

NFC Tarbes Challenge 2025

Earlier this year, 45 members took up the challenge of Nominating a pigeon to compete in the 2025 Tarbes Challenge. There was one simple qualification rule for each nominated pigeon ... that the pigeon must never before have been timed in from a previous edition of the Grand National race.

The nomination was FREE, yet Tom Scott secured a fabulous prize for the winner ... a free entry into the 2026 Welsh Elite One Loft Race, run by Tennyson Tipper <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1502820320227758/>

All roads lead to Rome as they say, and the 45 nominated pigeons would have varied and preparations, and had different racing profiles. Some had previously raced well in other NFC races 2022-2024, and there was even a Yearling nominated. A WhatsApp group was formed, that would share information from time to time ... some losses from training of prep races, hawk damage, some good prep races, etc, but the ultimate test would be whether we could get our Nominated Pigeons into the baskets for Tarbes.

I think in the end approximately one-third of the pigeons were basketed, amongst those missing from the line-up being my own Nominated pigeon, which had gone awol at Sigogne after a good flight from Nort-sur-Erdre (she's back now, thankfully).

We all know, of course, how hard the Tarbes Grand National turned out this year, but two gallant pigeons were verified within race time:-

1st David Clark - GB23N29124 – 6th Open 1st Section F (also timed from Nort-sur-Erdre this year, and also in 2024)

2nd Guy Reed – Section B - GB23N05589 – 87th Open 19th Section B (also timed from Fougeres and Nort-sur-Erdre this year, and Messac in 2024)

Others were reported to have arrived home, thankfully, though outside of race time



Dave proudly holding his 2025 Tarbes Challenge winner, a 2yo Chequer Hen, bred down from his old long distance family of pigeons. Also 6th Open 1st Section F Tarbes 2025

My Tarbes Challenge winner is bred mainly from the old strain I keep, from birds that raced well from Thurso and Tarbes over the years, occasionally adding long distance birds from other lofts to mix in with mine when the opportunity arose. In the 2024 season this hen was always back in the top ten to my loft, she had 3 Channel races and then stopped. In 2025 her first 4 races were raced from the West country, she came back 4 hours behind my first bird on three occasions! Then she was sent to Alencon, then Weymouth and then Nort-Sur-Erdre with the NFC. Both Channel races were difficult because of the East in the winds. I had the feeling the races had taken a lot out of her, so I rested her for 4½ weeks considering she had already had plenty of racing, plus we encountered heatwave weather conditions. In those weeks I took her training regularly and could see she looked well after the rest. She was keenly sitting some eggs approaching Tarbes so I thought I would send her. Sadly on the expected day of arrivals, personal news was not at all good, the wife had endured bowel cancer 3 years ago and was told on that morning that it had returned. Plus, in the afternoon our 15yo dog had to be taken to the vets to be put down. I was sat on the patio looking up the garden late that evening I can't tell you how low I felt ... then out of the blue my hen arrived home, giving me a much needed morale boost.

There you go! No fancy pedigree, no special prior year performances, yet selected on instinct in April to take on the ultimate NFC challenge. On 2025 'form' you perhaps wouldn't have backed her to even time in, but that break between her last race clearly brought her back into super form to take 6th Open 1st Section F. Congratulations, Dave, on a great win.



Guy's Tarbes Challenge
Nomination pigeon
87th Open 19th Section B
2nd Tarbes Challenge

Thank you for setting up the Tarbes Challenge, it made an interesting new challenge. I was uncertain of the criteria as I was under the impression that the selected birds had to have had no experience of Tarbes previously and not featured in the result. However, I chose a bird immediately after your invitation. I had a look round at the two year olds, and three of them took my eye, but this DeWeerdts-based cock I considered to be the best selection. As you can see from his pedigree I've had these birds a long time but with an introduction of a Gilbert/DeWeerdts containing the German bird **Ivo** plus the DeWeerdts, I thought this may give increased vigour. The Dam is from a long line with very few introductions, bear in mind my originals where from Geoff Cooper and this hen can be traced back to **Spiritus** and **Leisbet** two of DeWeerdts's main line for over 65 years. The preparation :- "Paul" had a couple of Island trainers which amounts to approx. 20 miles. His first race in 2025 was with the NFC at Fougères, where he was my third bird, and on the wing for approx. seven and a half hours. Then Nort-sur-Erdre NFC having eight and half hours, and my 5th arrival. No other racing or training until Tarbes. As a YB he was only trained on the isle of Wight, as a yearling he had three channel races out to Sigogne. On his arrival there was the normal amount of fatigue but he quickly bounced back and found himself a new hen, as his did not return from Tarbes until a few days later. Congratulations to Dave Clark and to everyone who managed to get birds home in this race, as it was truly a Tarbes Challenge.

Amazing that a bird nominated in April, with no previous long distance form to its name, can go on to take 6th place in the UK's premier long distance race, but then also consider that back in 2011 when the competition was run, the outright Grand National winner that year was a Challenge Nominated pigeon, "Pennine Heights" all the way up in Section K to Shackleton & Son. It'd be great to stage this competition again in 2026, where hopefully we'll see an increase in entries. Why not eh, after all it's free to enter, and adds another element of interest to a Pigeon Summer.

Yours
Paul O'Leary 0028B