

## **PETER TAYLOR OF GUILDFORD.**

The month of July saw one of the hardest Bergerac (450 miles) races of all time in the South of England! The London & South East Classic Club and S.M.T. Combine were both at the race point on the same day, so my good friend Peter Taylor of Bellfields, near Guildford sent a small team with both organizations, with outstanding success. The liberations were into a strong North East wind, on a very hot Saturday morning and there were very few birds recorded on the day. Peter recorded his good natural blue hen, 'Selina's Express', on the day at 20.37 hrs, and won 4<sup>th</sup> open London & South East Classic Club, with only half a dozen birds home on the day of liberation. This beautiful pigeon was bred by David Williams of Chessington from a son of Eric Cannon's 1<sup>st</sup> open N.F.C. Sartilly winner, Champion 'Culmer Marion', which he purchased as a youngster at Eric's dispersal sale in 2000, and a Janssen hen. This mating certainly clicked, as Peter Taylor has a full brother to 'Selina's Express', which won: 71<sup>st</sup> open L.& S.E.C.C. Guernsey, 63<sup>rd</sup> open N.F.C. Guernsey as a young bird in 2002 and he is called 'Orlando's Express'. 'Selina's Express' was sent to the Bergerac Classic sitting four day old eggs and she has some good previous racing form, winning: 2003: 87<sup>th</sup> open L.& S.E.C.C. Guernsey, 2005: 31<sup>st</sup> open L.& S.E.C.C. Pau. A wonderful hen! Peter's bit of bad luck on that very hard Bergerac weekend was he got a pigeon at 08.15hrs on the Sunday morning from Bergerac and would have won the Guildford club by two hours, but the pigeon had no race rubber on her leg. This game little dark chequer hen, named 'The Scotch Hen', was bred by Jamieson & Simpson of Cleghorn in Scotland and she was sent to the S.M.T. Combine race sitting four day old eggs. She previously scored in L.& S.E.C.C., being clocked on the day from Bergerac and in 2005 returned from a race with cat gut tight around her foot, and lost her toe nail.

Peter Taylor has been one of my best friends for over 30 years and every one who knows him will tell you, he is a great out spoken guy, who 'shoots from the hip'. A bit like my self, there is no 'bull' with our Peter and he tells how it is! Years ago, he raced in partnership with his later friend, Jack Hedges, at his home in Burlington Road, New Malden and in 1999 moved to Haverfordwest in west Wales, to start his retirement from work, racing his pigeons in the valleys. He soon got fed up with that, when a pair of Peregrine Falcons living about a mile behind his loft, took his young birds every day until he had none left. He returned and set up home and pigeons in Guildford about eight years ago.

My friend and 'rat pack' member, Peter, has a very big family, including many grand children. The two that keep turning up at his pigeon loft in Guildford and take the biggest interest in the birds is Isabella, age 10, and Lucia-Marie, aged 6. The two girls attend the St. Thomas of Canterbury School and both pick out their own bird every year and Isabella tells me her latest pigeon was recently killed by the local Peregrine Falcon, which resides near her school in Guildford. I can remember back years ago when their mum, Selina, was a young girl and she used to clean Peter's loft out every week for her pocket money. Now our Selina is all grown up with her own family of loft scrappers! Selina is a very busy Chef and works long hours at the Twickenham Rugby Union Ground, preparing all the food for all the big VIP 'bashes' held there. She is a wonderful cake maker and spends a lot of her spare time making magnificent cake creation.

Peter races his birds on the natural system, but is always talking about changing to the roundabout system and races the pigeons of Eric Cannon and Ced Allwright, with some quality birds being introduced from John Williamson of Bridlington last year. He has a very smart 18ft. 'Norton Timbers' loft, with corridor and open window trapping. Peter tells me the most important feature of his loft is the roof vents, which he fitted him self and uses a play pit sand on the loft floors. He has two small lofts for the stock birds, but says over the next year or so, he wants to phase out the stock team and just keep racers. He paired up in early April this season, but normally pairs at the end of February and feeds his own mixture of peas, maize and small seeds. He is great believer in feeding pea nuts and

trains his pigeons down the A3 to Portsmouth. The Taylor loft has put some good performances through the years, the best being 31<sup>st</sup> open N.F.C. Nantes (8475 birds) in 1998 with a pigeon purchased at the L&SECC Breeder / Buyer sale for £15 and was bred by the then classic secretary, Terry Smart. Other top positions won were 53<sup>rd</sup> open NFC Pontorson young bird National (6497 birds), 36<sup>th</sup> open L&SECC Pau (781 birds), 16<sup>th</sup> open L&SECC Bordeaux (977 birds) and 12<sup>th</sup> open N.F.C. Bordeaux, when our good friend, Bobby Besant won the race.

