

## The 2023 Tarbes Grand National

Well, there you have it ladies and gentle - the dust is just settling on the 2023 Blue Riband race for the National Flying Club. This year the Grand National was rerouted due to increased air traffic activity at the lib site that we had not been informed of, but in the end the convoy had them up and away and the race was on. Of course, with an afternoon liberation rather than a crack of dawn one, you will divide opinion with some members of the opinion that it creates a more level playing field for the 600 mile + flyers as all birds have to night out. Other fanciers would have relished the opportunity to sit in their gardens at the soft, quiet, tail end of the day following an early morning lib hoping for that flutter of a day bird from the Premier race in our calendar.

Regardless, the welfare of the birds comes before egos, pride and personal preference and as always the convoy were in the safe hands of an experienced race team who once again rose to the occasion.

As is always the case, the Blue Riband Race brings its own tales of triumph and disappointment - with dreams made and shattered over the space of a few days, and this year there were some exceptional feats put up by some of the convoy. I am thinking of the cavalry charge in to Section H by Jonathan Palmer and my good friend Max Hawthorne winning Section I with his single entry. On a personal note, it was the first Grand National without Alwyn Hill, who so sadly passed away earlier in the year, he set his stall out for this race and was always a presence.

So, on to the race itself. Given the wind pattern up through France and across the channel all eyes would have been on where and when the first birds made landfall. I doubt if anyone expected there to be a bird racing home to her loft on the East Kent coast in the shake up of early birds, and even fewer would have expected her to hold on to top spot as the race unfolded, but she did - and what a performance against the wind at that distance. The top racing partnership of Fagg and Nicholas saw home the 2023 Grand National winner to claim their third National victory - but as Colin said to me she is one that keeps you awake at night thinking about winning. The race winner is a belting blue bar hen that has now been given the honour of being named 'Mervs leading Lady', after his brother who recently passed away. She is definite bred for the job being bred out of their 1<sup>st</sup> Section E, 10<sup>th</sup> Open Tarbes when paired to a hen they bought from the Crammond & Langstaff Bereavement sale being a half sister to Mark Gilbert's champion Melissa. In preparation for the race she had 5 inland and 2 channel races with EECC. She was then set up for Tarbes so that she could be sent sitting 10 days on her first pair of eggs this year. As with the 8 other loft mates who were targeted at Tarbes she had almost daily chucks from around the Hayling Island area in the week up to basketing. She arrived home in excellent condition from the race.

Colin and Linda would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the phone calls and messages of congratulations that they have had, and well done to all the section

winner and everyone who timed in. Well done again to Colin and Linda, and the rest of the family because I know it is a real family affair at the lofts.



Doug holding his 2<sup>nd</sup> open Tarbes hen

Taking runner up spot and going double top in Section A is the loft of Doug Gatland - a man who is no stranger to success at the channel events. This is what Doug had to say: I sent 10 pigeons to the grand national having rejoined the NFC just two weeks earlier to fly this race, I clocked 5 yearlings by 10am Sunday morning all arriving in great condition to win provisional 1st, 2nd and 5th Section A, 2nd, 10th & 57th Open.

My first bird home is a small red pied yearling hen sent feeding 2 day old babies, she was paired mid January and reared a pair of young birds before being split from her cock and raced on my version of roundabout / chaos. She flew 10 races in the build up to Tarbes including Guernsey, Alencon and St Philbert in the BICC being my third pigeon from Alencon. After St Philbert with a few of the hens starting to pair the whole team was paired for Tarbes so that they would be on a small young bird for race marking. But I guess as with all good pigeons there was a twist, her cock had been lost from a short inland race (presumably to a raptor) and she was spare so I opened a few boxes and left the spare hens to it, she duly took a box on her own and went broody eventually laying and sitting her eggs solo. After a week or so she allowed another hen into the box and they shared the eggs, so 4 days before marking they were given a pair of chipping eggs and she was sent to the race on 2 day old babies and super keen! She is home bred with her dam being bred by my great friend Duncan Harvey of Cornwall - being a granddaughter of my 2nd BICC St Vincent x 20th NFC Tarbes and Ron Dove's Barcelona winner. The sire another home bred pigeon being a grandson of my number 1 stock cock who himself won 81st Open NFC Tarbes as a yearling. Well done Doug on a great team result with yearlings, and claiming 10<sup>th</sup> open with your second arrival.

