercised twice daily and Derek



Derek with yet another of his National winners.



Derek with his dad in the 1970's.



The roundabout cocks section.

and Clive like to get a total of 90 to 120 minutes exercise in during these two exercise periods. In addition, during the season they like to give the birds two 20 mile training tosses per week. The old birds have six to eight tosses out to 20 miles before racing with the young birds undergoing a more extensive pre season training programme of 14 to 18 tosses out to 20 miles before the first race. These tosses start at three miles and training of the babies only begins when Derek & Clive are happy with their home exercise. All young bird racing is done on the darkness system.

Feeding

All birds are fed communally in a hopper with a light breakdown feed on race return and in the early part of the week. A stronger racing mix containing a fair proportion of maize is then fed in the final days before basketing. The brothers monitor the weather and if a fast race is predicted the birds have more carbohydrate in their feed. Conversely, if the race is expected to be difficult with head winds then more protein is added to the basic mixture. Once the Channel races arrive the birds are re-mated and are sent to selected races in each individual pigeons' favoured nest condition. This may be sitting eggs or on a small baby, it's all down to the individual bird and Derek's observations in the loft.

Bloodlines

The main bloodlines responsible for the Flowers' success are a combination of Wall, Lunt & Green Janssens and de Klaks and Scammell & Peploe Nearly Cock bloodlines. Derek has found that the WLG Janssens excel up to 300 miles at which stage the Janssen x de Klak crosses seem to come into their own through to 550 miles. The Scammell & Peploe birds thrive at any distance but are exceptional on dirty days when the wind is on the nose and most of the convoy is struggling. They are tough, little, no nonsense pigeons, which wouldn't win in the show pen, but invariably get the red card when the race is long and the conditions hard. An excellent example of this



Clive with another of the National winners.



The roundabout hens section.

family's hardiness is the 2010 Saverne National winner, a blue white flight hen which turned up trumps again in 2011 by winning 1st National Bonn. That's two National wins in two years by the same pigeon. They really are tough, no nonsense little characters.

More recent introductions have been made with Heremans-Ceusters purchased from Paul Beaumont which have come up trumps from the off with a number of National wins. With an eye for the growing interest in long distance Classic racing, some selected birds were introduced from Steve & Lesley Wright at the House of Aarden. The House of Aarden pigeons produced a National winner almost immediately. Mark Bulled's King's Cup winning family has also been added to the stock loft and I know that Derek & Clive have high hopes of these in future long distance races. Some Freialdenhofens have also been added to the melting pot along with Mark Gilbert and Chris Gordon's Snydale Prince bloodlines.

The brothers don't have a particular breeding strategy but breed within the specific families avoiding pairing two big pigeons together and likewise two small pigeons. To sum up then, as far as Derek and Clive are concerned it's a case of always trying to improve by introducing winning stock from winning fanciers and then fine tuning them using basic good stockmanship and testing them at the distance they are bred to perform at.

Some Past Performances

I don't like quoting reams of prizes won but in this case I will detail the Flower teams terrific run of National performances by stating that up to and including the 2019 season Derek & Clive's birds have won no less than 25 x 1st in National races here in Wales!

Here's what Derek had to say about the loft's recent successes. 'In 2014 we were Federation champions on the south road, but lost a substantial number of pigeons, so decided to concentrate on the east route in Wales. Also joining the Rhondda Valley Federation, the largest Fed in Wales, we also



Alfie, 1st and 5th National (see text).

qualified to compete in the Welsh Combine. Our results in 2015 were very pleasing. We achieved a great result from Kinzweiler, a 406 mile race, having 11 out of 16 on the day when half of the convoy were missing on the day. We were 1st 2nd 11th, 18th, 23rd, 24th and 49th Open WSENF. The National winner was a 2y blue cock named Alfie, of Wall, Lunt & Green bloodlines, Gem 83, crossed with a G & S Verkerk son of Olympic Sogno. His brother, in fact his nestmate, won the same race in 2014. The 2015 winner, now named Alfie, was raced on roundabout and was in great form coming 5th in the National two weeks before in a strong north-east wind. Fortunately, he held his condition for this National, the only difference was he was given his hen the day before basketing. He won the race by 19 minutes and the pigeon that was 2nd National for us was Wall, Lunt & Green crossed with Scammell & Peploe bloodlines. The sire is a brother to our good Giessen Hen, and the dam won the Bonn National, and Saverne National at 450 and 517 miles respectively.

These were Alfie's National positions in 2015: Epsom, 123 miles, 2,924 birds, 178th Open, 90th East Section; Ypres, 264 miles, 2,752 birds, 51st Open, 22nd East Section; Rosemont, 324 miles, 1,546 birds, 5th Open, 2nd East Section; Kinzweiler, 406 miles, 819 birds, 1st Open, 1st East Section.

The following are the National positions won by the great Giessen Hen in 2015 at 9y: Ypres, 2,752 birds, 36th Open, 14th East Section; Rosemont, 1,546 birds, 148th Open, 31st East Section; Kinzweiler, 819 birds, 72nd Open, 26th East Section; Marburg, 514 miles, 284 birds, 6th Open, 5th East Section. In this race she was on the wing for 15½ hours and she achieved these positions after having been retired to stock at 6y after winning the Pont-a-Mousson National. However, she was put back into racing due to her not laying eggs. I think she will still race at 10y'.

So to briefly highlight the 2015 and 2016 results. Wins in 2015 include: 1st Federation, 3 x 1st National, 1st Combine, also winning the Fed Old Bird Averages. The distances of National wins were Rosemont, Kinzweiler and Marburg. In the 2015 Marburg National the Flowers team finished at 4th, 6th, 9th, 10th and 11th Open.

