

The Tarbes Grand National 2023

The convoy of 1300 birds arrived safe and well at Pau liberation site on the Thursday morning following a Tuesday basketing. The conveying team had rested them regularly enroute to allow them to eat and drink. Unfortunately, the French Aviation Authority informed us that no liberation would be possible from the lib site on Friday, and furthermore there were very limited windows of opportunity to liberate on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Obviously, this left our hands tied, so the decision was quickly made to relocate to Tarbes on Thursday to allow a race where the liberation time was not being forced on us.

The birds were quickly moved and settled in t Tarbes with the hope of a Friday liberation. The weather on Friday morning put paid to any hopes of an early lib, but the team had them up and away in the early afternoon. The thinking was that e birds would get enough flying in to get above the rain belt swinging in that would linger over western France during Saturday and Sunday. Now, the thing with afternoon liberations is that there is always an opportunity for a little bit of magic when a few game birds that really want home will fly further on the first day than most. That was the case this year with their hen dropping in to her home loft in Kent early on Saturday afternoon to claim all the glory for the partnership of Fagg and Nicholas. Now, Colin and Linda are no strangers to NFC success having won Messac in 2013 on a 2000ypm day, and again topping the result in 2020 from (I think) Fougeres.

When I spoke to Colin it was just about sinking in, and he told me this national win was different as it was The Grand National Blue Riband Race – the one that keeps fanciers awake at night dreaming about winning. The hen, now called **Melv's Leading Lady** after his late brother, that won was bred out of their 1st section E, 10th Open Tarbes when paired to a hen the partnership bought from the Crammond & Langstaff bereavement sale, being a half-sister to Mark Gilbert's champion Melissa.

She had 5 inland and 2 channel races with EECC in preparation for the Tarbes race, and three chucks from Hayling Island with the other Tarbes candidates in the week running up to basketing to put the final polish on them. She was sent sitting 10 days on her first pair of eggs this year and arrived home in excellent condition. Colin and Linda would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the phone calls and messages of congratulations that they have had over the last couple of days. Also, well done to all the section winners and everyone who timed in. Well done Colin and Linda a dream come true.