Third open and topping Section E is the loft of Mark Gilbert. As you would expect with a man of Marks stockmanship the chequer yearling cock is definitely an example of

horses for courses. He is a grandson of Southfield Hugo - the double BICC winner from Barcelona and Perpignan and also a nephew of Gold Lady another BICC Barcelona winner.



Mark Bulled

At Fourth open and taking runner up in section P is a past winner of the Grand National with the wonderful Legacy - Mark Bulled. This is what Mark Had to say; Well done to Colin on winning the no 1 race in the UK The Tarbes Grand National and to all those that timed in this special race. After a period of racing north due to Brexit I made the decision to return south in 2023 with the channel now open. The birds turned round no problem winning from the off, but the channel racing with strong NE winds was particularly hazardous to us fanciers in Essex with high losses. Because of this and birds losing their partners I decided to repair this year and send my birds sitting eggs. Racing natural is something I do most years for the distance events but mainly only with my hens

I timed 3 early birds which was pleasing. My first bird, a cock, was on only his 2nd channel race of his life as he returned injured from Alencon. It took me over a month of healing before I could start working on him for Tarbes a job I take it very seriously with no stone left unturned to get them into prime condition to race 600 miles, not home. He is bred from Legacy/Sergeant Cecil family 1st NFC and 1st LSECC Tarbes as were my other timers when paired to a hen I bought from Paul Kendall, being closely bred to Morning Glory (full of Pau NFC winners). Although inexperienced on the south he was 38th LNRC Thurso 500 miles north, 14 hours on day as a yearling. Incidentally, my other 2 timers also scoring high at Thurso last year. He was fresh on arrival, had been through a lot of rain, and had flown a long way on the 2nd day.

Taking second spot in section E and a fantastic 5<sup>th</sup> Open is the Redhill Loft of S B Frost.

Taking sixth spot and rounding up the top 3 in Section P is the loft of J Hayward.



The Damian Szpak hen 5 minutes after clocking.

In Seventh open and claiming top spot in Section A is the top loft of Wearn Brothers and Neilson. Jimmy and Erik were once more up with the lead birds on a challenging day - well done gentlemen.

Eighth open falls to another Section P loft - Damian Szpak. His first bird first pigeon from Nfc Tarbes is a 2021 winter bred hen (old ring) bred from a daughter of his "Queen 85" when she was paired to "Dark laureaat". The sire is a son of his Figo hen when she was with an Aarden cock. Both Queen 85 and the Figo hen have bred winners from 80 miles - the Aarden and Laureaat bloodlines were added to help at the distance.



**Steve Slade**

Topping section G, in fact going double top with second section as well, and claiming a very respectable ninth open is Steve Slade. This is what he sent me: First of all I'd like to congratulate D. Gatland for winning the BBC national and to Fagg and Nicholas for winning the NFC. Four years ago i decided that I'd like to concentrate on distance flying so I decided to visit Steve and Lesley Wright from House of Aarden and I purchased some Padfield pigeons and some Jelle Jellema to try to form a family of distance birds, so this year was my first year to fly from Tarbes and it turned out to be a good weekend, to win 1st and 2nd sec in the NFC. My 1st pigeon was a Padfield Jellema cross, he was sent sitting on a 12day old youngster.

My 2nd pigeon was purchased from House of Aarden as a kit of youngster and was also sitting on a 10 day old youngster.

Both pigeons have been coming consistent in the build up races to Tarbes.

On return from the club house I found a 3rd pigeon, which is a Padfield which I didn't clock.

### **Around the sections**

#### **Section A**

Taking third section behind Doug Gatland is the loft of D Turner.

## **Section B**

Taking second Section is the well established and long-time successful Gosport loft of P Ayling.