Going back a few years the partnership of Peter Taylor and Jack Hedges was always one to be reckoned with, but 1986 saw them have the young bird season of a lifetime. Final event of that season was Fulham United F.C.'s Open race from Wadebridge, a distance of 215 miles to the partners' New Malden loft. Entry for this race was £10 per bird and 59 London fanciers entered 138 young birds. Peter and Jack entered their two most consistent youngsters, a nest pair of blue hens, 'The Bishop Hen' and 'The 75 Hen', of A. H. Bennett bloodlines and bred by their good friend the late Len Bishop. The race turned out to be a steady one with a South East wind and their two entries maintained their consistency, winning 1st and 2nd by a margin of 15 yards per minute and more than earned their keep by winning £1,223 in prize and pool money.

In the S.M.T. Combine race the week prior to the Fulham Open, 'The 75 Hen' had already indicated its form by winning £97 from Bodmin. It was in this race that a loftmate, 'The Bodmin Cock', won 6<sup>th</sup> open S.M.T. Combine (3,592 birds competing) after a really bad trap. That was another pigeon of A. H. Bennett bloodlines and again bred by Len Bishop. It should be emphasised that the 1986 young bird season performances gained by this partnership were obtained with a team of six pigeons, yes just six pigeons, no mob flying here. Five of the six were bred for the partners by Len Bishop and are all of A. H. Bennett bloodlines, the sixth bird, and the odd one out, was a grizzle, a gift from Keith and Betty Mott of Claygate which was bred from a sister of their consistent Denys Brothers grizzle cock 'Double Top'.

The partners both had plenty of experience with pigeons prior to coming together as a partnership, and like most fanciers learned a lot from experience. They both agreed that there is a world of difference between racing old and young birds. Successful old bird racing requires a lot of patience. First and foremost the birds must be fit and to obtain this fitness the birds require training. It should be remembered that this loft raced the Natural system preferring to concentrate on the Channel events. Once fitness had been obtained observation plays a great part for as we all know that one cock will race better to 10 day eggs whilst another performs better when driving his hen, whereas some hens will put in a great deal of effort to chipping eggs. The permutations are endless. That is why old bird racing on the Natural system is such an art.

The partners' New Malden loft was 20ft long with four compartments and open door trapping was used. There was a separate young bird loft 10ft in length and consisted of two sections. It had a small flight attached to it which allowed squeakers to view their surroundings in safety before they first venture out into the wide world. Old birds were usually paired during the latter part of February. There were only three pairs of stock birds and these were paired at the same time. The partners liked to give their birds as much freedom as possible, they liked to see them wandering around the garden. It was during these open loft periods that the partners find it best to observe the birds, they said a lot can be learned about the team by this practice. They both thought that many fanciers make the mistake of keeping too many pigeons, and getting them from too many lofts. They recommended to anyone just starting that they should go to one good fancier and obtain birds from him and learn his methods and a history of his birds.

Both Peter and Jack were convinced that one of the major causes of young bird losses is overcrowding; never breed more than you can house and train comfortably, and do not start training young birds until they go running. Once training started the youngsters were trained in stages up to 30 miles prior to their first race. Once racing had started they were tossed at about 20 miles as and when considered necessary. Because of the partnership's interest in Channel racing the old birds were trained consistently from the coast. All birds, both young and old birds were fed as much as they require. The only time this was varied was on marking days, when the food is reduced by 50%. The partners both agree that one of the most important factors in the pigeon's year is the main moulting period if success is to be gained again the following year. The policy in this loft was to separate the sexes after the last race has been flown. At this time a little more Linseed was introduced to the food mixture. During separation the birds were only let out for exercise once a week and during this exercise period the bath was made available. Whilst both of the partners obviously enjoyed their pigeon racing and were successful, they don't just take. They were both clocksetters for their club, Surbiton Flying Club, Peter also did the job of Federation Delegate. There were no secrets in this loft just plain commonsense with an emphasis on observation. (See photos in the website 'Album')

**TEXT & PHOTOS BY KEITH MOTT.**