Finally a brief run through of the 2016 performances. Old birds: Newbury 1st, 2nd, 3rd Club, 1st and 3rd Fed, 3,901 birds. Epsom 1st Club, 11th Fed, 3,397 birds; Coutances Welsh National 2nd, 24th, 33rd, 44th, 105th, 111th, 113th and 114th; Maidstone 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Club, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 12th and 23rd Fed (2,851 birds), 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 21st and 99th Welsh South East National (2,866 birds), 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 12th and 23rd Welsh South East Combine (6,913 birds); Alençon 14th Open, 11th West Section BICC (4,332 birds); Hythe 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Club, 17th and 22nd Fed (2,751 birds); 17th, 25th, 37th, 39th, 66th, 69th, 71st, 73rd and 178th Welsh South East National (3,033 birds);



The racing lofts of Derek Flowers.

18th, 26th, 43rd and 47th Welsh South East Combine (6,240 birds); Ypres 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Club, 17th Fed (1,937 birds), 20th, 36th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 88th and 99th Welsh South East National (2,177 birds), 21st, 41st and 49th, Welsh South East Combine (3,696 birds); Ypres 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Club, 4th, 12th and 18th Fed (527 birds); 4th, 12th, 21st, 43rd, 44th, 55th, 77th and 78th Welsh South East National (713 birds); 4th and 12th Welsh South East Combine (1,030 birds); Epsom 1st, 8th and 9th Club, 2nd Fed (1,456 birds) 2nd Open; Kinzweiler 1st, 2nd and 6th Club, 3rd, 5th, 14th, 19th, 23rd and 27th Fed (611 birds), 2nd, 4th, 17th, 22nd, 25th, 32nd, 39th and 47th Welsh South East National (699 birds); 5th, 20th, 25th, 29th and 38th Welsh South East Combine (982 birds); Marburg 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Club, 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th, 11th and 13th Fed (104 birds); 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th, 11th and 13th Welsh South East National (122 birds), 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th, 11th and 13th Welsh South East Combine (122 birds). Young birds: Hullavington 1st Fed (1,700 birds), Epsom 1st Fed (3,068 birds); Maidstone 1st and 17th Fed (1,168 birds), 1st, 15th, 32nd, 33rd, 41st, 45th, 46th, 53rd and 108th Welsh South East National (1,931 birds), 1st Combine (3,060 birds); Hythe 5th, 6th, Fed (1,159 birds), 5th, 6th, 129th, 135th, 136th, 137th and 138th Welsh South East National (1,460 birds); Hythe 2nd and 3rd Welsh South East National.

Now for some of their old bird results in 2017: Swindon 2nd Fed (2,446 birds); Newbury 13th Fed (3,178 birds); Maidstone 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 13th, 14th, 18th and 19th Fed (2,314 birds), 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 12th and 14th National (1,990 birds), 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th 7th, 14th, 15th, 19th and 20th Combine (4,687 birds); Hythe 1st, 2nd, 11th, 17th, 20th and 24th Fed (2,030 birds), 1st, 2nd, 10th, 17th, 20th, 23rd, 42nd and 57th National, 1st, 2nd, 11th, 21st, 24th and 30th Combine (4,019 birds); Ypres 2nd, 13th, 14th, 17th, 20th, 27th and 28th Fed (1,239 birds); 2nd, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 20th, 27th, 28th and 32nd National (1,509 birds); Duffel 2nd, 6th, 13th, 18th Fed (597 birds); 3rd, 6th, 11th, 14th, 42nd, 52nd, 72nd and 86th National (782 birds); Newbury 8th, 11th, 15th and 16th Fed (1,403 birds); Newbury 18th Fed (1,192 birds); Kinzweiler 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th and 13th Fed (440 birds); 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 13th, 55th and 133rd National (583 birds); Marburg 1st, 5th, 8th and 9th Fed (104 birds).

Young bird: Swindon 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 14th Fed (1,789 birds); Swindon 1st, 2nd, 4th, 7th, 8th and 14th Fed (3,411 birds); Newbury 1st, 2nd, 16th and 18th Fed (2,632 birds); Epsom 10th, and 22nd Fed (2,542 birds); Maidstone 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 12, 13th, 14th and 17th Fed (1,496 birds), 1st, 7th, 8th, 10th, 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th National; Hythe 1st, 2nd and 3rd Fed, 1st, 2nd and 3rd National.

The Welsh SE Combine positions in 2017: Maidstone (4,687 birds), 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 14th, 15th, 19th and 20th; Hythe (4,019 birds), 1st, 2nd, 11th and 21st; Ypres (2,381 birds), 2nd, 19th, 20th, 23rd, 41st, 48th, 49th, 51st, 53rd and 57th; Duffel 3rd, 8th, 12th, 16th and 21st; Marburg (202 birds), 2nd, 6th, 13th and 14th; Kinzweiler (803 birds) 4th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th and 14th; Maidstone YB (2,593 birds), 1st, 6th, 7th, 9th, 15th, 16th, 17th and 21st; Hythe (1,769 birds), 1st, 2nd and 3rd.

To summarise the past four seasons' performances at Club and Fed level, these have been of such a high standard that Derek has been Federation Highest Points winner in the Rhondda Valley Fed, the largest Fed in Wales, for the past four seasons.

Terrific performances by two of the sport's most dedicated fanciers. Well done Derek and Clive. Watch this space for future developments!

GARETH WATKINS



The stock loft aviary.