**Mark Gower**

In third section and continuing to have a fantastic year is the Mr and Mrs Gower partnership. This is what Mark had to say: Here are few details about my hen that came to be 3rd Section 15th Open Tarbes NFC 6th club, 112th Open CSCFC Bergerac as a yearling 2019. She came late the 2nd day NFC Tarbes 2020, 16th open CSCFC Thurso 2021, 15th open CSCFC Thurso 2022 and now 15th Open NFC Tarbes 2023. She was prepared for this race with 3 x 90 mile races north with the Southampton North Road Fed and the NFC Fougères race where she had 9 hours on the wing. She is 100% Andy Parsons blood with Andy's 3rd Open Pau Classic & 5th Open NFC Tarbes in her pedigree. I would like to thank good friend and discussion partner on all things pigeon related Andy Parsons, who helps take my birds to the classic marking when work gets in the way.



**Continuing a great season - Lanahan and Gerard.**

### **Section C**

Top of the pile in Section C is the loft of Lanahan and Gerard who have been in the shake up at each NFC race this season. Our first pigeon a yearling blue hen raced on our chaos system is bred from one of Johns top racing/breeding cocks "Porshe" John raced Porshe as a young bird in holland winning 1<sup>st</sup> 12500 pigeons, 1<sup>st</sup> 4200 pigeons, 1<sup>st</sup> 3000 pigeons, 1<sup>st</sup> 1700 pigeons plus 4 x 1<sup>st</sup> club. Porshe is now sire of 15x 1<sup>st</sup> being mainly Van Loon blood. He was paired to a hen given to us by a great friend of ours George Owers "Owers Brothers." She is Bartolli De Klak.

Our second pigeon was bred from a daughter of Zwarte Louders 1<sup>st</sup> national St Vincent 16340 birds 600 miles. She was paired to a Jelle Jellema cock. Well done again gentlemen on a consistent season.



**Mel and Sue King**

Taking second section is a loft with a fantastic CV at classic and national level - Mel and Sue King. The first bird over the pad for the partnership is a 2-year-old hen raced on their tried and tested celibate/widowhood system and is again bred from their well established Vandennabelle based family and is linked in some way to the majority of their National winners a touch of Joe Raeburns great racing cock "Alex"

Taking third section is a loft that I have mentioned in 3 out of 4 national write ups this year - the definition of consistency. Nick Stevens is once more up with the leaders in a very challenging race. This time its not the cracking red cock who has been to the fore in the previous two races but was a 2021 Hen - "181" , having had Guernsey, BICC Alencon, BICC St. Philbert, BICC St. Maxident, then into NFC Tarbes. Her sire is a House of Arden, Padfield family, being a grandson of Fiffon, and the Dutch hen, a daughter of Wim Mullers Crazyboy x First Class. The Dam a direct Padfield family, with all the Wim Mullers to the fore. Nick says it was such a thrill to see her land, especially in the unfavourable conditions, and would like to pass on his congratulations to everyone who timed in.



**1<sup>st</sup> Section D**

### **Section D**

Taking top 2 in Section D is another loft that has been in the race reports a couple of times this season. E Reilly, Parr and son have had a fantastic season at national level, and have done this flying in to a hot bed of bed of national racing - namely Section D. 1<sup>st</sup> section D Tarbes is a cheq cock now named 'Big Daddy'. This cock was also 3<sup>rd</sup> section 3<sup>rd</sup> open from Messac NFC earlier in the season. He was sent to Tarbes sitting a massive young bird that should have been up flying, chipping eggs and also 8 day eggs - he was paired to multiple hens and was a very busy boy!! I am surprised he wanted to come home.

We brought the dam from Mark Gilbert and the sire was a gift bird from Mark as well. In the blood you see Jelle Jellema birds like Olympic Romee, Dafne, Jack, Kleinen Jade, there is also New Laureaat in the pedigree many times.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> section D is a cheq hen, she was sent sitting a youngster -both parents was



bought from Mark Gilbert, sire being a son of Kanibaal Barcelona when he was paired to a daughter of New Laureaat. The mother is a grandchild of both Special One and Sumerian fighter- both Barcelona international winners when they both paired to daughters of New Laureaat. We like to thank Daniloft for recommending a great product Kuhn what goes in the drinker and C'est Pharma who have some great products that we add to the seed, and Pigeon Test Centre who we often send tests off to. We feed Beyers Jellema mix while racing but add Sseeds energy corn coming up to the race. Congratulations to the all who times and massive congratulations to winner in the hard race.



**Robbie and Mike - up with the leaders again.**

Taking third section is a partnership who are at the very top and are always dangerous at national level given the right winds and conditions - Underhill and Prettejohn. Mike and Robbie. Their timer is known around the loft as The Little Blue Pied Hen, and has been very reliable, successful and consistent having won the section from the same race last year. She was sent on a small young one which she went straight back on it upon her return. Her breeding is 100% Louella Pigeon World the Sire being direct from "Penny" and the Dam direct from "Six Times" both Barcelona performance pigeon's. All being well she will go to Barcelona next year.



**The next generation at Khan brothers loft.**

### **Section E**

Claiming third spot in Section E is the top national loft of Khan Brothers. .firstly we would like Their timer is bred down from their well known L ring hen who was a Merit winner herself, and the legend Wing Down. She was sent sitting a 5 day old youngster to give her something to think about whilst she was away. The partners would to congratulate the winners who had a superb bird on the day of the race and also all members who clock on these races, well done.



**Section F topper for James Fulford.**

## Section F

Taking top spot is the Salisbury loft of James Fulford. James saw home a beautiful 4 year old red cheq hen. She is down through the Southwell pigeons - a family with a fine history in The Grand National. She is bred from a pair of 2016 Southwells pigeons that James bought from John Halstead. This pair of pigeons have already bred some good pigeons for James including 2<sup>nd</sup> open, 1st section Thurso Central Southern Classic in 2021 .

James would like to say a big thank you to John and Andrew Parsons who puts himself out to take the birds to the marking station for any fanciers who are struggling to get their birds away.



**Team Rostron - a family affair.**

Taking Second section is Team Rostron from Thatcham in Berkshire. Shane can often be seen labouring away at the Steventon marking when work allows, its always good to see one of the grafters getting on the result. This is what Team Rostron had to say for themselves. Firstly, we would like to congratulate the winners Fagg and Nicolas and all the section winners and everyone that timed. Our 3-year-old cheq hen (Now named Rosie after my grandmother who passed away in April) is a mix of distance blood bred out of the race team she contains Tumley lofts Seren 11 lines and some Stichlebaut.

She is raced on the roundabout system, she has had a lot of inland racing with the BB&O federation and her furthest race this season was Yelverton 142 miles followed by the odd toss to the coast of around 50 miles. With the strong north east winds we had decided to keep the pigeons we fancied for Tarbes inland until the last channel race before the big one that being Nort Sur Erdre around 290 miles with it being a 150-mile jump and their first channel race they were nowhere near the front but it

meant they had had plenty of time on the wing setting them up for Tarbes. The pigeons were then loft flown for the remaining days until basketing.

Our hen was allowed to run with her cock for about 30 minutes but not allowed to mate. She flew Tarbes last year as a 2-year-old but was out of race time, but we believe she learned something from that and we hope we can get her there again next season.

The feeling you get seeing a pigeon arrive from 575 miles first or last is fantastic and something we would like to continue to improve on.



**On the sheet again - having a great season.**

Third section is another consistent loft, having had a mention in the 2 previous race reports - Albert Sinclair from Swindon. Albert saw home a 5 year old hen who is a combination of Deweert and Dark Star - a CSCFC Pau winner, crossed with a Busschaert Cock, purchased from J Kings bereavement sale Swindon.



**Abi Rakes – showing dad how it should be done.**

### **Section G**

Taking second in the section is a familiar surname that was a regular on the distance national results - Rakes - and this time it is Miss Abi Rakes daughter of Matt who flew the wonderful 'Indy'. This is Abigails second attempt at the Grand National race having previously been 13<sup>th</sup> section in her first attempt in 2020. Abigails first timer is a two year old chequer cock having his first attempt at the distance and is bred from a granddaughter of 'Indy' the 2009 Tarbes Grand National winner for dad Matt. This cock has been very consistent across the water and was prepared with two channel races prior to being sent to Tarbes on 10 day eggs. Next morning saw the welcome return of her old favourite 'Pirate' to win 7<sup>th</sup> section after her 13<sup>th</sup> section in 2020. Even more pleasing is that Abi has 7 of her 8 entries back in the loft although 'Pirates' racing days are over now.



**D and J Staddon**

Third Section is a West Country partnership who breed birds that thrive in these sort of races - D and J Staddon, and this race was no exception claiming provisional 3rd, 4th & 6th Section. This is what Dave had to say about the result :Our first timer is a yearling hen. In preparation, She had 4 inland races then Guernsey, Alencon, St Philbert and St Maixent Ecole, many of which were tough races in NE winds. She is a raced on Chaos Widowhood. She is the most beautiful specimen, with perfect size, balance and athleticism. She bred from a pure Frank Zwiers sire who we bred ourselves from Direct pigeons from Frank, Dad felt this pigeon was special and so rather than sell him, we put him straight to stock. Although probably not known to many fanciers in the UK, Frank Zwiers has a loft of similar size to our own about 40ft and has amazing results from such a small set-up in the Dutch marathon races. The dam of our hen is our champion racer Evie the NFC Ace Pigeon of 2018. She is proving invaluable in the breeding loft as her children and grandchildren are taking regular positions at the top of the national races. Our second pigeon is a 2yo son of one of our best distance pigeons in recent years Fahrenheit. 1st Sec 2nd Open Riuex Minervois 592 Miles, 4th Sec 23rd Open Pau National. He is from the lines of Little Gem & Freelands Gem. Our third timer is Gemini who won 1st section 4th Open NFC Tarbes 2022 and is a full brother to Fahrenheit.



**Jonathan and his apprentice - what a race he had.**

### **Section H**

From Tarbes it was a one man demolition job of the top results in the section - an absolute masterclass from a young(ish) man by the name of Jonathan Palmer. Jonathan has only recently returned to the sport after life and work got in the way for a few years, but he quickly put together a small but formidable team that made everyone stand up, take notice and applaud. This is what Jonathan had to say about this amazing performance: After finishing up 1<sup>st</sup> club, 5<sup>th</sup> section Tarbes, 108<sup>th</sup> open on my first attempt in 2022 I was very motivated to do even better this year but never imagined it going so well.

I timed in 9 from 12 entries and got my 10<sup>th</sup> bird Monday Evening after the race. All of these pigeons timed in except the yearling are all broken in birds moved from my old loft location in Ipswich approximately 10miles to the South East of where I now live.

The preparation for the older pigeons was 3 or 4 tosses in late April the furthest being 25 miles, then sent as trainers at Colchester Invitation pigeon club, flying with the Thames North and Eastern counties FC where they had 3 races as far as Weymouth around 180 miles then into Bicc St Philberts the following week which is 335 miles. Their next race was 2 weeks later and again with the Bicc at St Maixent Ecole, 401 miles.



**First 4 in Section H for Jonathan Palmer**

After this race they received lots of rest and were just flown around the loft for two weeks, in the days running up to basketing they were flying very well and looked in amazing condition.

This year I raced the birds on a dry widowhood/chaos type system and normally only allow the birds together after their race. However, prior to basketing the birds for Tarbes they were put together for 36 hours and encouraged to start building a nest etc - some of them had, while others were closely following their hens around.

My first bird was bred from my small team of stock birds off a direct son of Fox and Symonds "The duck" who scored 6<sup>th</sup> open BICC Mont de Marson, 83<sup>rd</sup> BICC Pau and 1st club Alencon when paired to a direct daughter of Isla's rainy day boy. The dam of my first and 3rd bird was also purchased from the Fox and Symonds partnership -being a direct daughter of the NFC 2010 Poitiers winner.

This is his best performance to date, but he was also my first bird from the second BICC St Philberts last year as a yearling.

My second bird was bred by clubmate David fisher of Ipswich who bred me a kit of youngsters back in 2019 when I started back up with pigeons. He's off a son of Isla's Rainy Day Boy when paired to a daughter of Joe Raeburns Westbound when he was paired to a daughter of Litton glory. He was also my first bird from BICC St Maixent Ecole this year.

My third bird is a full brother to my first arrival but from a different nest, he was my first bird from St Philberts this year in what was also a hard race, he's also sire to the yearling hen I timed on the winning day from Tarbes on her second ever channel race, I only sent the one yearling but had confidence she could do it.

I would like to thank everyone who congratulated me and for all the positive comments posted on Facebook and pigeon chat it means a lot. And a big thank you to the marking station at saffron Walden for doing a great job with the birds.





**'Mick O' -section I topper for Max Hawthorne.**

### **Section I**

Taking top honours, and I would say bragging rights but he isn't that type of person - is Max Hawthorne. Max lives and breathes 500+ miles racing and has the smallest set up I have encountered in many years. He diligently and methodically prepares his small team for the longer races each year and at NFC and BBC level is always on the result. Now, when I say small team I mean exactly that - even when sending to club races as trainers Max rarely exceeds 12 birds - that being his entire team.

In the big ones he usually sends 2 or 3, but what makes this result more commendable is that the dark cock that won the section for him was his single entry. Added to this, Max lost his life partner of many years, Jeanette, a few days before basketing and understandably this knocked the stuffing out of him. This result will have been a positive tonic for him, and I don't think he will mind me saying he was in tears when the dark Cock - now named 'Mick O' - dropped in from Tarbes, all of 641 miles to his Lutterworth lofts.

'Mick O' contains the best of Brian Denney blood sourced direct and off the best crossed with birds he obtained from Pete Oliver - a well established East Midlands distance loft who has won all the way through to 2<sup>nd</sup> open NFC Pau behind Patrick Brothers. Max worked these birds hard and the basket produced some excellent distance birds for him over a 10 year period. Then Max attended the Pat O'Sullivan sale in Blackpool and bought Braveheart Royal - the last sone of Braveheart - and brought him home to pull through his existing birds. Unfortunately, he only had 1 season breeding rom him and then he escaped. But he has left his mark on the loft.

Second Section I is the Cossall loft of Keith Bush. It is fair to say that no Tarbes result would be complete without the Bush name at the top end of the results, and the harder the race the more these birds thrive on it. Well done Keith.



**John and Trevor - top of the pile again when quality counts**

### **Section J**

Top of the heap again, and having an absolute stonker of a season even by their high standards are Booth and Roper - the Peter Pans of Section J. This is what John and Trevor had to say: We timed a 7yo hen to take provisionally 1st section J, 35th open in what turned out to be a very hard race.

We fly well over in the west, sitting not far from the Malvern Hills. This hens main target was Barcelona this year. She was paired up in the stock loft and didn't return to the racing loft until the end of April. She would not exercise and hid behind the stock loft. After several weeks of encouragement she was exercising well. During this time she started to show an interest in me (Trevor), never has this hen in 7 years shown any liking for me but now she is following me around the loft and hopping from one perch to another and sweeping her tail and to be close to me. Seemingly totally paired to me. Barcelona was always on the cards, but 4 days before basketing I changed my mind and was glad I did, but wonder what might have happened at Barcelona. She has flown Pau once, Tarbes twice, Lerwick once and Elgin. She has achieved the following in national races. 16th section, 94<sup>th</sup> open MCCFC Fougères; 2<sup>nd</sup> section, 231<sup>st</sup> open BICC Poitiers; 5<sup>th</sup> section, 42<sup>nd</sup> open BICC Lerwick; 3<sup>rd</sup> section, 28<sup>th</sup> open BICC Elgin; 4<sup>th</sup> section, 16<sup>th</sup> open CSCFC St. Philbert; 7<sup>th</sup> section, 59<sup>th</sup> open NFC Pau and now provisionally 1<sup>st</sup> section, 35<sup>th</sup> open NFC Tarbes and 3<sup>rd</sup> section, 13<sup>th</sup> open BBC Tarbes. She is a hen in a million and she will now join our other 1st section J Tarbes NFC 2019 hen in retirement. We would like to thank everyone for all the messages of congratulations, it has been quite overwhelming. Also we would like to congratulate Fagg and Nichols on winning the race and to all section winners. And many thanks to Alveley marking station.



**Pete Barlow - another solid result.**

Taking second Section behind the Peter Pans of Section J is the consistent loft of Peter Barlow - a man who could be mistaken for the Tinkerbell of Section J in the wrong light! Pete flies a consistent bird and loves his channel racing, and given the area he flies in to, has built up an impressive list of results. This is what Pete had to say: Congratulations to Fagg and Nicholas, club mates Booth and Roper and all section winners. My 2<sup>nd</sup> section winner has already won 2x1<sup>st</sup> sections from Thurso with the BBC. He is bred from birds off Graham Clift that originate from Mark Gilbert and Mark Sparey - Southfield Supreme, Melissa and Emile Deweerdt lines. His prep was Messac with the NFC and Eastbourne the week before. His daughter was 9<sup>th</sup> open BBC Messac the week before so now he is destined for the stock loft. Many thanks to Graham and George for taking birds to marking.



**The brains and the brawn. - team Chambers**

Third section is the well established and successful Chambers family loft. As always Craig was thorough with the information he sent through: Our first arrivals from the Tarbes National was a 2-year-old blue cock bred from one of our main stock cocks who we call Jack Smash. Jack Smash was a winner himself of 2<sup>nd</sup> section, 61<sup>st</sup> open NFC Tarbes disaster race 2018 one of the hardest ever races with only 16 birds recorded in the over 650 miles having also taken 7<sup>th</sup> section 149<sup>th</sup> open NFC Tarbes in 2017. He is now sire of several top pigeons for us including 2<sup>nd</sup> section 27<sup>th</sup> open BICC national Agen 623 miles and our 0-800-mile RPRA Award winner for the WM Region 2022.

The dam to our first arrival is a daughter of our 1<sup>st</sup> section 7<sup>th</sup> open NFC Tarbes cock who we call Dutch Thunder when he was paired to a daughter of Pennine Heights, winner of 1<sup>st</sup> Tarbes flying over 700 miles.

Our second arrival who we clocked early on Sunday morning was the nest mate to our first bird detailed above and our third arrival was a 2 year old dark cheque cock who arrived shortly after our second bird. He is a half-brother to our 2020 1<sup>st</sup> Section E Pau winner who we call Hot Stuff who also won the 0-800 mile RPRA award in 2020. This cock is also a double grandchild of Dutch Thunder meaning all three of our arrivals are G. children of Dutch Thunder who is himself bred down from our Dutch Family of long-distance racers which go back to our 1997 Midland National winner from Bergerac.

### **Section K**

Top honours in the farflung Section K go to the Leeds loft of J Finlay. I was unable to get in contact with them in time to do this report, so please get in contact with information and I will include it in a future article.

Second Section goes to S and M Cook. They saw home a 3 year old Blue pied cock who is out of Massarella elite racing birds purchased at Blackpool a few years ago. For the previous 2 seasons they have flown north with the BICC and south with the Lincolnshire SRF, and this cock has always been very consistent, He was flying on natural to a youngster and he was in superb condition on arrival, The partnership would like to congratulate all fanciers and birds on a difficult task.

Third section is the loft of Brian Holland. This is what Brian had to say about his first arrival: The bird I clocked is a Cheq hen that was purchased by me from an online charity sale. She was bred by Lee Davison of Liverpool, himself a very successful flyer in the Sect L of the NFC. Her sire was from a kit of Jan Hooymans Lee purchased from John Crehan to race. Her dam is from a Nick Adshead Menne & Daughter paired to a Marcellis hen, the last daughter of Lee's Sect L Cholet winner. My hen was also 6<sup>th</sup> Sect K at this years Messac race. I had another from Tarbes in race time and one out of race time on the afternoon that the race closed.

## Section L

Taking top honours is a previous winner of the Grand National Mickey Locke. He won it in style a few years back with his beautiful, wonderful hen called Phoenix. Unfortunately, I was unable to contact him on the number provided in time to get any info but hopefully this can be rectified - so if you are reading this Mickey please get in touch.



**Gavin holding 'Tic'**

Second section is the Rochdale loft of Gavin Buckley: Bred by William Curtis the sire breeding is bred from a grandchild off Williams boy a winner off 1<sup>st</sup> section 7<sup>th</sup> open Tarbes winning the car ,also 2nd section k 26th open Saintes and dams side a Jelle Jellema the dams side is a child off Williams boy once again and the best off Jelle Jellema. The hens build up for the Tarbes race was to be raced unpaired in the run up, and targeted for the race on a small yb the first off her life. The preparation for the race was very hard due to my son being on the Wigan Warriors scholarship scheme which means he trains Monday and Wednesday - also I'm the coach of his Sunday team and we train on a Tuesday and Thursday, and with my daughter also playing rugby Friday and Saturday it is almost impossible to have my birds out from March to April. But when the mornings get lighter the birds started to go on and were really thrown in at the deep end with hardly any loft flying or training the birds had to go club racing. She received 6 inland races and approximately 2 week before the NFC I trained them every Monday and Wednesday from Wigan or whenever possible whenever my daughter or son were playing . This could be anywhere - Widnes, Warrington, Chorley they went. It was also a great help when my good friend lee Whitworth said he would take my pigeons training every morning to Stoke approximately 45 miles so they went. It was only with great help from my daughter or wife who got them in when they arrived either before school or work. The hen then had 2 channel races with the NFC - fourgeres again which proved a hard day for section L pigeons with a strong ne wind she

returned to be 463<sup>rd</sup> open flying 11 hours 12 mins vel 960 arriving like she not left the loft , the second NFC race from Messac proved another hard race with again a strong ne wind when she again arrived after 12hours 14 mins to gain 369<sup>th</sup> open, again not looking like she had been out off the loft and improving her condition and fitness every week by continuing by having a 45 mile morning Chuck and a Chuck every Monday and Wednesday from Wigan then a Thursday wherever my team was playing - all the time being fed on the system that has won 1<sup>st</sup> NFC for me and my brother. She was now going to NFC Tarbes with confidence and on her first ever young bird and was very keen and the pick of my candidates. On the day of Tarbes, with there being no day birds due to a midday day lib, I sat in the garden from 10 am even when they was no birds timed in so much was my excitement for the race. It was when the birds started to get timed in I realised to get a day bird up into section L was going to be hard or impossible. But after 22 hours 41mins she appeared from no where, dropped on the board and was timed in for a velocity of 938 ypm - proving once again she never gives in and was quickly sat on her young bird and once again looking a million dollars. After verifying her she won 2<sup>nd</sup> section L 15<sup>th</sup> open only being beaten by another exceptional pigeon for Micky Locke, She also won 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Yorkshire 4 bird club. I was made up with there only being 2 birds flying over 700 miles on the winning day and with her flying 725 miles being the longest flying pigeon on the winning day! Thanks go to Will Curtis, also my daughter Abbey and my wife Kim and also my brother Glyn for his advice on how to set her up for the race. What a buzz she gave me.

Third section is the Crewe lofts of Mellor Brothers.



**Steve Frankland**

Fourth section goes to the loft of Steve Frankland. His red hen that was 4<sup>th</sup> section L flying 734 miles was a 2021 Jellema x Gary Crawford Bricoux. She was sent to Tarbes sitting 12 day eggs at basketing. This year she has previously flown Carentan with the MNFC finishing 37<sup>th</sup> section, 116<sup>th</sup> Open from 2,827 birds. Steve would like to pass on his congratulations to all those who timed in from a very difficult Tarbes race.

### **Section Q**

Once again I am indebted to Chris Boyce for gathering the info for Section Q. From Tarbes only one brave bird saw home before the close of the race. Take a bow Terry Luscombe and that brave bird. This is what Chris had to say about the race: With the birds released at 1330 into a W/NW wind, the conditions were always going to be challenging for those of us in the West and South West of the country, but this was our Grand National so 8 members took the risk and sent 40 birds down to Tarbes in the Pyrenees around about 530 miles in a straight line. That wind proved to be too much for most of our birds in Cornwall with only one bird getting back within the race time.



**Terry holding the only bird in race time in Section Q**

Our winning bird belonged to Terry Luscombe of Looe, this was the second time this bird had won 1st Section Q for Terry, he also picked up a win in the Fougères race at the start of the Channel season. The bird flew the 538 miles in 51 hours 20 minutes with a velocity of 307 yards per minute. The bird itself a blue Chequer cock, was a gift from Terry's Plymouth club mate Geoff Williams. He's a 5 year old bird bred from Jelle Jellema based birds. It was a mighty result considering the persistent westerly wind that faced the birds over that weekend, well done Terry and well done the Blue Chequer, I don't know if it has a name yet but it should have after that performance, (How about Chesney, the one and only) my commiserations to the other flyers and I hope you get some of your birds back over the coming days.

Right folks, that is the big one done and dusted - some dreams have come true for a few members and for the rest of us there is always next year. As I get ready to send this off the birds are sat in Sigognes waiting for the weather to improve so members can get a race. Until next time, take care and look after yourselves and those around you.

You can get me on [weebu@hotmail.com](mailto:weebu@hotmail.com) or 01926 817796/07984230076

Drew Callan

NFC PO